

C l i f t o n L. T a u l b e r t
A Global Conversation-The Foundation-It's All About Community
March-2010

Community on the road
CLT

As most of my friends and associates know, I spend quite a bit of time in our airports. I know the Skycaps and the ticket agents by name. I know how to dress to undress and I can spot a six-inch container at a glance. I have been duly trained. This is my working life... however several weeks ago when my work required that I drive for two weeks. My wife and I decided to make it both a working and fictional vacation road trip. Along the way, my wife and I encountered 'community' being lived out. While on the road, we met some wonderful people and I want you to meet a few of them.

Our first stop was in Little Rock, Arkansas where I lectured at Pulaski Academy, a prestigious private school. While there, Cheryl Watts, our friend at Pulaski, introduced us to the new head of the school, Dr. Mott. Contrary to what I expected of him, Dr. Mott turned out to be an incredible community builder—collecting relationships as great works of art. Though it was our first time to meet each other, it felt like 'old friends' were reuniting. Dr. Mott insisted that I have lunch with him and Dr. Fitz Hill, the President of Arkansas Baptist College (ABC)—a historic African-American College that had fallen on hard times. I had not met or heard of Dr. Hill before, however, but Dr. Mott insisted. He described Dr. Hill as "positive energy living among ordinary people." I am delighted he insisted I meet him. When Introduced to Dr. Fitz Hill, I found him to be everything that Dr. Mott had claimed—a man with incredible energy and vision for a college that had almost folded. While we ate lunch in ABC's cafeteria, I was visibly moved by his faith in action as he related to all the people around him. I had little doubt that Dr. Hill had their future on his heart. After lunch, he drove us through the area that he and his team were giving a 'makeover.' The negative environment had fallen prey to Dr. Hill's vision. Dr. Mott was right! I never expected to get my soul refreshed like this while on a road trip, but I did.

From Little Rock we headed to Eudora, Arkansas where we celebrated my wife's father's birthday who was almost ninety. For several years he had taken care of his ailing uncle who was almost 100. Building community still looks like caring for others. From Eudora, we were off to Mississippi and to Glen Allan where I was born. We visited my cousin, Mary, who's almost ninety now, but filled with wisdom that she generously shared with us—extolling us to never forget our roots. Unable to get around as she once did, she still found the strength to pray with us, as we made ready to leave for Rolling Fork, Mississippi. Mary's husband Buddy was in a nursing home there. I had to stop by and see him even though I didn't expect him to recognize me. Sadly, he was not the man I knew while I was growing up. Dementia had set in. We found him and Barbara and I created a little family circle around him. We talked. He just looked at us. But as I stood up to leave, his face lit up and he called my name, Clifton! We were both so glad that he knew we had come to see him. In good community, you don't forget those who need your memory on their behalf.

With my home of Glen Allan and Greenville in the rear view mirror, we headed to Vicksburg and Jackson, Mississippi where I had to do an NPR interview and give several speeches for the Mississippi School Board Association. While at the school board conference, I was delighted to see Mr. Bud Hall, a longtime Civil Rights activists and one of the first black school board members for my home county. I was one of his 'boys.' He was one of our elders—bravely stepping up during the 1960's to ensure that we enjoyed a good community. Because of his presence, I was even more honored to speak to this elected body. Looking out on the racially mixed crowd, I recognized that the impossible is possible. I was seeing a community that I dared not to dream of when I was a child.

After my last speech and book signing in Jackson, we headed to Natchez, Mississippi where I would give another speech at the Natchez Film and Literary Festival. On Saturday afternoon, I talked about George Washington Carver and the impact of the twists of fate in his life, not unlike the twists of fate in many of our lives. The audience was encouraged to become answers to significant and life altering questions that lived in the heads of others. Carver's life was such a life. People of both races stepped up and answered his heart's questions. Their bravery and unselfishness allowed America, and the world, to witness the genius of his living. Community still demands this of us. Community is more than a conversation or a speech I deliver. Community is the collection of ordinary people stepping up and out of their comfort zones to become the twists of fate in the lives of others. We can all do this. Anticipate your opportunity to change the life of someone else and when that opportunity shows up, don't shy away or let your familiar way of responding keep you from meeting the challenge head on. Run and grab it. Such opportunities are fleeting and if not grabbed quickly, they may never show up again. I discovered community on the road. All of our lives are along some ones road.