



by **Robert L. Woodard**  
*The Wynnefield Barber*

**W**hen I think about real people and real stories, South Philly always stands out. Let's take a walk down memory lane. At 15th and Christian Streets, **Kenny Gamble** started his empire with **Philadelphia International Records** and the **Universal Companies Family of Schools**. Mr. Gamble and **Leon Huff**, along with **Thom Bell** and **Linda Creed** of Bellboy Records, are all examples of real people who have done extraordinary things.

**WRITERSBLOCK**  
As we continue to travel further West down Christian Street on 16th, we find the historical **First African Baptist Church**. This Church attracted many fair-skinned Black people as members. I recall being invited to go with my friend, Richard Daley. Richard's family were very light complected people.

When we arrived at the church, I was told to go upstairs to the balcony. Richard and his family went to the front of the Church's first floor. As a young Black child, I never understood what was going on until I became much older and aware of prejudice and segregation in our own community.

Moving down to the next block at 17th and Christian was the E.

**M. Stanton Elementary School**. I attended that school for just one year, for the sixth grade, to finish my elementary education. I never understood why, in the middle of a school year, the City decided to demolish the old school building. Now as an adult, I wonder if it could have been asbestos. From first to fifth grade, I attended **Chester A. Arthur Elementary School** at 20th and Catherine Streets.

I only covered a small part of Christian Street. If you were to go just another block down, a famous actor, **Mr. Sherman Hemsley**, from the hit show *The Jeffersons*, lived on Christian Street. The YMCA was in the middle of the next block. Mr. Morton was the director of that building. I became a Boy Scout at the **Christian Street YMCA**. My Scout Master was Mr. Herman Suggs and my Troop Number was 572. I still have a photo of me and my Troop at Camp Heart. **Ollie Johnson** was one of my Troop members. He later played for the **76ers**. The YMCA had many athletic superstars like **Bobby Lewis**, **Andrew McCarter** and **John Robbins**, a star swimmer.

Moving right to the next block of Christian Street was **Dr. Richardson's Pharmacy**. Dr. Richardson and my

father, **James Woodard, Jr.**, were best friends. When my father closed his business at the end of the day, he and Dr. Richardson would play checkers on my front porch as if their lives depended on it. They both loved the game of checkers. The neighbors would all become the audience that enjoyed the competition between these two great men. I thank God that Dr. Richardson's building is still standing. However, the developers built new buildings all around and behind the historical neighborhood business. Hats off to a real person doing extraordinary things, like the new owner of the **Christian Street Pharmacy**, **Mr. Jerome Wack**. He is truly a hero of the community for not selling his building and having the guts to stay, even though they built all around and behind his historical neighborhood property.

In the present years, the area is being gentrified. The places of my childhood are being erased. The history of Philadelphia was built on the values of brotherly, sisterly and motherly love for all neighbors. I am an original long-term resident of the community. Remember, South Philly is all we have left of our neighborhood history and we all should never forget. **PRH**