



*University Parkway, August 1971, Forsyth County
image courtesy of the Forsyth County Public Library*

HOMES

A STORY BY CO



*Frank Jones, photographer,
Public Library Photograph Collection*

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ANNOR MCNEELY



DEBORAH FORD

"...AND IN THE MIDDLE, DEBORAH FORD AND HER FAMILY. THE FORDS' HOUSE WOULD BECOME JUST LIKE THE OTHERS THAT THE CITY HAD TAKEN WITHOUT QUESTION — A PLOT OF LAND OVER WHICH CARS WOULD THUNDER FOR CENTURIES TO COME; ITS HISTORY AND LEGACY EMPTIED OUT AND FILLED WITH CONCRETE."

Along 25th Street, hundreds of women and men watched the empty road with babies in their arms and children by their side. Waitresses wiped their hands on their aprons and mechanics stood in their overalls. Rocking chairs leaned on the curbs and housewives left their houses to stand in tree-shaded front yards.

A little Black girl named Deborah stood with her mother, Rosie Ford, gazing out at the oncoming motorcade in the cold sun.

Her father, Johney, wasn't there to see the city police and state highwaymen parade across 25th. Even though most of Winston-Salem had shut down, he was still working. Mr. Ford usually had one day off, and it had already passed.

Deborah looked out at the crowd. Cameras were snapping on either side of the road. Even a priest in his robes stood there, taking pictures. An entire kindergarten had assembled with a big sign and an American flag, the stars and stripes swaying in the wind. Dozens held Confederate flags; little white girls and some young men, who waved their flags to the news cameras passing them in cars.

"The President's coming," Rosie Ford told her daughter.

Before he would clean his lunch plate at the Babcock mansion down Reynolda Road, President Harry Truman rode in the White House limousine across 25th. His procession of hundreds of police cars and motorcycles passed thousands of residents and visitors that lined his route from the Smith Reynolds airport.

"Wake Forest Day" had arrived, and its national and local newspaper heralds crammed themselves into buses, cabs and

motor cars to stalk the presidential procession. People stood on the roofs of the exhibit buildings of the old Liberty Street fairgrounds to gaze down at the spectacle.

25th Street had never seen anything like it, the road least of all. It had been used to an easy kind of traffic: the slow tread of automobiles and feet. Only the rain made walking the dirt paths and streets difficult.

But there was plenty of land on which the crowd could gather for a glimpse of Truman, the President who hadn't gone to college, come to break ground for a school that the Reynolds family had willed a hundred miles east from Raleigh.

"Most of these thousands will only be thinking one thing: That's the President over there," wrote a Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel columnist on Sunday.

He was right. Nobody knew what this new college would bring. Little Deborah had no idea that Wake Forest would carve itself a path to the city—one that would lift her parents' house out of the ground and carry it somewhere else.

The crowd of thousands watched as the President passed them by; the convertible sailed past the bungalow and four-square homes of 25th; on through the orange and gold covering of the maple trees and the green open fields of Reynolda Road to the white facades of the Reynolda estate.

Hours later, Truman shoveled his first spadeful of dirt from the mound where Wait Chapel would spring forth. As he walked back up to the speaker's podium to face the battery of photographers, they shouted, "One more shot, Mr. President!"

In a moment Truman was back down the stairs with his shovel to break ground three more times; the President of the United States planting a seed that would stretch its network of roots throughout Winston Salem and break the ground right back.



Photos of Deborah Ford
courtesy of Ivan Weiss

Nearly a decade earlier, on the north side of Winston-Salem, Johney Ford was preparing to go to join the fight in World War II. When he left his family, the Reynolds skyscraper stood over the city; a beacon of an industry that had attracted thousands of African American sharecroppers and farm workers to work in its factories. When Ford returned, the building hadn't changed. It remained the unmistakable sign of an empire — a business in firm control of a city where it paid more than a quarter of all property taxes.

The people of Winston-Salem had their saying: nothing could get done in the town unless it had been first approved on the 19th floor of the Reynolds building. They were right. It was the wealthy white executive of Reynolds, Charles B. Wade, that helped handpick poor Black neighborhoods to wipe off the map in the Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission.

Far below that top floor, dozens of Black women worked in suffocating heat and dust, deep in the heart of Winston-Salem. Sacks of tobacco rode men's shoulders into the factory floor, where the women were waiting to roll them into cigarettes. There were no breaks. If they slowed down, they'd be shown the door. Some would die in the building. The manual labor of these workers, who were primarily Black, built the Tobacco Metropolis, whose imperial building and giant smokestacks loomed over them.

When he returned from the war, Johney brought with him an interest in the famous trade of Winston-Salem: business. But not the Reynolds Tobacco kind of domineering industry. With money saved from the Air Force, Ford became a member of the growing class of Black professionals and small business owners in the city.

Johney started a business of his own in the middle of 14th Street: a café called Little Rose Garden. Music and the smell of meat on the grill would float out into the road, welcoming Black customers that many lunch counters and restaurants turned away. It was a steady crowd for Mr. Ford, and in it, his favorite customer: little Deborah, who would come to visit her father at work and enjoy some ice cream.

Back then, there were plenty of small, Black-owned businesses like Mr. Ford's on neighborhood streets. At the end of his workday, Johney would drive home from East Winston to 25th Street, where corner and grocery stores had sprouted up on nearby Cherry Street. These were

centers of community, where residents purchased fresh produce and shared life with each other. The Fords lived in Alta Vista, an area with many doctors, teachers and factory workers. Lawns were tidy, and houses were taken care of. It was part of the Boston-Thurmond neighborhood, whose genesis can be traced back to a set of cottages developed by white investors for the growing number of working-class African American families.

Above the pavement and cement, these streets had human bonds of shared experience and neighborhood gossip to connect them for miles. A certain comradeship had been built in those communities that the first tremors of modernization would knock down.

The city government's wave of "public good" had reached the North Ward. The Fords' house — constructed in the 1930s — sat on the blueprint for yet another dividing line that was to be put between Black neighborhoods. The city of Winston-Salem purchased their house on April 1st, 1958 for \$100 dollars. One morning, Deborah watched as her house was packed onto a truck bed and sent to a new property on Thurmond Street. Now, work could begin on the Cherry Marshall Project, which they would name University Parkway nearly two decades later.

As time unfolded, the dividing line in other Black neighborhoods had lengthened with it. Families likely opened the Sunday morning paper in 1959 and read the headline: "When the Bulldozers Come — Get Out!" and remained unalarmed. It was all too familiar.

The Fords were just one of the 4,000 families that the city had displaced from 1953 to 1959. And as strange as it was, this transplanting of homes was often the generous kind of relocation that the city of Winston-Salem enacted for residents that were in the way of the public purpose. Those who were renting homes, like the family of one of Deborah's school classmates, Darinda Boston, didn't have any help from the city to relocate.

Johney and Rosie didn't have a say in the matter. They moved to Thurmond Street. Johney continued to drive to East Winston, where his chain of businesses would be located for the rest of his life. Deborah learned to love her new house and Paisley High School, though she yearned for the allure of city life at Atkins in East Winston, a public school where her mother and cousins had gone. But even after a long day at Paisley, Deborah could still return home to Thurmond Street and her room, where a "million-dollar view" of the city skyline was waiting for her every night.





Photo courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library

The municipal courtroom at City Hall in Winston-Salem was packed. Hundreds of people stood in the halls outside and jostled to get in. Although they were separated from the building by a thin line of policemen, their voices were so loud that the people in the room couldn't even hear themselves speak.

It was a hot August night in 1959, eight years after the President had visited Winston-Salem and broke ground for the new college. Change — or modernization, as city leaders called it — had finally arrived in the city.

Truman's successor had brought with him the most rapid phase of infrastructure development in American history: the new interstate highway system, which was in many ways the perfect opportunity for the Winston-Salem city government. If you pushed through the crowd outside the municipal courtroom in City Hall, you'd find the aldermen of the city and members of the Winston-Salem Redevelopment Commission. They had come to discuss their plan to renew the slums and impoverished places in the city. But after three hours of explanation and no questions from anyone else, no one had learned much of anything about what was going to happen in East Winston.

That plan would later result in the new foundation for the city — a series of highways and public housing projects to concretize existing segregation with the elbow grease of federal government dollars.

For the members of the redevelopment commission, renewal was just another word for destruction. Decades of racism and dominant white authority had created unimaginable levels of poverty for African American people. Living conditions were so bad for African American communities in the city that the city had decided to simply destroy them and either move the people somewhere else, or leave them with nowhere to go.

Government officials and city engineers had helped to create the very conditions that they considered so abhorrent. Throughout the decades, they had labeled and sectioned off Black people into specific neighborhoods and urban areas through segregation, restrictive housing covenants and discriminatory real estate practices.

City leaders had a blueprint for the "All-American" vision of Winston-Salem, and it was already being developed thirty years before the introduction of new road-

ways and the interstate system. The city government had a guiding public development plan that carefully designated where African Americans lived, which was mostly on the eastern side of the city, developed by a planner named Harry L. Shaner C.P.W. In 1937, the Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), an arm of the federal government, provided a residential security map for Winston-Salem that assessed creditworthiness by color-coding mortgage security risks. Although the colors were green, blue, yellow and red, the map really only had two: black and white.

African American areas of the city were marked in the red, “hazardous” designation. These neighborhoods locked residents into generational poverty. Areas classified as high-risk on HOLC maps became increasingly segregated by race and suffered long-run declines in home ownership, house values and credit scores. The swath of country property and white homes on Reynolda Road were graded an A. The land where historic, working-class Black neighborhoods stood earned Cs and Ds.

Up until this time, throughout the country, Black people had been essentially excluded from mortgage lending. The federal government put its stamp on discriminatory real-estate practices by giving a warning to insurers and private lenders about some neighborhoods and urban areas: “Rapid-Negro infiltration.” Even homes that might have been well worth a mortgage loan were discounted by this documentation.

African American people were forced into the cheapest communities available. Fifty years before the redevelopment of the city, the old 180,000-gallon Winston-Salem reservoir had cracked and flooded some bottomland. A working-class Black community, named “The Pond” was confined to the area. For decades, rainwater would store industrial runoff from tobacco factories and attract mosquitoes, causing tuberculosis. In one area of the community, there was only one outhouse for as many as 50 people. But for residents, there was no help from their landlords, and no escape because of Jim Crow sanctions and federal loan policies.

Help would finally come from the Winston-Salem government, but not in the way that the people had expected or wanted.

City leaders had noticed unsanitary conditions in neighborhoods across the city, and they were alarmed. Polio had spread across Winston-Salem in the 1940s, and the language around the disease had communicated that it was a sickness primarily caused by the unsanitary conditions of poverty.


Photo courtesy of Connor McNeely



Brenda sits on her porch with her two boys, Tobiyas and Treyvon. Their family is just one of those on Thurmond Street dealing with a rise in rent price; an issue across Winston-Salem for all tenants.



Photo courtesy of Connor McNeely



“The lesson seems to come harder, but surely we are learning now that we must wipe out slums, the general breeding places of disease, vice and other evils,” read a Winston-Salem Journal editorial on July 9, 1948. The Journal, as well as newly elected Mayor Marshall Kurfees and the Winston-Salem housing authority, had a clear idea of where the “slums” were located. In April 1951, the Winston-Salem Board of Alderman created the Redevelopment Commission to find “blighted areas” and redevelop them.

The Winston-Salem city government had decided to take action and clean up their city. The Pond was the first slum on their list.

The city destroyed more than 300 dwellings. Then they built Kimberly Park on top of the rubble. In his study on the midcentury transformation of Winston-Salem, historian Shane Cruise notes that thousands of people were displaced without an opportunity to move into the area’s new housing development.

Urban renewal continued through the decades in Winston-Salem, strengthened by the introduction of the interstate highway system. A trio of federal, state and city governments installed the biggest landmark of their “modernization” of Winston-Salem — a giant dividing wall between the white and Black towns their blueprints had created. They named it U.S. Highway 52.

The price tag for accelerated economic growth and activity would be the living space of 16,000 people, most of them Black. The city strong-armed these families out of their own homes with the use of eminent domain. Although urban renewal policy stipulated that homeowners

had to be paid a fair market price for their property, the land along the new highway route wasn’t part of that plan. With no new housing being built in East Winston and full public housing, displaced people were out on their own.

On the north side of the city, the city government saw another opportunity to modernize the city. Wake Forest, the private, all-white Baptist college that the President of the United States had welcomed would need an expressway to the city.

Planning engineers drew up a north-south expressway in the style of the “farm to market” roads system that would lead students, faculty and suburban and rural residents to downtown commerce. People outside of the city would have a direct connection to Marshall Street. The highway would link to U.S. 52. The decision, it seemed, was a no-brainer. The expressway would doubtlessly lead to substantial economic growth and become one of the most well-traveled and efficient roads in the history of the city. The choice could yield in ways that city leaders couldn’t even imagine: when the industries of Winston-Salem would collapse near the end of the century, this road would prove to be one of the most critical arteries to the new beating heart of the city: Wake Forest University.

The only thing standing in the way? A vibrant, united community of four Black neighborhoods, and in the middle, Deborah Ford and her family. The Fords’ house would become just like the others that the city had taken without question — a plot of land over which cars would thunder for centuries to come; its history and legacy emptied out and filled with concrete.

60 years later, Deborah still has her million-dollar view of the city skyline.

If you take University Parkway, it's an eight minute drive to her house on Thurmond Street from Wake Forest University. On the second floor of the property, she watches Winston Tower and the other skyscrapers light up at night, just like she did as a little girl.

It's easy to drive on University Parkway and pass the outlet onto 25th Street and the Fords' old garage on the corner, which was never moved, and not even notice it. I've driven on the roadway for four years now, shuttling downtown and back, hardly ever cognizant of the history of the route that I was traveling on and its decades of modifications and expansions. Hundreds of houses on the surrounding streets are invisible in the periphery when you catch your first glimpse of the city's skyscrapers.

But now that I've stopped and turned off the highway to walk down those neighborhood streets, I can't stop turning over the name of the highway in my mind: University Parkway.

Road design in the late 1950s and early 1960s, including that of the Cherry-Marshall expressway, took elements from the original concept of a parkway. Influential 19th-century landscape architects had developed the idea as a means to link urban centers to suburbs — simultaneously encouraging surrounding green areas.

Many of these parkways, including University, were less focused on aesthetics and leisure than they were designed to promote robust, economical road systems that would lead to growth. Yet before University Parkway led weighty commercial infrastructure into this section of North Winston, Johney Ford would get into his car on his only day off and take a Sunday drive on the new road through Wake Forest's campus, where his little girl would one day go to college. Back then, it was totally about aesthetics.

Instead of traveling up a corridor dense with hotels, restaurants, shopping centers and offices, Ford would gaze out upon the beginnings of development; houses, businesses and the very first coliseums and sports arenas that still had plenty of green space between them. CVS, Salem Chapel, the Habitat for Humanity complex and the Red Cross building were still mostly a vacant backyard. The intersection of Coliseum Drive, now a bustling hub of commerce, was then a modest set of businesses and their relatively undeveloped land. Lawrence Joel Veterans Coliseum and Truist Field, which now clog the arterial road with traffic on game days, were mostly empty fields, marked with names for the arenas and public spaces that would one day attract expansive parking lots filled with out-of-town visitors and their cars.

Johney's destination, Wake Forest's carefully curated campus, still remains one of the city's most charming attractions. It's the park in the middle of the parkway.

When I'm sitting in her living room, asking about her father and his Sunday drive, Deborah smiles as she remembers her father.

"I paid no attention to that," she chuckles. "And it

really didn't have a bearing on my going to Wake Forest. But then when I talk about it to my kids, I think to myself, maybe those drives did have something to do with it."

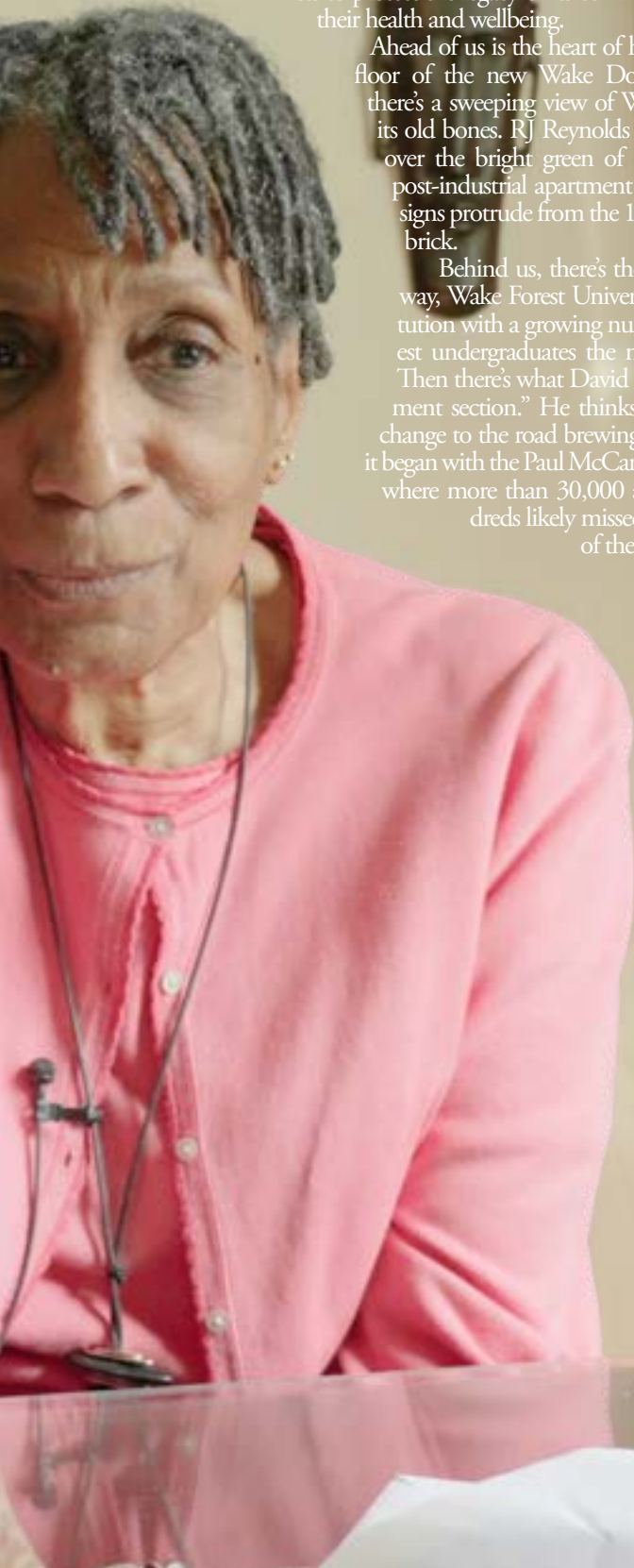
In a city that changed as rapidly as Winston-Salem, there were many different bearings that pushed and pulled Deborah's inclinations. She had first encountered white people at St. Benedict and other Catholic schools that she attended until ninth grade, where the entire student population was Black and the teaching staff was white. Deborah grew up in Alta Vista and Thurmond Street, two Black communities where you never really saw white people, especially back when everything was segregated.

Through the years, as Deborah raised her family on Thurmond Street and graduated from Wake Forest, the world changed, and Winston-Salem changed with it. Yet even as the movement for civil rights — in which Deborah and her husband actively participated — accomplished wide-scale social change and uplift for African Americans, the injustice in many of their material realities remains, especially in Winston-Salem.

University Parkway is one such example. Darinda Boston, a longtime resident of the Boston Thurmond neighborhood and one of Deborah's school classmates, can vividly remember how the highway had changed her community forever.

"It was upsetting, because we had been there for years," Darina said. "Nobody really wanted the expressway to come through there, but there wasn't nothing we could do about it. I can't remember any meetings or if they sought other people's opinions about it, even the people living in the area. Everybody was having to move in different directions. We knew that the expressway coming through there would make a big difference in everything. And it did."





I'm standing on the catwalk with David West, Boston-Thurmond United's team leader for revitalization, safety and beautification. He's lived in Winston-Salem his entire life, and now is advocating for this organization, which exists to protect the legacy of its community and develop their health and wellbeing.

Ahead of us is the heart of his city. From every floor of the new Wake Downtown building, there's a sweeping view of Winston-Salem and its old bones. RJ Reynolds smoke stacks hang over the bright green of Bailey Park. Sleek, post-industrial apartment and restaurant designs protrude from the 100-year-old factory brick.

Behind us, there's the park of the parkway, Wake Forest University, a top-30 institution with a growing number of the brightest undergraduates the nation has to offer. Then there's what David calls the "entertainment section." He thinks there's a potential change to the road brewing in that space, and it began with the Paul McCartney concert fiasco, where more than 30,000 attended and hundreds likely missed the event because of the traffic.

"University Parkway..."

David tells me, "It's a 45-mile-per-hour speed limit. To be honest with you, I don't even do that!"

We walk across the catwalk together, and I try to listen above the blaring of sirens and traffic. We're probably the only two people to walk the structure in the last week, or maybe even the last

month. It's mostly used by the large homeless population that occupy University Parkway and its junction with Northwest Boulevard. Residents of this space constantly travel across the four-lane highway, sometimes using this pedestrian bridge, whose sole purpose now is to hoist billboards and advertisements.

University Parkway's continuous river of traffic guides all people, in droves, through the Boston-Thurmond neighborhood. What once was an almost entirely Black community is now diverse and full of people from all walks of life. But for those living on either side of the highway, it's often an immovable and disruptive force in the middle of their lives.

This disruption has consequences. In 2017, a woman who lived on Rundell Street was killed in a hit-and-run crossing University Parkway to get to Bojangles, the closest and most affordable restaurant near where she lived. Over time, the expressway removed the local restaurants and corner stores with fresh food and produce. Now, corporate-owned chains and gas stations dominate the area and create food insecurity for residents who live near the highway.

It isn't something that takes years of living in the area to recognize. On the corner of 25th Street, you've only got a couple of feet on the curb before you're in the way of oncoming cars. All people walk across the four-lane highway, at all parts of the highway. If you go north, Wake Forest students cross early in the morning from housing across campus and cross late at night to go to parties. People working downtown jaywalk to get onto Northwest Boulevard. Some even cross the middle of the street at the busy intersection on Coliseum Drive.

For too many people, University Parkway is a ubiquitous, featureless highway that hardly occupies space in the mind. It's successful in that way. Engineers and planners designed the road so that you barely have to think about it at all when traveling over it.

But what if people thought differently?

What if they stopped and examined their lives in the way that they are constructed, down to the very roads and highways that carry them from place to place? Instead of looking in their rearview mirrors, or looking straight ahead, as David says, people could look out of their side windows.

Today, there is a community of neighbors living on either side of the cars that rumble through their neighborhood. Behind the black fences and walls of trees, families raise their own and celebrate life. They mend the divide between the east and west, north and south, white and Black by making new communities, new history and a new legacy around the expressway.

On either side, they look to Wake Forest. Inside its academic halls, work offices, parks and residences, exists a familiar illusion: that its people are not tied together with those outside of its walls in a mutual network of promise. As an institution, Wake Forest now seeks to powerfully reckon with its participation in injustice and its vast potential as the city's economic engine and driver of change. Time has run out on the lie that the people of Winston-Salem are not all connected. Even now, families in the Boston-Thurmond neighborhood wait, watching for the next move.