**Meet the Woman**

**Behind HSC Cultural Competency Day In her Words**

*by Patricia Allen*

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WHO AM I? I think I have probably finally figured it out. I am just “me”—an individual who wants to love my eight children, many grandchildren (35) and many, many great grandchildren (38). I desire to be friends with “most people,” and hope and pray that everyone gets to live their life the way they want to. I like to think that we should let others live the sort of life they want to have. I want everyone to be at peace with the world. Impossible you say. I keep hoping it will happen.

I have passed through many years of changes in our society. I have seen diversity from many angles, sometimes good, many times very bad. We lived through the “Great Depression” and the Great dust storms in the West. Have any of you ever been in a dust storm?—I was very young, but remember it well.

I grew up in a very small town in Western Kansas on a 640 acre farm. My parents and their children were an English and German family who adopted me as a baby. I never noticed when I was growing up that my skin was a little darker than theirs. I was always a protected child. My dad was a wheat farmer and rancher. We also raised purebred Hereford cattle and shepherd and collie dogs. The only place I went by myself was to school. Everything else was family outings. When I went to school, the first through eighth grade was in a one room school house. My high school graduation class was a total of 13 students. I did learn at an early age that I preferred to work in the fields with my dad. Of course now and then I got caught by my mother, who thought young ladies should learn how to keep a house clean, iron and all that silly stuff you are supposed to do when you learn as a female. You know- how to take care of a house. (I really needed that and she knew it). Sometimes, being a typical child I wanted to get away so when I wanted to escape and dream about what I was going to be someday, I would saddle a horse and ride out in the pasture. No one could find me there. My parents tried to instill in me the value of being a strong individual, tolerant of others, accepting them as individuals regardless of age, race, social status or any and all differences. I remember one instance as a youth growing up when of a lot of young men were going to the service. One summer at the close of World War II, my dad had German Prisoners of War come help in the harvest field. At that time I thought it was terrible because of the guards watching them. I was a little too young to understand.

I moved to Wichita, Kansas after I graduated to go to business college. I went to work for the Wichita Area Girl Scouts for 10 years after graduating. My very first job, I was excited!! This was a lot different than the farm. I met the love of my life and married. Wichita, Kansas was not integrated completely. I at that time could not understand what their problem was as my parents had never been like the people in Wichita. It was not as bad as some states, just a “little testy.” We moved back here to Louisville, KY, as this was my husband’s home state. I was a stay at home mom with eight children. I was involved in PTA, and helped students with reading problems until my children were ready for middle school. In the 70’s the children in Valley Station did not have many activities to attend that they could afford, so with the help of United Way we put together a little program for me to direct which allowed low income children in our neighborhood to take field trips to some educational and recreational sites. We went to Louisville Science Center, Slugger Museum and Bat Factory, University of Louisville Planetarium, roller skating, Otter Creek Park, and anywhere we could think of that would make a day of fun. At the time, United Way had a program for teens to work in the summer, which gave me the great opportunity to employ teens to help chaperone. The United Way were miracle workers and somehow came up with lunches every day for the children. It was quite an experience for the children to get to know each other. They learned how to socialize and learned more about each other. We had no age limit. Actually, the timing was good because we had just been “graced with busing in Louisville.” We took out 3 buses --started out 4 times a week, then for the next four years we went 3 times a week from all the school stops in the Valley Station area

This was a lot of fun for the children, the chaperones, and me. We had 5 summers exploring the world. You notice four times a week only lasted one year. The director (me) had to maintain a semblance of sanity also. I don’t think I ever really had an understanding for racism until busing started. I guess I never wanted to accept that everyone didn’t want to like each other and get along. I realize personalities clash, but I have always thought that you could get over that, right??

When I decided to go back to work I worked for a car rental place for 10 years until they sold their lease line. I decided at that time to further my education and went back to school. After two more years of school I was fortunate enough to start working at the University of Louisville.

Mike Byrne, director of the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program at the time, had been thinking about introducing a cultural competency workshop into the AHEC agenda for one day a year. We received invitations from the University of Kentucky who had already started a program regarding diversity with their students. I attended their programs at the University of Kentucky and went to several workshops a year in Mt. Sterling for a couple years and brought the materials back to Mike. They had some very interesting speakers. Mike thought it would be beneficial to have a cultural competency day here at UofL. We talked to the faculty in 2004 and after planning a couple years we implemented the first Cultural Competency Day in 2006. We had the first one in the 2 lecture halls of the School of Medicine Instructional Building 102 and 202 with approximately 150 students. We had one workshop at the Muhammad Ali Center, one at the Convention Center and now we are back at the Health Sciences Center. I thought every year was going to be our last year to have our one day with the students. But the university has let us continue and now every year we have approximately 450-500 students, faculty and staff from across the HSC. Now the students lead a planning committee who meet and decide who they want for their speakers for the next year.

Now that one little dream of mine for a “Cultural Competency Day” has begun to take wings. Dr. Faye Jones has been appointed as the Assistant Vice President for Health Affairs/Diversity. Her initiative and passion for diversity and inclusion will keep that day and many more like it alive.

I thank God every day for my life on the farm, and the values I learned from my parents. I think it has kept me very strong and determined in my quest to try to make a few things just a “little bit” better in this world. I may not have succeeded, but at least in my mind I have made an effort. As for me, I can say I probably have the most diverse family in the world. We have all the colors of the rainbow. I do not know or care about checking “race” in a box. I just always put “other.” Guess I will just have to continue trying to figure out “Who I am.” I doubt that I will spend much time on that—I have more important things to do!