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Holy Name of Jesus  
6<sup>th</sup> Grade  
Mrs. Smith

“Black History Essay on Murphy J. Ruffins, Jr., Photographer”

In celebration of Black History month, I would like to spotlight and dedicate this essay to my grandfather (PaPa), Murphy J. Ruffins, Jr., and African-American man who has made a significant contribution to American history, culture, and society through his long distinguished career in Photography.

His mother (Mama Stella – now 97 years old) owned cafés and homes for the aged and mentally challenged. His father (Murphy Sr.) was always interested in Film and was a Film Projectionist. Throughout his childhood and high school, he was always interested in learning. He loved music. He always dreamed of becoming a Photographer.

He was drafted in the Army and served in the Korean War from 1950-1952. The army did not have combat shoes (size 12) to fit him so they put him in the Photographer Unit – 8199 on Kimpo Airforce Base in Korea. He taught Photography to Officers and F84, F86 Jet Pilots who would take aerial photographs and bring film to Kimpo Airforce Base for processing.

After the War, he started Ruffins' Record Shop. He took pictures of the Nicolas Brothers, Nat King Cole, Sammie Davis, Sidney Portier, Martin Luther King, Jr., and more. Although he was self-taught in the field of Photography, he attended Los Angeles City College and Anne J. Anthony school of Photography because he always believed in education. He learned to use the Rolleiflex – German Twin Lense, 4x5 Graphic, Hasselblad – Sweden, and 35 mm cameras. He then started House of Murphy at 4764 South Central, Los Angeles, California.

Photojournalism became his specialty, where stories were presented mainly through photographs rather than words. This is

where he learned that most White publications believed that dark-skinned people were inferior and they would not publish his photographs. He then worked for Aerospace, the Los Angeles Sentinel, Sepia, Ebony, Jet Magazines, and many other publications.

His photography work has been displayed in a Photograph Exhibit called “Light Catchers,” for its originality, standard of printing, social and historical significance, ability to capture emotions and expressions. The work of five Black Photographers who spotlighted and told the history of Los Angeles, California was displayed. My PaPa was one of them.

He grew up in an area of segregation where Blacks were not treated equal; he had to use different water fountains and bathrooms, and go through back doors, but, he always taught his family to see no color lines. He said, “You will step foot out of bed, go to college, get your education, be extraordinary at what you do, and succeed.”

I am proud of him because he turned out to be the best grandfather in the whole wide world. He is kind, generous, knowledgeable, and honest. He often was not allowed to take pictures because of his color. He not only was an exceptional photographer, he supported his family, and has been married to my Grandmother for 52 years. He is the father of five and grandfather of six. I am blessed to be one of them.

He always encourages me to be the best that I can be, stay focused, and never give up on my dreams and goals. Murphy J. Ruffins, Jr. (my PaPa) is my hero and I am honored to celebrate him during Black History month.