

'He's the wind beneath my wings. He really is.'

Foundation built for model educator

BY LINDSAY POLLARD

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Daisy Spears Stroud often visits her husband, Gerson, at a nursing home. When she asks about his day, most times he can tell exactly what he did. Other times, he relives faculty meetings he attended or a student he counseled decades ago.

Daisy said Gerson touched many lives as an educator in Charlotte, but now he has been diagnosed with dementia. She wants her husband to hear how people value and respect him while he can appreciate it. That's why she started the Daisy Spears and Gerson L. Stroud Foundation last fall.

The foundation is headed by Daisy and her family and supported by people Daisy and Gerson influenced. The foundation also honors Gerson's legacy as an educator and the couple's role as civil rights leaders.

They were both educators during desegregation. Daisy, a community activist, first taught at Oakdale Elementary. Gerson was the principal at West Charlotte High in 1971 when the first white students arrived.

Larry Bumgarner was one of those students. He remembers Gerson well.

Bumgarner attended Myers Park High before transferring to West Charlotte. He was a junior, and he hated it there. That is, until Gerson reached out to him.

He had been a bystander during a race riot and was trampled.

"I had my head kicked in," Bumgarner said. "(Gerson) came over to me and asked me if I was OK."

From there, Gerson encouraged Bumgarner to join the student

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COURTESY OF THE STROUD FAMILY

Gerson and Daisy Stroud during their 59th anniversary. Daisy started a foundation in honor of her husband. They wear their wedding clothes for each anniversary.