Excerpt from “I Want the Black People to Win,” by Karen A.D. Burton

Iva “met her husband, Evans Davis, they started a family, and then a business. They owned Davis Food Center, a neighborhood grocery store on Flint’s south side. Evans also worked in the General Foundry full-time, and when he died in the late 1960’s, Iva was the sole proprietor of the store. She was an entrepreneur, a female founder, a boss lady, all the terms we use now that really didn’t exist back then. She was the general manager, the buyer, the accountant, the HR manager, stock-clerk and check-out clerk when needed, and she was a butcher. Folks around town called her “the lady butcher.” There were hardly any female butchers in the 1940s, ’50s, ’60s and ’70s. Heck, there aren’t many now.

I don’t remember anyone who entered the store ever calling my Granny by her first name, even the white men who worked across the street at the oil company. Traditionally, calling a woman Mrs. (or Mr. for a man) has been a term of respect. Everyone who came in, said “Hey, Mrs. Davis,” as they approached the meat counter at the back of the store where she spent most of her day. When she worked for the white people, even the little boy she cared for got to call her Iva.

As the larger regional chain grocers moved into town, Granny couldn’t compete. She held on as long as she could, but closed Davis Food Center when I was 10 years old — the age that she started working to help support her family. Early on, the Davises gave people groceries on credit and helped folks get their start as they moved to Flint to work for GM. As those workers got bigger paychecks, they were lured by the bigger, fancier stores.”

Burton, Karen. “I Want the Black People to Win.” Medium. January 18, 202., https://kadburton.medium.com/i-want-the-black-people-to-win-1cc59c5ee4f9.