

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Everyday
Contributions
to Black History

FEB 2023



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About me...

Growing up my parents made sure my sister and I knew that education was important. My dad used to say “find your rabbit”, an expression from a book we read as a family. It meant, find the top person in your class, and make sure you keep pace with them or exceed them. It’s something that stuck with me and pushed me to strive for excellence.

Because education was a priority, my parents made sure we went to schools in the best districts. When I was 3, we moved to Southfield where I attended Birmingham Public Schools. I don’t remember much about elementary, but what I do remember was the impact my principal, Mr. Don Tobe, had on me. Mr. Tobe was the “life” of our building. He knew your name, he knew your family, he saw you. As a black girl in primarily white school, being seen was more important than I realized at the time. Mr. Tobe was a constant I could count on because no matter what grade or who my teacher was, he was always there. While I had a wonderful experience in elementary school, middle school was more of a challenge for me. I was not seen, I as picked on by my black peers because I did not talk like they thought I should or dress like they thought I should dress. It was hard. My self-esteem plummeted and I was no longer looking for “the rabbit” in my class, I was just working on running away.

If only Mr. Tobe was there. Someone that saw me and knew there was something wrong. I didn’t know it at the time, but this became part of the reason I became a teacher and would later become a building administrator.

My name is Shari Pawlus, and I am the principal of Hill Elementary School. I became an educator because I wanted to make sure that all kids, but especially black and brown kids like me, feel seen and I think I do. I know all my students’ names and I make sure they feel special the moment they walk through our door.

Shari Pawlus
Hill Elementary Principal
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