

Ellen Green Remembered



Hillsborough Remembers

Olive Florene Jones

By Ann Bush

August 2, 2007



Ann Bush (AB): *This is an interview with Olive Jones--*

Olive Florene Jones (OFJ): Florene. You've got to say the "Florene."

AB: --Olive Florene Jones, who is--, who was a personal friend of Mrs. Ellen Green of Tampa, Florida. (). This interview is being conducted on August 2, 2007 at Mrs. Jones' home. This--. My name is Ann Bush, and I am a librarian with the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library system.

Thank you so much, Mrs. Jones, () for participating in this project. Would you tell me about your earliest memories of Mrs. Green?

OFJ: Ms. Green was a Port Tampa person, and my grandparents lived in Port Tampa. So I knew her practically all of my life. She was also () several of my family () church.

So I've known her on and off, in many capacities, practically all of my life. She () was working at the Central Life Insurance Company. () civic endeavors that she did. I missed the most important part of her life, and that was () president of the NAACP. But I knew her prior to that.

And I've known that she was a person who was really driven to go above and beyond the call of duty- very mild and soft-spoken, but very much a person of her word and very much a person of action.

AB: *What would you consider her greatest accomplishment?*

OFJ: The fact that she was able to lead the Urban League. To me, that (). () involved in all sorts of movements. And the NAACP was supposed to be involved. I don't think before her, we had a person who was consistent in always pushing for ideas () for a long period of time. This is what she didn't do ().

She was a person capable to get crowds together, to touch people, to get other people to touch people. She was very good at that. And I think that the fact that she believed so deeply in what she was doing made her a very influential person.

AB: *Do you have any memories of her work with children?*

OFJ: Not a lot, because in our civic endeavor, we worked a lot. But as we went to our jobs, we worked in different arenas. So I really have not that kind of memory of what she did with children- except that she worked with children during sit-ins, etcetera. Now, I knew that because I was on the other end, working with adults.

AB: *You participated in sit-ins with her?*

OFJ: Not with the children. Well, both. During that period, I got my, I got my (). [Laughter] I always thought that if you didn't do that-- whoever didn't do anything-- would never have to say anything to their grandchild. "What were you doing during the civil rights movement?" You'd have to say something. And I know they were over there at one time working one area, and we were over working another area. But () same thing. She worked very diligently with the children sometimes. We worked through the young adults () for aggressive action.

AB: *What did you sit-in for?*

OFJ: Well, Walgreens--. Our () came from them- from Walgreens.

AB: *Oh! [Laughter]*

OFJ: We thought it was time during this whole business--. We thought it was time for us to show that we could go any way we wanted to as citizens. But I think the most effective thing we did was the B and B supermarkets, because we shut them down completely.

() young adults for aggressive action, but that took us a lot of people. It took a lot () people who wanted to see a change in the social system, OK. And to me, that was very important, because they had three supermarkets- two of which were in predominantly black neighborhoods.

And we went intelligently to them-- that was Dr. Martin Luther King ()-- and we went intelligently to them and asked them if they would put blacks in some of those jobs they had in black areas. And they said no. And having just come from a fresh meeting with Martin Luther King, we said, "Well, we'll see about that."

So we began to organize a strike against Pine (), B and B markets. One was located behind the telephone building. Another one was located on 8th Avenue

and 22nd Street- big supermarket. The third was over in the area around North Hillsborough, which was not predominantly black. And what we did was () everybody wanted to help. And we picketed those places until they went out of business.

You know how it is. People think that because they say 'supermarket,' that they're making a lot of money. But that money has got to be consistent. And if they were getting most of their money from black people and black people stopped going, what would happen? They could not and did not survive.

AB: *And they would rather close down than hire--*

OFJ: (), and I wish we could still remember how strong that () power is. It's very strong. What happened was they thought they could maintain the money. But you see, you only get a 3 percent margin of profit. And if you've got mostly () coming from them, they're not buying it, there's no way in the world you can survive.

But some people had to be shown that: we do have power, even though you may not believe it. But other people have seen what power can do. If you get that 20 percent of the market, that's enough to close somebody down, because they need to make at least 3 percent. And if you've got 20 percent not buying, they may not say it at first, but after a while, you will know that it made a difference.

I think we've forgotten that lesson. And that's unfortunate, because that's one of the most powerful weapons you can use: don't buy what you can't afford. Don't do anything that you cannot be accorded the full rights of citizenship. And that's what the whole thing was all about, you know.

And our children need to be taught this, because they think it's so funny. "Oh you didn't--. That didn't happen. Oh, you didn't have separate toilets. Oh, you couldn't drink out of () water." All of that!

And it happened because people began to mobilize after a while. People saw what happened with B and B. They saw (), and they saw us out there waving at us (), "Don't buy what you can't sell." And we had good backing from organizations that were able to touch other groups in the community. And had good police protection, because the people--.

One day, somebody called us and asked us not to go downtown that day, because the Klan or somebody was coming into town. And we did not go, because we were told by people we trusted not to go. And they came () up and down the street, but there was nobody there. We only knew that because other groups (). So they didn't want Tampa to be another Alabama ().

So they came, but they () one group; they tried to talk through it first. And we were never--. We () on Hillsborough, and we had our () all laid out, where (). And that was it. (). And we said, "Well, we're not moving." And what happened was they had to call the police. (), "Lock them up." So (). () again, "We don't have black people." "Well, I'm not moving." So the police (). So it kept on; they had the whole town (). () black people trying to go to a ().

But I think we don't talk about it enough. We don't remember enough how we got these jobs enough, how we got into the telephone business, or () at that time. And all of the press people looked, and they saw what a group-- a small group of people--. And nobody needed that, and especially didn't need it trying to get other people to move into the area. They didn't want to come to the area ().

But now we've forgotten that (). We don't, we don't demand enough anymore. It's demanding what we all do. It's not asking anybody to do anything for us- just demanding what is ours by right. And I think that's what () do that again. I really do.

And I think all of that had a lot to do with (). She wasn't afraid of anything or anybody. Small, tiny little lady- not afraid of anybody. We--. I haven't seen--.

I've been home now fifteen years. I came back to bring my mother back. She wanted to come back home. I haven't seen a lot of things () that I would have seen growing up by now. It seemed like once we achieved a little bit, we got comfortable. And we can't get comfortable. I tell my relatives, "There's a lot we can do." We can go over there and volunteer to do something. Sometimes you can't volunteer for something, so ().

So we need to get that cohesiveness back again, so we can form one perfect union of people who want to do everything to get every ounce of freedom that we're entitled to- because right now, we () second-class citizens. And I mean that. I can look at my tax bill and see ()! [Laughter] You can really see that now, you know what?

You know, so she started a big movement that we were not doing before. And she continued to build on that. And so I am so happy that, really and truly, somebody wants to honor her, in a way that she should have been honored a long time ago. But she didn't get to see that honor.

However, I'm looking around, and I'm seeing some people who'll get honored who are still living. And that's wonderful too. That's wonderful too. Usually, we wait until people are dead, and they don't know how much we really appreciate them. But we often, as much as possible, do exactly what she does. And I think it's really wonderful.

And she deserves it. She deserves it. She's a hard-working person. She didn't take a lot of stuff and try to make things that are not true. She presented it clearly, precisely, and she expected you to support it. OK. Sure enough, people did support it. She's wonderful- wonderful, wonderful.

AB: *OK, did you say that you grew up with Mrs. Green?*

OFJ: () between her, between my aunts and me. But she was a little older, but not much, I would say. She was a like a teenager, and I was ().

AB: *In the same neighborhood?*

OFJ: No, no. My grandparents lived in Port Tampa, and so we went down there every weekend. But I lived in West Tampa. I lived in West Tampa, which was way far away.

Let me tell you how I used () down there on weekends. The streetcar ran right straight down Bayshore Boulevard, in the middle () now, we went on the streetcar. We went down to the Walgreen's in downtown, got the streetcar, went all the way to Port Tampa on the streetcar, got off at (), and waited for my granddad to pick us up. So, you know--.

And then once we got there, we went wild in Port Tampa, because you could. That was before MacDill came (). My granddaddy had pigs () there, and cows out there (). And we just ran around and loved Port Tampa to death. (), so when the church movements, we saw () AME Church. And we saw, we saw each other all the time. And we were friends ().

AB: *So going to Port Tampa was going to the country.*

OFJ: Oh, yes! [Laughter] Oh, yes. Oh, yes. We were (). () grew up in Hyde Park, and we were selling somebody a car. You see Cass Street back there? There's () nothing but sand when we were kids. (). [Laughter] Nothing but sand. Not one thing but sand all the way back. But there's so much going on now, it's beautiful (). (). I like to visit, but I like to come back home.

And I moved to Miami, however. I considered Miami my home. But my mother wanted to come back to my real home, so I brought her home. (). When you get to be older, you don't need to be moving around the world. You () and you stay put. And you make due. So it was a wonderful place to grow up in, even though you had to--.

You know, parents back in those days () do a really good job of () parents keeping your () so you didn't feel a lot of hurt (). And they made up stories about the ().

In our neighborhood in West Tampa, we lived in a neighborhood with Spanish and Italian. And for the longest time--. I was a big girl before I realized that they went to a different school. I thought they went to parochial school because they were Catholic. It didn't dawn on me that that wasn't the real reason. The real reason was that we were black and they were white.

And we used to pass the school right there on the corner of Laurel and ()-- MacFarlane-- and go past them to Booker Washington () Booker Washington (), you know, until they built a new school. Then they gave us a () school, Booker Washington--, uh, MacFarlane. And they called that ()- Carver, () Carver. But it was like, books raggedy, everything raggedy.

() really kind of upset that people wanted neighborhood schools again. We don't have the power to really demand what we need for our children. And I would rather see them be going to school to have all the things we need to teach them than to say, Well, you're in the neighborhood, and you get second-hand everything. I just don't believe the world has changed that much that people are going to be willing to see every person as a citizen of equal--, that you've got to fight to discontinue it.

This is a continuing of that- a struggle to survive and to improve. There's no reason for our children not to have a better world than we had. And for their children, you've got to keep trying to (). (). And that's what we all need. We can't be satisfied because (). I haven't see one () that they can give an activity for.

My birthday's coming up. I (), and I have a (). Now why is that? I was here when they lived in the Greek house, and how hard we fought to get people to support (). () involved in plenty of things. And they let that beautiful--, and it was a beautiful (). And now (); they let the Urban League, Urban League go (). Not one place (). As a matter of fact, I don't know really a nice place that I could take out-of-town guests to live--

AB: *That we own.*

OFJ: --that we own. (), because black people have never discussed it, but we have money. And you're welcome! [Chuckle] But () money's coming back into the black community. I really do. I would like to see a really first-class restaurant. ().

We even had--. A lot of the time, we had (). We had (), and we had (), on call that Central, and I guess that was Scott Street. And we had (), around there on the corner of Kay and Nebraska. And we had () used to take us out for ice cream on Sunday. We had () little children lock up the TV.

They don't play ball anymore. We used to go down to Port Tampa for the ball game. But they always had ball games down there. And they would play people out in Avon Park. Uh-huh.

We had our own, we had our own entertainment. It was not all dependent on whether or not you could go to the major communities; we had our own. () team; that was a big deal. On Sunday afternoons, they'd dress up, and somebody (), somebody recited poetry or did singing.

I remember The (). That was a group of black men. And they were organized and picked up a teacher called () Milton Jones. And it was nobody short of waking up the Jordan; we could sing better. They had 25 men in that group, and they were called The (). And they used to--. You had a program- ().

We don't () and make ourselves outstanding. We're still trying to go and reach through other heights. But we've got a lot of talent in our own community. There's lots of it. And I think if I want to see anything happen to continue her work, it's--, I want to see people develop people in our own communities. I would really love to see that.

Now, I don't know that--. I know that I'm too old, but I still have some memory. [Chuckle] You know, so if we could pass on that memory--. And if younger people can--.

But we really do need to try to put ourselves (). I want everybody to be able to vote (). () in helping () voter registration (). () young adults for aggressive action. These were young black men and women- I would say between the ages of 22 and 32, or something like that. (). And we did the big things that (). But we did all kind of picketing; we did all kind of voter registration.

I remember going up and down Main Street and people saying, "()." I say if you go in there, maybe you can come out a leader. And I don't see the difference. But we did () when we did voter registration. (). We said, "You can't improve anything (). I'm going to take you down there, I'm going to stay with you, and we are going to ()." And we used to go there.

But all of a sudden, we have gotten complacent. We don't have enough black people registered. () black people could make up ().

Now we've got Obama up there now. And that's the most exciting news I've heard in my whole life! A black man, a black person (). () everybody, everybody who has () should be registered to vote. Do you know in your lifetime you'd see that? That is so wonderful. And we're close; we're close. ().

You got to really wrap up those people, because even if you--. It's very possible that you won't, but right now, if you read the paper, it is so close. It is so close.

You got two people up there. And the other one keeps getting more popular each day. (). I don't, but I would like to. And I think that she (). In my lifetime, I would love to see a black person in the White House. I would love to see a black person in the White House! And it's time.

You know, if you look at the world now, (), remember, we used to think that everybody in all this country was light-skinned- until they invented television! [Laughter] And we said, "Oh! They look just like (). Oh! Did you see these people? They look just like people in our neighborhood!" We didn't know about ()- that everybody who was black wore--

AB: *Loincloths.*

OFJ: --loincloths, and () the trees with Tarzan. We didn't know they were kings. We thought all the kings were white. And they're not; they're not. So we have to look at all of these things that have been coming (), and remember that the population of black people in the world is the largest ().

See, I don't remember when I was growing up and going to school, where the Middle East was. There wasn't a Middle East. There was just a continent. All of a sudden, as you began to read, you began to create the Middle East- Egypt, etcetera. I don't remember this.

I asked some people now, "Where was the Garden of Eden?" (). I said, "()." "What do you mean?" () whatever they call that () area of Africa. But we believed it. Really look in the mirror, and see who is looking back at you. And who is looking back at you could be the leader of the world. [Pause] Could be. You've just got to have confidence. We've just got to lock arms, love each other, and move forward.

I think mainly what I want us to do is love each other. If you love each other, then you can forgive (), and try to build on the proper () in people. It's OK for you to criticize, but what are you doing to change it? You know. If (), I don't expect them to behave as well as (). People (). That's what I like about the (). They're not looking to take anybody's (). ().

I wondered a long time before I first went there --, I wondered, Where are all the men? Where are all the black men in church? And I--. Because when you go to church, you see a bunch of women-- two or three men-- lots and lots of women.

I tell you, () every kind of job, you see them being electricians, you see them doing every job in the world. You see them anxious to do things for other people. And they have people get up there, and "You know, I was a drug addict. And () when I found Christ, so and so..." We don't do that in those churches. Somebody () say that, and you'd say, "Yes, I did. ()."

But they embrace people that nobody else wants. And so consequently, their membership keeps growing. I went there because I couldn't believe that they would just come out to all the neighborhoods and distribute to them and (). () went out there and said, "Everybody bring something to give away." And they'd bring boxes of school supplies. I mean, people who don't give anybody anything. But they're anxious now to do something for somebody else. And I think that's spiritual. If you do this, then you are showing your love for other people. So ().

So you know, it's very deeply instilled in me. My grandfather was an AME (). My father was an AME (). Somebody said, "What would your dad say now?" I said, "My dad must be so happy that I finally chose a church where I can really do what I believe in." () I think that he would. I don't think that I betrayed him. I just was looking for something to do what I think religion--, my Christianity, () my Christianity looks for me to do- and that's to love your neighbor as yourself. And see, all these other things--.

You know, "Honor your father and your mother." And that is the only time the Bible tells you what will happen. "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long." Is anybody listening? Because we sure are treating them bad nowadays- robbing them, using them in other ways.

You can't, you know--. (), you know--. So if you just (). () always doing something with the children and the other groups.

AB: *I didn't realize that.*

OFJ: Oh, yeah.

AB: *Is there anything else that we should know about Ellen Green?*

OFJ: Just a wonderful person to know- always with a concern for other people, always trying to move something forward. I never saw her do anything to try to retard anybody else- never. I never heard her talk about things that (). She was always focused with the group that wanted to move ahead. [Pause] That's what I remember about her.

AB: *Well, I thank you so much. This has been very enlightening. And you can sure (). But she's such a wonderful () lady. You know, Port Tampa is a--*

[END OF INTERVIEW]