

Stay You But Be Different



Attending a predominantly white high school as one of the only Black girls was a unique and challenging experience. I often felt like I stood out in every classroom and social setting, which sometimes made me feel isolated and misunderstood. Despite these challenges, I found strength in my identity and learned to navigate the complexities of race and culture with resilience. I became more aware of the importance of representation and the need for diversity in all spaces. This experience not only shaped my perspective but also empowered me to advocate for inclusivity and understanding within my school community.

Growing up, all I knew was Alton, Illinois, and I thought it would stay this way forever until it was time to make a life for myself. Attending the school district in Alton was not a hard journey for me because I went to school with the same kids I had always known. Entering Civic Memorial High School in Bethalto, Illinois, during my sophomore year, I didn't know what to expect in the coming years. While many might perceive this experience negatively, I embraced it as a positive one, though it has not always been this way. However, if someone had asked me if I

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expected it to unfold the way it did, I would have said no. Yet, I am happy with it.



Entering a new school in a new town with new people is not easy for anyone. But entering as a minority with very few peers like me was particularly challenging. Accepting my situation without having people like me to express my feelings to was hard at first. After feeling nervous for so long at the beginning of my move to my new high school, I knew something had to change. I couldn't stand going in every day with my heart thumping like a loud bang on the door, footsteps heavy like metal, and my voice scared to speak because I felt different. I realized I could and had to take this as an opportunity to make a name for myself.

During my first week of being the new girl, I met the assistant principal, Shelby Norris. Mrs. Norris had the face of a stern woman who did not joke around when it came to business. Somehow, Mrs. Norris and I connected one day at lunchtime when I was sitting alone. Not even knowing her well, I cried to Mrs. Norris about how nervous and lonely I felt moving to Bethalto. Something about her gave me the vibe that I was safe with her. From that moment forward, Mrs. Norris became my best friend and school mom. In times of trouble, worry, sadness, or happiness, she was my support. Her support extended beyond school and meeting her would not have

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happened if I hadn't taken the chance to lean on others outside of my comfort zone.



Being in classrooms as the only Black girl was initially daunting. I found myself questioning whether I would be judged for just being me or whether I should act like everyone else just to fit in. I knew changing myself for acceptance was not something I wanted to do. I had no choice but to put myself out there because I did not want to be a girl from a minority that no one knew or heard of.

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Starting from a place of nervousness and isolation in my sophomore year, I decided to take proactive steps to change my experience during my junior year. I was part of the yearbook club for my first two years at Civic Memorial. I found solace in the creative outlet that the yearbook club provided. One requirement for yearbook members was to attend three specific games or events to take pictures. Having to do this for the yearbook class as a requirement, I told myself I had to make the best of it. That is exactly what I did. I slowly started talking to people, using my voice to be heard, and using my camera to make a name for myself.

However, it was joining the Media Club and taking a Mass Communication class that truly opened many doors for me. In Media Club, we conducted interviews, created weekly announcements, promoted different clubs and sports, and ran DJ booth interviews and games. Each video we made for announcements was shown to the school in classrooms. This exposure helped people I didn't know start to recognize me. Seeing me with my camera and on camera reminded others that I was present. I was not ashamed or quiet because there weren't many others in my position who were outgoing like me. I used this as motivation to stay different and engaged.

Joining the photography and Media clubs allowed me to open myself up to many new experiences and people. I was making a positive name for myself by putting myself out there, allowing me to shape the image I wanted with people who weren't like me or didn't know the past me. The Media Club became a platform for me to express my ideas and connect with others who shared my passion for communication. This experience helped me build a support network and gain confidence in my abilities. Being the responsible, respectful, nice, and caring individual I am, also played a significant role in how things went for me at Civic Memorial. Attending

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Civic Memorial High School contributed to my personal growth and the type of person I wanted

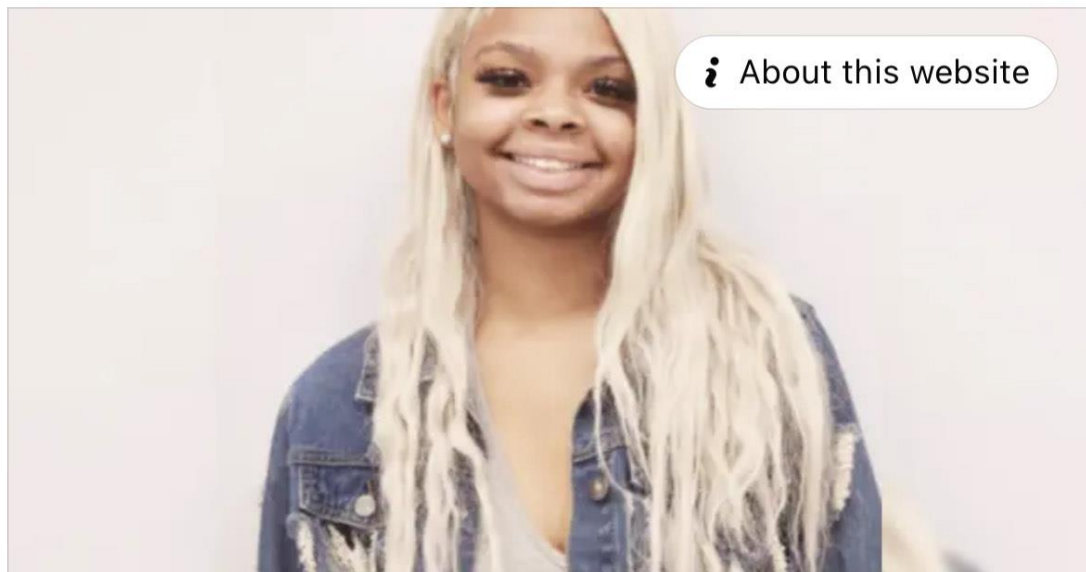


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Jasmine Davis is a Student of the Month for Civic Memorial High School.



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to become.

Looking back, I am proud of the progress I made. The Yearbook, Media Clubs, and Mrs.Norris played a significant role in my journey at Civic Memorial High School, helping me transition from feeling isolated to becoming an active, engaged member of the school community. I witnessed a positive shift in the school's culture as our media initiatives promoted understanding and inclusivity. My journey taught me that while being different can be challenging, it can also be a source of strength and inspiration. I am grateful for the lessons I

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learned and the resilience I developed, which will continue to guide me in advocating for inclusivity and understanding in all areas of my life. This experience has not only shaped my high school years but has also prepared me for the future. I now understand the importance of finding and creating spaces where everyone feels represented and valued. My time at Civic Memorial High School has equipped me with the skills and confidence to continue advocating for diversity and inclusion, whether in college, my career, or any other community I become a part of.

