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Politicized

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STORYTELLER: Jackie Patterson

WESTWOOD

I remember great Grandma taking me into the voting booth with her. She wanted me to see that she was voting for John F. Kennedy. She told me that she didn't usually vote for Democrats or Catholics but that Kennedy had promised to make things better for our people. My great grandmother wanted me to see this. She also needed me to make sure that she was reading the names on the ballot correctly when she made her mark when voting.

I know how important it is to be involved, to make sure that someone is hearing your voice. I was six years old in that voting booth. Kennedy won the election and I've been involved in politics ever since. When there's a council meeting, I'm there and I speak up. I let them know what



it is that we need and want in Westwood, my neighborhood. I ask hard questions. I argue with people that don't like being argued with. I was one of the original plaintiffs in the case brought against the landfill. I put my name on that, I had to. I'm not the only one who speaks up, either. My friends are activists, too. Involved people. Agitators. My family members, too. You don't learn about this on your own. I'm not just doing this for fun. If I don't look out for my seniors in my neighborhood, who will? **IF I DON'T GET THE RESOURCES FOR WESTWOOD THAT OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS IN THE CITY ARE GETTING, WHO WILL?**

There are answers to these questions. No one else will look out for us. No one will. The white neighborhoods will get the money, not us.

It's not that I don't like other neighborhoods or other parts of the city. It's that I'm from Westwood. I've never lived more than two miles from where I live now, though I do leave Westwood everyday to go to work at the Air Force Base. It's working at the base that has done so much for me. Working with service families, I saw how much they give up for their country. I saw how much is sacrificed to make this country like it is, but I also saw how different this city is for white neighborhoods and for black neighborhoods. **I COULD MOVE OUT OF WESTWOOD, BUT I**

COULD NEVER LIVE IN ONE OF THE SOUTHERN SUBURBS OF DAYTON. THEY DON'T WANT A PERSON LIKE ME IN KETTERING, IN CENTERVILLE. I CAN'T GO TO THE GROCERY STORE AND BE COMFORTABLE THERE. That's why I stay in Westwood, even though Westwood doesn't have a grocery store and there's no place where you can buy fresh, healthy food. There's not even a Subway. I drive past four or five Subway restaurants leaving the base every day—even before I get on the highway. But we don't have any healthy options in Westwood. It's like the city doesn't want us here. So I segregate myself in Westwood. I know this segregation is awful, but it's much better than the alternative.

People don't believe me when they hear me say that. They think that it can't be true, that racism like that doesn't exist in Dayton, doesn't exist anymore. But I was just called a nigger by a Trump voter in a line of nice people at a Kroger in the Dayton suburbs. He called me a nigger and said I was probably paying with food stamps and he had cash money. **I LET HIM AHEAD OF ME IN THE GROCERY LINE. I DIDN'T ARGUE WITH HIM BECAUSE SOME PEOPLE YOU CAN'T DO ANYTHING ABOUT.** There were dozens of people around, though. Dozens of nice, suburban whites. After the man left, someone apologized

to me for the man's behavior. Why didn't you say anything to quiet him? I asked. She didn't have an answer.

How did I know he was a Trump voter? Because he was wearing a Trump shirt and the red hat. And I'm a black conservative! I'd been working for the county Grand Old Party for decades until they nominated this president. Then I told the party, I can't vote for him. He doesn't want us here. If you nominate him, if you endorse him, you will be sending the message that you don't want us here. They voted for him. I guess they didn't really want us here—even the few of us who would vote for their candidates—either.

That message has already been delivered by Dayton many times. **I DRIVE THROUGH THE WHITE NEIGHBORHOODS AND SEE SCHOOLS, SHOPS, CHURCHES, PLACES FOR THE COMMUNITY TO GATHER, SAFE PLACES PEOPLE CAN MEET IN.** You won't see any of that in Westwood, though.

What do we have? Liquor stores. Fast fried food. Which means we also have obesity, hypertension, and heart disease.

Great.

They're putting a dialysis center in Westwood.

Great.

So we'll have a dialysis center for our fast food, but no public meeting places. We've got no

good-paying jobs. **THE GROCERY STORE IS GONE. THE BUSINESSES PULLED OUT. GM MOVED OUT, TOOK THE JOBS, AND LEFT THE BLIGHTED FACTORY.** Now we've got no jobs, blight, and what else? Teen pregnancy, drug abuse, poor schools.

THAT'S WHAT WESTWOOD IS KNOWN FOR. WESTWOOD: THE TEEN PREGNANCY CAPITAL OF THE COUNTY.

Great.

How can you compare this to somewhere else, a different neighborhood in the city and not think that the city doesn't want us here? They don't.

The city needs to do something to show us that we matter. We live here. We were here before those other neighborhoods. We stayed here when things were hard and now they're harder and we're still here and the city is doing nothing for us. That's why I can't leave Westwood. Too many people already have. The city wishes I would. The city wishes we'd all move out to Englewood or Trotwood. It wants to act like we're not here, to spend money elsewhere, but that's our money, too and we deserve the things that the other neighborhoods get. I'm going to be in Westwood, making sure that they know we're here, until they stop acting like they don't want us here, because if I don't who will?