

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Brighton Gardens — A Community within a Community — Conclusion
Submitted by: Suzanne (Campbell) Conerway

I am proud of growing up in Brighton Gardens. It was then known as Brighton’s “Black community.” But life in Brighton was not always easy. Until the late 50’s, I was the only child in the Gardens, except during the summers when a few families with children would come to their summer homes. In school, I was called the “N” word, and some teachers were not sure how to teach a “Negro” child. When I was in the sixth grade my teacher went to Mr. Gordon Hawkins, the superintendent, and told him I was “retarded,” so I was put on the side of the room with the challenged students even though I had always been an ‘A’ student. In my senior year, I was told by my counselor that I “was not qualified to attend the University of Michigan,” and that I should “go to the Canopy Hotel and get a job.” Well, challenges only make one stronger!

I graduated from the University of Michigan with a Bachelors and Master’s degree and became percussionist for the Detroit Women’s Symphony Orchestra. I became Brighton’s first African American teacher, teaching choir at the junior high and high schools, served twelve years as president of the BHS Alumni Association and I was an active member, lay minister and choir director at St. Paul’s Episcopal Church. In 2006 I was honored to become a member of the Brighton Area Women’s History Roll of Honor.

Brighton will always be an important part of my history! My hometown has changed and so has Brighton Gardens! Uncle Birney eventually built a home on the land where the pavilion was located, and he lived there after his retirement in 1955 until his death in 1976 at the age of 92. Our homes are among the only original homes built that remain a part of the Gar-

dens. In her later years, my mom was blind, and we sold our home to the Watkins, a white family in 1983. Although the community at that time was not happy with our selling to the Watkins, Brighton Gardens became integrated, and today it remains the peaceful and welcoming community Uncle Birney envisioned 100 years ago!



**The childhood home of Suzanne (Campbell) Conerway
on Larchmoor Drive in Brighton Gardens**