



# Rights Perspective

*A Semiannual Newsletter of the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Human Rights Commission*

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## ***MAKE A WISH...***



*BY COMMISSION CHAIR SAMYE N. MILLER*

“Make a wish...blow out the candles.” Every birthday I can recall my wish was for one dream: that people would live together peacefully. I never hoped for total understanding or acceptance, but I have always believed that mutual respect could be possible.

Perhaps this desire came from my childhood surroundings. I had the very good fortune of being raised in a loving family. My parents were Sherman and Fannie Miller. They were involved both within our home and within our community, genuinely concerned about the type of people their children would become and the world they would find as adults. They taught me to care about my world and the people in it.

My father, Dr. Sherman E. Miller, came from humble beginnings, the third child of immigrants who had fled Europe because of the persecution they experienced as Jews. Both my paternal grandparents had difficult lives in America, and died young. But, they gave their four children freedoms they could never enjoy in Europe: public schools, access to medical care, freedom to travel, and freedom to dream broadly of their futures, knowing that with hard work they could achieve their goals.

Born in St Joseph, Missouri, my father told stories of how difficult his family’s life was and what he, as a young child and later, young man, endured. He had a hunger for education, and many days he had to literally fight his way both to and from school: other children called him names just because he was a Jew. It was not until he went to college and dental school at St. Louis University that he was finally able to enjoy learning without the insidious harassment from others. Working hard to complete — as well as afford — his studies, he found help from his teachers, many of whom were Jesuit priests. He could finally enjoy social and academic freedoms within the university.

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My mother, Fannie Miller, also, felt somewhat isolated growing up in Winchester, Ky., being one of very few Jews living there. She, too, told us of very difficult times in her youth, recalling when the KKK held rallies there and remembering the cruel rejection she often felt at school. Like my father's parents, her parents also fled to the United States to escape persecution. My mother told us of stories of the pogroms her parents endured—how her mother, as an infant, was hidden under the bed when Cossack soldiers ransacked her village.

Graduating from dental school in the early 1930s, my father settled in Lexington and met my mom. With my parents came the memories of prejudice they had dealt with most of their lives. My father was especially aware of these injustices and observed them everywhere. Lexington at this time was still a small town, and the attitudes here were reflective of trends nationwide. Blacks and whites lived in separate communities that intersected only occasionally. There were many members of the African American community who could not get quality medical care. My dad was the first, and for a time, the only Caucasian dentist in the city to take African American patients. His contact with the African American community offered him the chance to witness the horrors of the then accepted attitudes African Americans had to endure: segregated schools that were second rate; limited housing of low quality; general treatment with flagrant disdain as less than second-class citizens. As Jews, meanwhile, my parents continued to experience prejudice. Neighborhoods, clubs, hotels, and schools were closed to Jews. Intolerance was taught and accepted. If you weren't "mainstream," which is to say "white and Protestant," then you were "different."

Between 1941 and 1953, my three siblings and I were born. As the family grew, and my parents began to look for a larger home, my father discovered that some housing developments in Lexington restricted members of certain races or ethnic groups. Consequently, my family was excluded from living in certain areas of Lexington. As my siblings and I grew up, we experienced prejudice. I have vivid memories of the prejudice that was accepted in this community. I experienced it as a Jew, as well as observed it in the treatment of anyone who was "different." Children can be cruel, and they did not spare me or my brother and sisters. My siblings and I often felt as though we were living in two worlds, because there were times when we didn't fit in with other children. It was frightening to walk in the neighborhood and suddenly be accosted by name-calling boys. Who was or wasn't a friend became difficult to know, as some of them couldn't or wouldn't invite me to their homes or parties because I was Jewish.

These biases extended into my early adulthood as well. Admittance to some universities was limited because the schools had "Jewish quotas" which may have been filled for that academic year. Occasionally, walking into new social or professional situations became uncomfortable because—for reasons that had nothing to do with me as an individual—I found I was not welcome by most of the people there. Bigotry made my first teaching job, in Cincinnati in the early 1970s, one of the most painful times of my life. After I asked for time off in order to attend services during the Jewish New Year, the principal of the high school began to bully me. He repeatedly sought me out, telling me how displeased he was with my performance as a teacher and my teaching practices, though he never personally observed me. Eventually, he refused to provide my classes with books or needed supplies even though the other teachers were given them; and he made personal judgments, even questioning my choice of clothing. In short,

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he undermined my work and my abilities. Only later was I told by another Jewish teacher at the school that it was unwise to let this principal know that you were Jewish. This teacher said that he had not attended Jewish New Year services since he began teaching there because he didn't want to bring notice to himself. Ultimately, I was forced to resign. Years later, I spoke with the then-assistant principal of the school, who confirmed that the principal was anti-Semitic.

Even in the face of such intolerance, Judaism teaches the concept of *Tikkun Olam*: working for peace to restore our world. This teaching is about making choices from within that affect your relationship with the world outside yourself. By giving and thinking, striving for justice, a person can have an impact, so that the world can be repaired, one step at a time. A central principle of this is that we have an obligation to do acts of charity (*tzedakah*) throughout our lives. This goal was as pressing for my father throughout his life, as it has been for me throughout mine. It has dominated my actions, my attitudes, my work, my home, and, indeed, every aspect of my life. I was taught (and have taught my children) to treat everyone with respect, living within the fundamental premise that one treated others as one would want to be treated.

My father was a part of the Human Rights Commission from its inception in 1963 until 1986, helping to found the organization in Lexington. He was a part of a group of men and women of diverse backgrounds who shared the common concern that all members of our city should be able to live in a community of mutual respect and equal treatment, and, to ensure, that protection would be provided by law. He was a man who believed in fairness and continued his involvement with civil rights all his life. No one harbored illusions about everyone liking or accepting everyone else; instead, the goal was, and continues to be, regarding the "others" as people, to see all people as equal, and to offer everyone the same opportunities. My father strove to bring this to pass within and outside the home, through his family, his work, and his active role in the Commission for nearly twenty-five years. I would like to think that he made a positive impact toward that goal of *Tikkun Olam*, and hope that I may be able to the same.

This year, the LFUC Human Rights Commission will celebrate its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Like many of those we serve, the Commission has often been misunderstood and reproached due to preconceived notions, as well as a lack of education about what we do and what we represent. Our mission is to "safeguard the legal rights of individuals regarding discrimination and to promote mutual understanding and respect among the people of Lexington-Fayette County, Kentucky." Yet our role goes beyond our charter. The Commission has grown as Lexington has grown during the last 40 years, offering advice, legal counsel and redress, education and outreach programs, and more to every member of our community.

We are proud of how we have evolved and will continue our work earnestly as we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We invite each of you to join us as we commemorate this benchmark year. I ask you to share with me, as we blow out the candles on our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary, in making a wish that 40 years from now there will be no need for such an organization as the Human Rights Commission. Rather that the world then will be one in which recognition and respect of human rights is universally accepted. Make a wish...

**“Celebrating Diversity – Ensuring Equal Opportunity  
in Community Development”**

**LEXINGTON-FAYETTE URBAN COUNTY  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION’S  
NINTH ANNUAL FAIR HOUSING LUNCHEON**

**TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2003**  
Hyatt Regency, Lexington, KY  
**11:00 a.m.**

**Housing Information Station**  
**11:30 a.m.**

**Fair Housing Luncheon**  
*Featuring Guest Speaker*  
*Cory Booker*

*(see biography on page 6)*  
**& the**

*Second Annual Police Community Relations Awards*

**TICKETS:**

\$35.00 per person/\$350.00 per table of ten

**Contact:**

Tami Reed  
859-252-4931, ext. 10  
treed@lfuchrc.org  
or register online at  
www.lfuchrc.org

**COMPLIANCE REPORT - 1<sup>ST</sup> & 2<sup>ND</sup> Quarter FY 2003**

*July 2002 – December 2002*

***Cases Received: 61***

Employment-48

Housing-8

Public Accommodations-5

***Cases Resolved: 75***

Employment-60

Housing-12

Public Accommodations-3

## Commission Officers for FY 2003 and New Commissioner



*Samye N. Miller*  
*Chair*



*Lori Davis*  
*Secretary*



*Jeff Jones*  
*Vice Chair*



*Brian Berthiaume*  
*Treasurer*

*Congratulations to the FY 2003 Executive Committee on their election to office. Also, the Commission welcomes new Commissioner Angela Slaton. Angela's photograph and biography will appear in the next newsletter. Welcome Commissioner Slaton!*



The Commission is proud to announce Cory Booker as our guest speaker for the Ninth Annual Fair Housing Luncheon On April 1, 2003 at the Hyatt. (see page 4 for details)

## CORY BOOKER

*Former Newark City Councilman & community activist*

A native of northern New Jersey, Cory Booker's passion for politics and justice was instilled at an early age by a family committed to change. His parents successfully fought against racial discrimination and shattered corporate ceilings, inspiring him to a life of breaking barriers and working for change.

While a varsity football player and class president at Stanford University, Booker ran a local crisis hotline and organized programs for city youth in East Palo Alto California. As a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University, Booker made headlines through his friendship with then-Lubavitcher Rabbi Schmuley Boteach. Their friendship and Booker's leadership of the L'Chaim Society was a powerful example of Booker's strong belief in the strength of diversity and the tremendous possibilities when people move beyond simple racial, ethnic and religious tolerance.

During his first election, Booker rose to prominence by upsetting a four-term incumbent to become councilman. He knocked on tens of thousands of doors, inspiring over a thousand previously discouraged voters to turn out for the first time.

Booker lives his politics, often in unconventional and creative ways. In the summer of 1999, he went on a 10-day hunger strike in one of the most drug-infested housing complexes in Newark, an effort that resulted in increased police presence and improved security for residents. For five months in 2000, Booker took to the streets; he lived in a motor home and parked it on the worst drug corners in the city, inspiring residents and businesses to fight against drug dealing and crime. For this *TIME* magazine called him "The Savior of Newark," and it proved to the city and the nation how dedicated he is to fighting inner-city problems.

Booker brings his passion for social change to the podium. His drive and commitment are inspirational to audiences across the country.

As Newark's Central Ward Councilman, Booker introduced dozens of pieces of legislation and resolutions that impact housing, youth, safety, jobs and create better government. He earned a reputation as a leader with innovative ideas and a willingness to take bold actions. From increased security in public housing to new playgrounds, his initiatives are changing lives.

Booker was an All-American football player and excelled in sports throughout his academic career. He ran a mentoring program for low-income youth while studying History in Oxford, England. While earning his law degree at Yale University he cofounded and ran legal clinics to help low-income residents of New Haven. He is currently the Director of "Newark Now," a grass roots nonprofit group and is partner at a law firm in Newark.

**LEXINGTON-FAYETTE URBAN COUNTY  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

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**Vice Chair**

Jeff Jones

**Secretary**

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