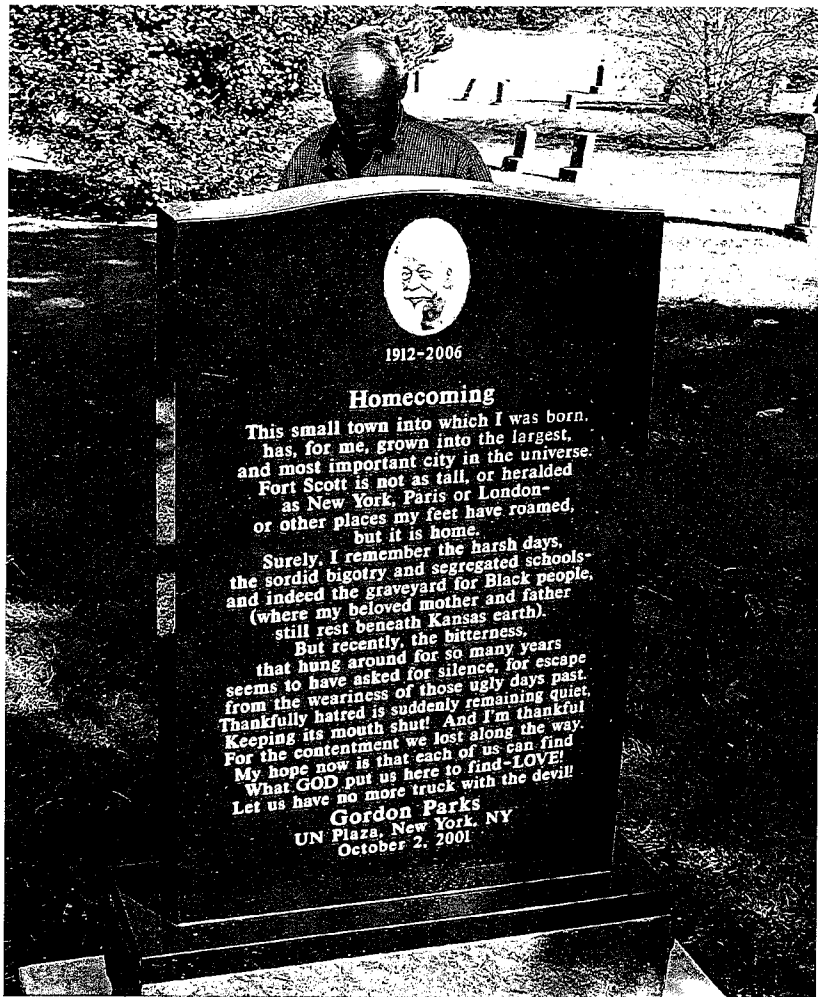


"I replied, 'I wish I was, too.' I think now he meant it literally, and I really didn't grasp that." At this point, Ken's eyes became misty, his voice broke, and he said, "Dammit, I didn't go."

Perhaps the best expression of the relationship between Ken Lunt and Gordon Parks came in response to one of Ken's offhanded comments. He once mused, "I don't know why you mess with me, Gordon."

Parks was quick to reply, "I trust you." ◉



"Giving God Instructions"

By Marcella Piper
as told to Mike Hogard



Besides being remembered as an artist, musician, poet, photographer, and cinematographer, there is another side to Gordon Parks. This aspect is exemplified in the memories of Marcella Piper, or, as Gordon called her, "Cellabug." Evident in Marcella's voice is the deep love and affection she still holds for Gordon. Here, in her own words Marcella recalls her days with Gordon:

Gordon left Fort Scott at the age of fourteen following the death of his mother. There were three of his sisters in Minnesota and then two siblings joined them. Gordon came to Minnesota to live with his sister Margaret (Peggy) staying for about two years. She and her husband David had no children. David did not understand teenagers and how obstinate they could be. If David said something that Gordon didn't like, Gordon would respond. One Minnesota winter night, David kicked Gordon out. He was sixteen at the time. Gordon came to my mother Cora and she took him in. I just fell in love with him immediately; he being the big teenager and me the little girl. He started playwriting at my mother's house. He did poetry and stories, but none of that caught on.

Whenever Gordon was in the house, there was always a party and there was always a group of people around. Marcella's mother would often say, "Gordon is so personable he could have talked Jesus off the cross." Gordon was happy all the time and malice free. I don't remember him hurting anyone intentionally. He was humorous, you might not understand at the moment what was so funny about it, but if you thought about it later, you'd fall out laughing. He was good at everything he attempted, always restless, and always on the move. He was a good tennis player, ice skater, horseback rider, basketball player, swimmer and seemed fearless at any of these activities.

Gordon was always broke and always came to me if he needed money. I seemed to always have money, and I don't know how. Before Gordon died I said to his accountant, "He owes me money!"

The accountant said to me, "Let's figure out how much money you owe her."

"Hey, don't play with her," Gordon replied, "if she wants money she will get it."

In Fort Scott, Kansas, the year before he died, I actually told him that he still owed me for the \$8.00 I gave him to purchase his first camera. I told him that camera launched him on his career. But he said, "I lost that camera in Puget Sound." Gordon had fallen into the water with the camera and lost it, but he got himself out.

During this time Gordon was a waiter with the Great Northern Railway. He was so young that the older waiters, when they had a layover in a city, would tell Gordon he was too young to go out, so, "Get your books and start reading."

He also owed me money for the "most hideous green zoot suit," the same color as a praying mantis. He said, "Well, baby, I'd rather owe you money than anybody in the entire world."

I just worshiped him from day one that he moved into our house. He moved in, and my mother took care of him. He bought an Oldsmobile, but he hated to drive. He went to the city fathers and told them that I was a reliable, responsible, high school student, and he needed me to drive him around. If they would give me permission to drive, he would

**Gordon was always broke
and always came to me
if he needed money.**

take responsibility. I got my license and became Gordon's driver. I soon learned that after I dropped him off and found out what time to return to pick him up, that I could leave and show off the car.

When I went to New York, he'd say, "Go get the Rolls Royce. I have to go to the city." He was living in White Plains, and I would have to drive in that crazy city [New York City].

Gordon liked to go to a particular fish market to buy his own white fish. Most people didn't know that he was a gourmet cook. He always picked out his own fish. No one else could do that for him. Similarly, while doing his fish recipe in his kitchen, no one was allowed to enter. The fish was delicious!

Gordon loved to have parties, but everything had to be just perfect. Every Thanksgiving he would have his three former wives over, and they would come, and were gracious to each other. He was, in turn, a gracious host, lover, and former husband.

Trying to walk out of his apartment in New York City was a dreaded trip, because if you could make the trip in fifteen minutes alone, with Gordon the same trip would take two hours. Bus drivers would stop their buses in the middle of the street and say, "Mr. Parks, Hi!" And with that famous left hand he'd make a salute to them. Cab drivers would stop their cabs, hop out and shake his hands. One of the ladies he was dating at the time said, "Isn't it hilarious. I hate going anywhere with him on the street."

If he met someone he knew, but not well, he would stop and say "How is your mother or father?" He could even remember the dogs and cats that were in that household. People would stop him and ask for autographs. He would stop and just sign his name without ever looking at what they were giving him to sign.

One day I told him, "You should stop and read before you sign."

He just said, "No, baby, they're not going to do anything to me; they love me."

"Yes," I pleaded, "but money is the root of all evil." All the while he continued to sign.

**Every Thanksgiving he
would have his three
former wives over.**

One day after Gordon had gotten out of the hospital, I asked him how he got such beautiful gray hair, because none of the Parks grayed early or late. When Uncle Gramps (Jack Parks) died, he only had five white hairs in his mustache.

Gordon would look at me and say "Cellabug, only your hair dresser knows for sure." He would never tell me if it was dyed or not.

That smile he had would make you do anything whether you wanted or not.

I never heard him raise his voice at any time in his life.

The wife of boxer Joe Louis really pushed Gordon in his photography. Anything she did Gordon had to be on the scene. "I think she kind of liked him."

Half Past Autumn [the book] had nothing to do with the season, but it was his life. He was getting older and that's what it was about. The day they sent the first cover of the book to his apartment in New York, I said, "That's a pretty cover with your white hair."

"There is something wrong," Gordon replied.

"No, there's nothing wrong with that picture," I argued.

"Baby," he said, "hand me that white shell over there."


I handed it to him and he put that on the cover and said, "Now, that is complete." As you looked at that cover, the white of his hair, the white shell and the white clothes just brought that cover together.

"How did you know that?" I asked.

"Because it wasn't complete."

The first time Ann Parr came to New York to talk to Gordon about a book she was going to do, Gordon didn't know her at all. As Ann and her husband arrived at his apartment on United Nations Plaza, Gordon was standing in the hallway with his hands outstretched and said, "Welcome to my home." Ann almost started to cry. Ann thought this man doesn't know us, and here he is waiting for us.

Gordon said to me, "That's what I should do, they were coming to my house."

It's very difficult for me to think of Gordon as being dead, because he was so alive all the time. Often at church here, I will say, "I bet he's up there giving God some instructions." 

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By Pa

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**The wife of boxer
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