

*Ellen Green Remembered*



**Hillsborough Remembers**

**Wanda Howard**  
by Priscilla Lakus  
August 23, 2007



*This is an interview with Ms. Wanda Howard. Ms. Howard lives in Tampa, Florida, and she is a personal friend of the late Ms. Ellen Green. This interview is being conducted on August the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the year 2007, at the Port Tampa City Library. I am the interviewer, and my name is Priscilla Lakus. I am representing the City of Tampa--, I'm sorry, Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library system oral history collection project.*

**Priscilla Lakus (PL):** *And it's my pleasure to welcome Ms. Wanda Howard. Thank you, Ms. Howard, for coming today.*

**Wanda Howard (WH):** Thank you, ( ).

**PL:** *I understand that your throat is a little bit scratchy. So we may have to pause during this interview from time to time to let Ms. Howard get a drink of water, or something. But other than that, we'll continue on with the interview.*

*Ms. Howard, I understand you were a close personal friend of Ms. Ellen Green. Can you tell us a little bit about her- how you met her, for how long you've known her, these kinds of things?*

**WH:** I met her when I was a little girl, so I've known her for quite a while. She lived a street behind us in Port Tampa. And as most of the people-- the older people in Port Tampa--. They were all our mothers and fathers, so she was one of my many mothers that I had in Port Tampa.

She and I went to the same church, and she just became one of my many mentors. She was just an excellent person. I mean, you couldn't ask for a better friend. She and I were nowhere near close together in age, but it didn't matter. She and I were friends. And I spent a lot of time with her before she became ill.

I moved away when I was eighteen, and moved back about thirty years later. And she and I just started off where we left. It's just--. She was a lot of history- a lot of history there with her.

*PL: Right. Do you recall, or were you familiar with some of the things that she did locally here for the civil rights movement? I know you were probably a much younger person, but you might have heard stories about some of the things that she did.*

*WH: Well, I'm glad you asked me that, because we did a salute to her at my church. And I wrote a little something about some of the things that she had told me about. I know that she was actively involved in the civil rights movement. And with the NAACP in 1955, she held various positions there. She was there when the incident happened with the McCoy restaurant. It was the lunch counter there at the--*

*PL: Woolworth.*

*WH: --Woolw--. It was--. I think it was McCoy's, McCoy's at that time, she had told me.*

*PL: Oh, OK.*

*WH: But it could have been Woolworth's. But I think she said McCoy's. Or it could have been both. But she did tell me about where she sat there and she ordered a meal. And that was not acceptable at that time, you know, in the South. And she and her friends- they did quite a few sit-ins in those days. And I'm not that young that I don't remember.*

I remember also when my mom used to take us downtown, that we had to ride on the back of the bus. And we too, being young, always wanted-- when you take someone out-- always want a drink of water and go to the bathroom. So I remember those days also, that we couldn't use the bathrooms- we had to go around to the back, or we had to drink out of a water fountain that wasn't always clean. And my mom would always take water with us, and you know, so that we wouldn't have to ask for water at that time. But you know how children are.

So she would tell me all these stories about the things that, you know, that happened during that time. She also told me about how she was pushing for public housing for the poor, that the--, you know, to get the money from the federal government for the city. She also pushed for the county to build adequate schools for elementary children here in Port Tampa. She said that--.

I guess she went to the school system here. There used to be a school on Kissimmee, almost where our church is now- an old school there that they used to go to. And I'm not quite sure if that was the old Booker T. Washington junior

school. I think that was the name of the school that she told me. And I don't know why that just sets in my mind, that that was the name of the school that was there at that time.

So those are just some of the stories that she told me. I mean, it was so many things that she had done. She was president of the National Council of Negro Women for sixteen years. And I know that probably you've heard about that. But the thing that I think that--.

She received so many awards. In 1993, she received the Outstanding Service Award for the National Council of Negro Women. In 1993, the Human Rights Award that the Tampa-Hillsborough County Human Rights Council gave her. And in 1996, she was the Black Women in History Award for her contribution to black history. That came from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office. In 2003, she received the Bethune-Cookman Achievers Award for the National Council of Negro Women. And I did go to--, go with her to that, so I did see her receive that award. If you just excuse me for one minute.

*PL: Certainly. [Pause] I've heard some of her accomplishments. I had not heard of these awards, so I'm glad you're able to share those with us. That's very good.*

*WH: Yes. She showed me these. And she had a book that almost probably same as the one that's out at the University of South Florida- not as big, but--, that I had started to--. The pages were beginning to yellow and everything, and I had began to put them in plastic for her so that it would, you know, preserve a little more. The other thing about her is that she was a Christian. [Pause]*

*PL: I've heard this about her.*

*WH: She loved her god. She knew her god. I mean, she was a member of our church for eighty-eight years.*

*PL: [Gasp]*

*WH: That's a long time to be a member of one church.*

*PL: What was the name of your church?*

*WH: Mount Zion AME Church, on the corner of, on the corner of Kissimmee and Idaho. And she was there when the church was on the other side of the street. It wasn't always on the spot where it is now. But she was always involved in the church. And she held so many positions there in the church. In fact, when I was a little girl, she was superintendent of the Sunday school. And she just, she just loved working for the Lord.*

And I think besides my mom, she would probably be the only other person that, you know, that I knew that loved, you know, working for the Lord as much as--. And I guess I get--, that's where I got that from- my mom and Ms. Green, because she taught me how to be the church secretary. She was the church secretary. She taught me how to do that- how to write resolutions when someone passes. So now I do that for my church. And that's what she did. And she taught me how to do that. So when I say she had a lot of information, she did. She did. She took a lot of that information with her.

And I wish that sometimes we--, when I was gone, I didn't come back. When I came back, she was already a little ill at that time. So we didn't get a lot of time to spend. But I tried to spend as much time with her as I could, trying to find out things. And I would take her meals, take her food to eat. And she was always so thankful. But she, you know, she had her good days and she had her bad days, as, as do we all. But someone that everyone should have known.

*PL: Well, I don't want to put you on the spot, necessarily, but I'm going to. Is there any personal story that you can share with us, from either your childhood or later on as you got to know her- just some personal little story?*

*WH: The thing that I liked about her the most is that she would always tell me that, "Whatever you do, do it to the best of your ability, because whatever you do is a reflection on you." And I always remember that. I mean, she would always tell me that. And she was always so proud of anything that I did, because she said that I did it to the best of my ability, and that God will always bless me. So I remember that most of all.*

*PL: That sounds very much like her. I've heard from interviewing other people about her religious background and how strongly she felt.*

*WH: Yes.*

*PL: And I also--. I never had a chance to meet her, and I wish I had. But I can envision her, from the things that have been said about her. One person commented that she was a woman of small stature--*

*WH: Exactly.*

*PL: --but she carried a big stick! [Laughter]*

*WH: She did. She did.*

*PL: And you can just see her, you know, not taking anything back from anyone, but yet doing it in a very respectful manner, you know.*

**WH:** Exactly. Exactly. My pastor at the time, Reverend Gene Jones, named her “Mother of the Church,” because she had been there for so long. She was the, the member with the most seniority in our church, so he named her the “Mother of the Church.” But she was; she was that type of person. Whenever something came up, and it wasn’t something that she thought was right, she always spoke out, you know, against it. And I’m probably like that also. [Chuckle]

**PL:** [Laughter]

**WH:** So I would have to say I got that from her- and my mom. But you know, when I see an injustice, I think that, you know, something should be done, and something should be said about it. Otherwise, you know, you let it slide and it just slides and slides. And it’s-- After a while, you can’t go back and redo what you know that you should have done to begin with, or something that you should have said that wasn’t right. So we have to remember that: that small people- we still have a voice--

**PL:** [Laughter]

**WH:** --and we can speak up. And she did. She did in so many ways that, you know-- I just wish that more people would have gotten the opportunity to know her, to talk to her. And I just think a lot of things were probably blown out of proportion, you know. But we should have gotten to know her, or they should have gotten to know her better. And then you would have seen and known what type of person that she was.

**PL:** *Well, from all the interviews that I’ve done, I--, that’s the one thing that I feel probably the strongest: I wish I would have-- I wish I would have had the opportunity to have at least met her once, because she just sounds like a fantastic person.*

**WH:** Right. I also would like to say that this is something that I said:

“This is not just some little old lady sitting in the corner with her head held down. She has a quiet, sweet voice now. But back when she was not afraid to let her voice be heard, this is a strong black woman who deserves respect, because she has been there and done that. Mother Green will be eighty-nine years old on the 19<sup>th</sup> of this month. I salute her, and I thank you, Mother Green, for all you did for me and all blacks in Tampa.”

And this was the, the salute that we gave her when she turned eighty-nine years old, so that was--

**PL:** *Was this done at the church?*

**WH:** Right. This was done at the church. And that was one of the things that I had put in there for her. So I really would like people to know that- that she wasn't just some little old lady. She had a voice at one time, and she spoke out. And--

**PL:** *Her voice still carries on.*

**WH:** Right. And her voice was heard.

**PL:** *Yes, it was. Well, I thank you very much for coming, for making the effort. And I know you weren't feeling up to 100 percent. But you came and you shared some wonderful thoughts with us about Ms. Green. And I personally appreciate it very much.*

**WH:** And thank you so much for inviting me.

**PL:** *You're quite welcome.*

[END OF INTERVIEW]