

Eugene Parks

The last few days have been rather sad ones for me due to the recent death of Eugene Parks. I have always viewed Mr. Parks as a role model. I admire people who tell you how they feel without being “politically correct.” He was that type of person. He commanded your attention, not because of his “gruff tone” or “edginess” but because of his sincere knowledge of the topic on which he was speaking. Mr. Parks knew what he was talking about.

When I decided to run for Madison School Board, I made a list of people from whom I wanted to get endorsements. Eugene Parks was one of those people. As I made my way through the campaign, our paths finally crossed in a local restaurant. I was very excited to tell him about my candidacy. I exclaimed to him, “Mr. Parks, I’m running for Madison School Board!” He replied, “Why would you go and do a fool thing like that for?” Honestly, I was kind of stunned. Sensing this, he told me of his feelings about the Madison schools. He felt that schools were being set up. They were being asked to do everything but not adequately funded. He also told me that the school board was the only elected position that for every ONE friend you made; you made TEN enemies. Again, Mr. Parks knew what he was talking about.

After winning my election several months later, I was asked to do a radio interview on WORT. After my segment, Mr. Parks was the next guest. Once pleasantries were exchanged, I wished him luck in his interview; he wished me luck on the school board. While I was listening to interview, he told the interviewer how proud he was of me and that I represented young leadership that our community needed. I was very proud of that. He also questioned the priorities in the City of Madison where the community would build swimming pools but not support additional funding of public education (remember last year the School Board cut 10 million dollars from the budget). His comments were very profound.

I know I’ll never be like Eugene Parks. There will never be another Eugene Parks no matter how hard someone tries. Unfortunately, my personality is not like his. I am not as brave as he was to say exactly what was on my mind and tell everyone how I feel. However, every once in a while, the “Eugene Parks” in me comes out but I save it for special occasions and the settings in which media will not be around. The truest way to honor his memory is giving the Madison School Board the type of passion, effort and commitment that he gave to our Madison community. I will miss Eugene Parks.