

Ellen Green Remembered



Hillsborough Remembers

Jacqueline Allen
By Darlene Harris
October 10, 2007

This is an interview with Mrs. Jacqueline "Jackie" Allen. She's the assistant principal at Robinson High School in Tampa, Florida. Mrs. Allen was a long-time friend of Mrs. Ellen Green and was a friend of her family. This interview is being conducted on October the 10th, 2007 at Robinson High School during the after-hours, exactly at 5:30 PM. My name: Darlene Harris. I'm the interviewer, representing Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library system oral history collection project.

Darlene Harris (DH): *Mrs. Allen, can you tell us: How long did you know Ellen Green, and in what capacity?*

Jacqueline Allen (JA): I came to Tampa, Florida in 1970. And I was attending a church program. And at that time, I saw Mrs. Ellen Green. And when I saw her, I was awed, because she looked just like my grandmother.

After the program, I went up to her. And I guess she thought I had--, was strange, because I asked if I could touch her hair. And then I looked at her. And she said, "What's wrong?" I said, "You look just like my grandmother. It's as if she's been reincarnated." And so at that moment, she smiled; she says, "Well, I'll be your grandmother!"

And so we struck up a relationship. And from that point on, very often, we had conversation through the church and my employment where her grandchildren attended school here at Robinson High School. And the relationship started then. And it lasted up until her death.

DH: *My, that's just--. In reading about Mrs. Green, I was just so, so impressed, and would have loved to have made her acquaintances. But you seem to have a lot of history with us. Tell us about the time that you had to speak in behalf--, on behalf of Mrs. Green, or they invited you as a guest speaker as the church to speak for us. Could you tell us about that?*

JA: Well, several times when she shared programs at her church, she would invite me to be her guest speaker. But the most memorable one was when they honored her a few years ago, and I was the guest speaker. And at that time, it was really an honor for me just to be in her presence. And that morning when I graced the pulpit and I started talking, I guess tears started coming from my eyes, because as I told the young people there, they did not realize that they were in the presence of history, and that they needed to spend time themselves just going by her house, sitting on the porch, you know, just listening to the

stories that she would tell them, things that she had experienced herself throughout the years.

And after the program, she just looked at me, and she smiled. And she wrote me a letter- a thank you letter. And she called, and we talked. And I went by, and I saw her. And she just said I just did her soul real good, at what I--. She said, "I didn't know you thought so," you know, "so much of me." I said, "What are you talking about? You didn't realize I thought so much of you?" because I had referred to her as a phenomenal woman, the *Negro Mother*, the poem, that she was representative of that, and that she was a prayer warrior, because in many instances it was prayer, and she was a faithful believer in God and loved her church.

And many times, even here at school, when I sponsored a female mentoring group, she came out, and she talked to the young ladies, and told them about stories and, you know, and challenged them. And she talked about her gray hair-- , her white hair that was symbolical of years of wisdom in which she had encountered experience. And she said she just wanted to in her humble way the joy within her. That's why I referred to her as a phenomenal woman, because she was truly phenomenal.

***DH:** It sounds like it's so deserving for a person of her statures. What--? Can you tell me a little bit more--? What type of person was she? What type of person?*

***JA:** I recall a situation. [Laughter] I have to laugh, because I was youth director for eight years for the young people of African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Tampa, Florida Conference, which consisted of 50 plus churches. And I had sent out a communication to all churches inviting them to a youth meeting. And in the letter, I had stated that they could wear pants.*

Then I got this call. She says, "Baby," she says, "this is Mama Green!" I said, "Yes, ma'am!" She says, "Now, let me tell you something, darling." She says, "I'm from the old school." She said, "They read that letter in church Sunday. And when they got to the part about they could wear pants--," she said, "Now, you know how Mama Green feels about pants in the church."

I said, "Oh, my goodness!" I said, "Yes, I suppose--." I tried to explain; I said, "But we're going to be in the fellowship hall. And we're going to be doing things, you know- arts and crafts. And they needed to have--." She says, "I don't care! You're on God's land and under God's roof."

So I said, "Yes ma'am!" And I was obedient. She says, "Now, you remember obedience is better than sacrifice." And I just--. I had so much respect for her-- still do-- that I couldn't help but say, "Oh my goodness." And I had to tell the

people that I had been reprimanded by someone who I held in high esteem. And I never forgot that, so--. She--. If she thought, she shared--.

But she had a mild, sweet way of reprimanding you. And you couldn't get upset when--. And she just told you straight. She said, "Now, you know how Mama Green feels about this." And you couldn't help but smile and just give it a "Yes, ma'am!" [Laughter]

DH: She truly sounds like a--, just an incredible--, like you said, a phenomenal woman.

JA: Yes, yes, yes.

DH: What do you consider her greatest accomplishment?

JA: Her ability to walk among people and really walk queenly and not lose the common touch of being able to communicate with people. She didn't have to know you. But if she came in contact with you, there was just something stately about her-- her smile-- just that would just draw you to her. And if you engaged in conversation, there was a wealth of wisdom; there was a wealth of spiritual experiences that she could share with you. And when you left her, you couldn't help but feel better.

DH: Mmm!

JA: And that's a gift that many people don't have. She, she spoke--. She walked tall, but had a small--. She walked kindly; she was a gentle person. And she didn't like anything--. You know, many times when people do things for you, they want the world to know. And she was quiet, and she did not want the world to know many things that she'd done for people- many things she'd done for young people who () mentored and tried to give advice to, and in working with their grandchildren. She just did not want the world to know the many kind deeds that she would do daily, just with people she would come in touch with--, in contact with. But if you came in contact with her, her presence, her stately presence, which I believe was a gift given to her from God.

DH: Mmm!

JA: That's right.

DH: I just feel like just listening to you and then have read a lot about her since her passing, truly I was not aware of her existence and all the great things that she had done. And I can easily see what you're saying--

JA: That's right.

DH: --that she was a person that did great things and didn't want a whole lot of recognition for it. And I learned about her being a mentor to many. And I just feel like, Oh, I missed out, so I'm reliv--, I'm getting this opportunity to experience through these interviews. So this is truly a joy for me.

Let me ask you another question: Can you describe Ellen Green? If you were talking about physical attributes, can you describe her? What did she look like?

JA: Her hair. That's why when I first saw her, I just wanted to touch her hair. Her hair to me was symbolical of a glow or a light from heaven. And the wisdom-. You couldn't help but just feel the creative--, the creativity. And under that snow-white hair--, because ever since I've known her, she's had that, that hair [Chuckle] that, that stood out. But under that hair, you could see a face that even though if she were in pain, she could camouflage the pain. And there was a radiant glow from her. She reminds me of my little Barbie doll--

DH: Mmm! OK.

JA: --my little African American, stately Barbie doll, with a lot of wisdom, love, and an inner glow that radiated outwardly.

In fact, she gave me--. She said, "Now, come here, baby. I've got a gift for you." She gave me an eagle. And that eagle now sits at the top of my buffet in my dining room where my china is. And I call that Ellen Green's Eagle, because we would often talk about soaring like eagles. And she would tell people, "Yeah," she said, "The clouds," she said, "I look and see the clouds. But beyond the clouds, there's even much more."

DH: Mmm. Mmm! Just--. Oh!

Now, tell me about her affiliations. What organizations and--? You know, you mentioned a church that she was affiliated with. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

JA: Well, I know she was very actively involved with the National Council of Negro Women, the NAACP, other organizations in the community. In her church, she was, I believe, a steward. Then she was a very staunch steward in active support of her church. And she served in many capacities throughout the church, even the missionary society, and always an advocate of young people.

DH: OK. And do you remember anything about her working, as far as an occupation? What did she do; what was her occupation?

JA: You know, strange enough- before I came to Tampa, we used to come with a lily-white organization when we were much, much younger, when we were in high school and they had the parades down--. It was a long time ago. But here,

it--, I think it was the insurance company used to hear of certain--. You hear of the little tiny lady that--. Her presence was known; she didn't have to say a lot! But her presence was there. And you know, as--.

We came to Tampa on many occasions. Before I moved here, you would just hear about--. And I had heard of Ellen Green, but you know, you didn't put until--. And then when I moved to Tampa in 1970, and I went to church--. That's why I say it was ordained, so it had to be God's plan! And when I saw this lady sitting up there, and I walked up to her, Oh, this is the Ellen Green we've heard so much--! But a powerhouse- I mean, tiny powerhouse. () through the insurance company.

***DH:** Right, right. And I want to just ask you: Is there anything else you want to tell us? Do you have a favorite story? I know you told us in the beginning; you mentioned that. Is there something else special that you want to impart and you want people to know about her- a favorite story that you would like to share with us about Ellen Green?*

JA: Well, I recall the last time when I went by to see her, shortly before she passed. And I went to her church that Sunday morning. I was on program, and she was not there. And then I went by the house to see her. And I sat, spent a considerable amount of time. And she told--, she said, "You know, Jackie?" she said, "The world doesn't owe me anything." She said, "I just hope people will remember the small things that I tried to do."

And I got very--. She says, "What are you getting emotional about?" She says, she says, "I didn't come into this world to stay," she said. "But I just hope that I've done some good for somebody."

And then we started talking, she started talking about her grand--, she started talking about--. Sidney Trust was one of her grandchildren, and I had the pleasure of working here at school when he was a student here. And he was an awesome young man. And she started talking about Sidney, and how she had appreciated, you know, my mentoring Sidney.

And we just went down memory lane, but the main thing she kept saying that stuck with me was, she said, "I tried to do the best I could." She said, "And I hope people will remember."

She says, "And I don't want no fuss over Mama Green!" She said, "I don't want no fuss! I don't want--. You hear me? I don't want a fuss over it." And then I went--. She said, "Now, I told you--." She said, "Why are your eyes full of water?" And then she started reprimanding me. Then she started telling me--. She said, "Now, let me tell you something. I want you to slow down."

I mean, so I remember, you know, the echoing of the wisdom from her voice from her stomach through her heart was love in it, but she was telling me, "Now, Mama Green knows best." And all I could say was--, you know, smile, straighten up, and nod my head. And she was telling me goodbye without telling me goodbye. But she was, as in her usual manner, challenging me and telling me, "Now, I expect you, what you expect me to do."

And I left her house. In fact, when I left, I smiled all the way home. When I got home, my husband asked, "What's that?" And I told him. I said, "I just got a lesson from the voice of wisdom." And it felt like it was a voice that had been given to me down (). She told me she was eighty-something years--, and through the years, of eighty years plus, of wisdom- in one conversation. And that is a story that is--, experience with her that I will never forget.

***DH:** I'm just delighted. And just thank you, Mrs. Jacqueline Allen, for sharing your story and your history and experience with Mrs. Ellen Green. This concludes the oral history interview. My name is Darlene Harris, representing Hillsborough County Public Library system.*

[END OF INTERVIEW]