



The first family to come to Mary House made it to the nation's capital from Mexico. At the mercy of an unscrupulous apartment manager, they, along with 15 other immigrants, paid \$85 for the privilege of sharing a basement hovel in Northwest D.C. When I took this family home with me, Mary House began what is now its 19th year of service to refugee families in Washington, D.C. During this time, we have shared our home with more than 200 families.

For many families who come to the nation's capital as refugees, day-to-day demands become the focus of stories. A mother from Honduras learns English for an hour on Sunday mornings because the 12 hours of commuting and work six days a week only allow for an hour. This is nevertheless her determined attempt to master the language that is quickly becoming her daughter's first language. A Bosnian father performs jobs that most would not want in order to provide for his children; he wants to give his children the warmth of a safe home to dream their own dreams.

The first phrase I learned in Spanish was, "Mi casa es su casa" — "My house is your house." This is the foundation of Mary House, and to provide necessary services to those refugees and immigrants in the nation's capital. The first victim of poverty is always a person's dignity. Mary House provides a home to forgotten families, a place to reclaim their dignity, and an opportunity to establish themselves as neighbors in this new community they call home, Washington, D.C.

Sharon Neuman Murphy is a wife, grandmother, and mother of four. She is co-founder and Director of Mary House.

Some of Us Were Born Here

by Diana Onley-Campbell

I was born in Washington, D.C., on May 4, 1954, in Freedmen's Hospital (now Howard University Hospital). I grew up in a completely Black environment. The only window that I had on the world of White America was television and my family's weekly drive from our split-level home in far Northeast to the family church in

Georgetown. I grew up two blocks from the Shrimp Boat, and to this day I can tell if Black folks are native Washingtonians by their familiarity with this landmark.

On Sunday mornings my family embarked upon a journey across social boundaries. Traveling west on East Capitol Street brought us across the Anacostia River. But it was not until we got

to the other side of Stanton Park that things became less real to me and more like television. I wondered why our church, Mt. Zion Methodist, was surrounded by White people. My paternal great-grandmother and my grandmother shared a home in the heart of Georgetown on O Street around the corner from the church. The closest Black families to them were over on P Street near Rose Park. The house in which they lived had been built by my great-grandmother's husband as a wedding gift to her when the neighborhood was still predominantly Black. When my great-grandmother died, the house had a huge sum in back taxes attached to it, so it was sold. I was 19 then.

As a child I felt very safe in my neighborhood. I attended Kelly Miller Junior High School at a time when it was transitioning away from the

On Sunday
mornings
my family
embarked
upon a journey
across social
boundaries.



long-time principal who had just retired. It was a rough three years, not only because of the chaos that reigned there but because I was beginning to understand myself to be a lesbian. At least there was the beginning of understanding that it was girls that I wanted, not boys. This desire would lie submerged in my consciousness for another decade before my acceptance of it as part of who I am.

High school was a time of great unfolding for me. I attended Spingarn High during the Black Power/Vietnam War era. I wore a black armband to school for the anti-war moratorium campaign. None of the faculty or staff made any note of it. My peers, however, inquired all day about it. I became a conduit of information for them, a role that I continue to be drawn to even now.

I curtailed my education at Howard University to get married, a move that I now recognize as an attempt to negate the lesbian part of myself. It was an ill-founded relationship that could not have lasted for a number of reasons. But from it I was blessed by giving birth to my daughter. I never did return to Howard. Instead I began the task of building a life that would be true to who I am and to the things in life that I value.

Part of that life included being the out lesbian mother of a child in the D.C. public school system. My daughter was fortunate to have attended Brookland Middle School. The faculty and staff there were nothing but loving and nurturing. I know that they knew I was a lesbian. I had been featured in a Channel 9 news series by Bruce Johnson about the city's Black lesbian and gay community. My daughter's high school experience was not as positive, but the climate in the whole country had begun to deteriorate by then.

I have been out as a lesbian for more than 20

years. In that time I have had my family's love and support. I have had the opportunity to be politically active as an out lesbian, an opportunity uniquely provided by D.C. All of the social justice movements of my time have had, and will have, a presence in this city. It has been uncommonly fulfilling to me to be in this environment where the idea of justice lies always just below the surface and so regularly is elevated by those who seek it.

Diana Onley-Campbell is Assistant Director of the Union Institute's Center for Women. She is a founding member of the Black Women's Education and Action Collective.



Photo: October 11, 1987, is the date of the second national march for lesbian and gay rights.

Photo © JEB (Joan E. Biren)

Born in Washington — And in America

by Eleanor Holmes Norton

I am a proud native Washingtonian, who grew up to represent her city in the United States Congress. As a child at Bruce-Monroe Elementary School, near Howard University, I did not dream of becoming a congresswoman. Perhaps this was because Blacks had only token representation in Congress. Perhaps it was because Washington's schools and public places were all segregated. It certainly mattered that the