

As I located the various Negroes, got a list of their names through Lucille, I heard of one, while I was going to Nigeria. This was Ruffin Bridgeforth, who was teaching the Sunday School Gospel Doctrine class in the Salt Lake Stake over here in Swedetown. I think it was the Fourth Ward of the Salt Lake Stake, but it was over in Swedetown, out where the refineries are. So I took my camera, went out to a Sunday School class, and took some pictures of him teaching. He had an excellent class. His wife was a Spanish woman, the organist, his son was the chorister, and he was the adult instructor. Upon one occasion one of the high councilmen, who was the bookkeeper at the Deseret Book, told me, "If we changed the bishop out there, if Ruffin wasn't a black man, he would be the first on the list." That's how much they thought of him.

So I became interested and went out. Ruffin told me that a woman called him up late one night and said, "Brother Bridgeforth, I'm ill. Will you come over to administer to me?" He said, "Sister, you know that I don't hold the priesthood. I can't administer to you." She said, "Will you come over and give me a blessing anyway?" That's how much confidence and faith they had in him as a good man. But he couldn't do it, he said.

So one day I got ahold of Lucille by telephone and I got the names of people. I said, "Lucille, I think that the colored people of Salt Lake City and this area ought to get together and get acquainted with one another. You're scattered all over and you don't know one another." I had a whole list of names by then of people we could gather together. I said, "I'm going to ask that all of you meet out at the Riverside Park on a Saturday afternoon. Everyone bring a plate of food and let's have a reunion." And everyone responded. We had a large group of the families over there in Riverside Park one Saturday afternoon, and they all got acquainted.

I: You were just doing this on your own?

W: I was just doing it on my own, just to bring them together. It was not authorized at all. Then I said, "Next time, Lucille"--she was kind of the matriarch of the people here--"let's hold this reunion over at your place." Or I said, "Where should we hold it?" and she said, "Why don't we hold it at my home?" So the next year we held it in her backyard.

In the meantime two young girls had a problem and were expecting, and the Relief Society, knowing that I was working with the colored people, called me and said, "We must find a home for a little baby that we're expecting in the near future. Will you see if you can find some parents somewhere?" So I got busy. I called Lucille and she said, "Oh, I have a son and his wife that can't have any children. They'd really like to adopt a child." So I called the Relief Society and made these arrangements.

Well, when the time came, the Relief Society called this couple in, and I was there. They brought in this baby all wrapped up and laid

it in the lap of this colored mother. Lucille's son, when they looked at this baby, just fell down on his knees and said, "That's the most beautiful child I've ever seen." It would just bring tears to your eyes. I just couldn't get over it.

About six years went past before we had this reunion in Lucille Bankhead's backyard. They all brought food and everyone socialized and got acquainted, and Ruffin was there, and Lucille's son. I inquired about the baby, and the father said, "Tony, come here." And a blue-eyed, white-haired blond boy came running over, not a trace of Negroid blood. I think the girl must have thought she was involved, because there was no Negro blood in this boy. You see, when a dark father and a light mother mate together, that baby is always lighter than the black father but darker than the mother, always. There's a halfway point. But there were no dark eyes or hair or any of the Negroid features in that child whatsoever. But he was accepted and loved by his parents and the congregation, and he loved his parents. So little Tony was about six or seven years old then.

After the meeting I took Ruffin to one side and we sat on a bench by a table we had there, and I said, "Ruffin, the colored people will never get any attention as long as I take the lead. Until you and your people want something and make it manifest and carry the burden and show some responsibility, you will not be recognized by the Church. You've got to do something on your own. You've got to let them know that you desire a place in the Church. You've got to step forward and quit being on the back bench. I want you to select someone, and you go talk to the Brethren and plead your own case. I can't do it for you. We'll never get anywhere." He said, "I'll do it."

So two or three of them got together and they went to the Brethren, to Gordon Hinckley and I think Boyd Packer, and they sat down and they had meetings and they pled their case in front of them. And they were told that they could have an organization here in town. I said, "Now you can't have the priesthood and you can't have sacrament meeting, but you could be conducting a Relief Society, and Primary, maybe a Sunday School, or whatever the Church would allow you to do." So they were told that this could happen.

Then Ruffin told me, "You know, I've decided to name it the Genesis Branch, because 'Genesis' means beginning. This is the beginning of the recognized work among the colored people of the Church. So I've named it the Genesis Branch. How do you like it?" Well, it didn't appeal to me too much, but I thought, "That's all right. It's just as good any other name."

So that began the Genesis Group, and they still meet once each month. I've been with them to the temple in Manti where there were sealings, since they've had the priesthood, of Negro families and children to fathers and mothers, and I've been to their dinners and firesides. I went to their fireside just before I went to Nigeria. I haven't been to one since we got back, but I need to go. But that's how the Genesis Branch got started among the colored people.

- I: I understand that in the Genesis Group, in many cases the men and women in the couples aren't both black.
- W: No, there's as many white people as colored people that go there, but it does include them. And it's good that it does, because they're recognized, they're not really ostracized, and they're accepted by their group. A lot of people like to be a part of it, even white members that feel sympathy. I shouldn't say "sympathy." I think it's really interest and love for these people.
- I: Is there anything else we ought to say about your Nigeria experience up to '78, or have we pretty well covered it?
- W: I think in general we've at least touched some of the highlights of it, without going into the details of experiences with various groups, other than what I have.
- I: I imagine that much of that's in your record.
- W: It's all recorded here, so that it could be referred to almost in detail, I think even to the names of those who attended some of the meetings.
- I: Okay.
- W: Now the Church was officially organized and registered in Nigeria during the time before they received the priesthood. Ime Eduok, who graduated from a school in California, is the district president now. He and five others, including myself, were the board members in registering the Church, the official members. But it was all done unofficially by them over there to get the Church registered. And that was recorded, but not officially done.
- So right now they're in the process of trying to get that transferred over so that it meets with Church approval. I've been eliminated from that group, so that it's all Nigerians now, with President [Bryan] Espenshied as the chairman. The mission president of course is the chairman of the group for registering it.
- I: All right. I've got to go to another meeting, but that at least takes us through this part of it, and when we get back together, we can pick up with your call to go there as a missionary with Sister Williams.
- W: Yes, we can go over that and give the highlights of that mission and what was done.
- I: Good.