

Flonzie Wright shares civil rights stories with MNCS

By Rachel Miller
Editor

Minnesota New Country School students had a rare opportunity to participate in an online video chat with Civil Rights activist Flonzie Brown Wright on Friday, Feb. 19.

Born Aug. 12, 1942 in Farmhaven, Mississippi, Wright was appointed as the NAACP branch manager in Canton, Mississippi when she was just 20 years old. In that position, she helped thousands of African Americans register to vote.

It was not an easy task either. Wright told MNCS students that there were two very different registration tests. White people had to answer six questions, four of which were name, address, social security number and employment.

African Americans were given a two-page, 21-question document. Among the burning questions they were asked to gauge their competence to vote: How many bubbles are in a bar of soap? How many feathers are on a chicken? How many jellybeans are in a pound of candy?

"Can you imagine just trying to register to vote and answering those ludicrous questions?" Wright said.

Wright herself failed the test to vote, and that inspired her to run for public office. But it was not going to be easy.

"When it came out in the paper a colored girl had qualified to run for the position of election commissioner, they changed the rules," Wright said.

Prior to her campaign, a candidate merely had to win a majority vote in their district. But after she decided to campaign, the rules were changed so that she had to receive a majority vote among all five districts in Madison County, Kansas. But when the dust settled

and the votes had been counted, Wright emerged victorious.

In that position, Wright monitored elections, trained poll workers, supervised registrars — and sued the Elections Board for discriminating against her fellow black candidates and poll workers.

It was not all happiness, however. Wright's success was not well-received by many and made her a target of the Klu Klux Klan. Wright shared that at roughly 2 a.m. every morning, her phone would ring from people making death threats. They even made death threats against her children. Wright reported the threats to the sheriff, but she also followed her children home from school in her car to make sure they got in the house safely.

Wright lost two of her cousins to the Klan. They were walking down the road when KKK members picked them up, took them into the woods, beat them, chained them to the truck and drove until they were decapitated.

Despite the pain, trauma and threats, Wright persevered, as she



Minnesota New Country School students had the opportunity to listen to and ask questions of Civil Rights activist Flonzie Brown Wright (below) on Friday, Feb. 19. Wright was a big part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and worked hard to give African Americans the right to vote.

"We understood we may not live to see the fruits of our labor, but the next generation would."

- Flonzie Brown Wright, speaking to MNCS students about her Civil Rights activism

'have I done enough?' And that is what keeps me moving."

Wright shared how there are many things a person can do to help, and chief among them is "live out your values before young people." Speak out for what is right, and work to set a

good foundation for the next generation. Register to vote, and ensure everyone eligible to vote in your household is registered.

Wright said if someone is sharing prejudiced or homophobic ideas, the best thing a person can do is live out their beliefs in front of them.

"They may not agree with you, and you may never agree with them, but they will respect you for standing tall for what you believe in," Wright said.

believes every generation needs to do their part to improve things.

"We understood we may not live to see the fruits of our labor, but the next generation would," Wright said.

Wright said she was able to stay motivated because she knew she was on the right path.

"I am on a journey, and the journey I am on is for the right reason so it keeps me motivated," Wright said. "I always ask myself



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