

## STREET BEAT

The sound of all the bandsmen warming up is “music to my ears.” This is where I’ve dreamed of being all my life... in a parade. I’m excited and nervous at the same time. This is my first time marching in a parade. Oh, I marched alongside the bands, way back before I started to school, but to be in a band marching through the Southside of Tulsa is a new thing for me.

I’ve played “air drums” ever since I first heard the band long before I started to school, but now here I am, proudly standing in the small two-man drum section, waiting to step off, play my snare drum, and march, in a real parade.

I look around at all the young musicians and can’t believe that I’m right here, right now, with an old snare drum and a tattered pair of drums sticks. I think I look pretty good with my new hand-me-down uniform and wearing a pair of second-hand white Salvation Army shoes momma bought for me.

As far back as I remember I have always wanted to play in the band. My earliest days of summer were of growing up on Jasper Street, climbing up in the maw berry tree, eating maw berries, and waiting for the band to come in late August. We’d hear the music and take off up to the corner and wait for the parade to come by. Sometimes we’d march in place waiting for the band to top the hill a couple of blocks away.

Even before I started to school in 1942, we’d hear the music as it cascaded over the “Brickyard Hill” down the Greenwood corridor, and off we’d be running to meet the band. I ran along, with the rest of the “Mawberry Tree Gang” to the corner of Jasper and Greenwood and marched in step with the band, before it got to our street.

We stood apart from the rest of the kids in the neighborhood because of our street colors. We were a rag tag bunch of kids, stained from head to toe with maw berry juice. Our short britches, feet, and bodies, were colored a deep purple, mixed with dirt, faces full of smiles and pride, marching along with the band. We put the 60’s hippies to shame with their tie-died clothes. We had being multi-colored and raggedy, down to a fine science.

Miss Ollie owned the tree at 623 E. Jasper and we all grew up around it, way back then. Miss Ollie’s kids, the last bunch of them; Doll, Joe, “Big Sonny” and Junior,

were the official keepers of the tree. They call me “Lil Sonny,” Cliff and Ernestine were charter members of the “Maw Berry Tree” Gang too. I later discovered our “Maw berry” tree was actually... a Mulberry tree. I harkened back to my earliest days for a moment now, as I wait for the parade to start. I feel like jumping out of this uniform.... I’m so happy.