

Ellen Green Remembered



Hillsborough Remembers

Doris Reddick
by Ann Bush
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This is an interview with Doris Ross Perry Reddick (DR) of Tampa, Florida. Mrs. Reddick is a retired school board member and worked in the civil rights movement with Mrs. Green. This interview is being conducted on August 2, 2007 at Mrs. Reddick's home. My name is Ann Bush (AB), and I'm a librarian with the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library system.

Ann Bush: *Thank you so much, Mrs. Reddick, for agreeing to participate in this product--, project. Would you tell me your earliest memory of Mrs. Ellen Green?*

Doris Ross Reddick: Now that's going to be quite difficult, because I've known Ms. Green as long as I can remember. Ms. Green was a friend of my mother's. And therefore, I was a little girl around the house, and I knew Ms. Green. At that time, Ms. Green was a--, she was working for an insurance company. And my mother had taken out insurances with the company that she worked for. I don't remember the first company, but the Central () Insurance Company was the last one that she worked for. And I--.

So therefore, I can't say, you know, just how many years that has been, because it's been--, you know, I just told you I was eighty. [Chuckle] And so it's been quite a long time that I've known Ms. Green. And all of it was not with the civil rights, nor the, the other kinds of things she was involved in. But it was the, the way she was. And she would--. Although I was a little something around, she would take her time, you know, with me as she came to do her business with my mother in the insurance area.

AB: *She was not one that felt that children should be seen and not heard.*

DR: No, no, no, no, no. No. She believed in children. And I'll tell you something else a little while later, as you ask me about her and children. OK.

AB: *OK. What type of person was Mrs. Green?*

DR: Mrs. Green was a petite little lady. And she was small, but she was strong. And as it is said, good things come in little packages. And Mrs. Green was certainly proof of, of good thing coming in a small package.

She was friendly. She was a church person; she was a Christian. She believed in do unto others as you would () do unto you. She thought that there was some wrongdoings in the world, and specifically, in the little corner where we lived--, she lived. And she decided that she would do whatever she could to make it a little better. And she did. She made it a big, big bit better.

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

DR: OK, now that's going to take a lot of thinking, OK, because she had many great accomplishments.

AB: *Well, tell us--. Just tell us about ().*

DR: I'm going to tell you about one, I think. [Pause] And when she became the president of the National Council of Negro Women, of which her mother was one of the founders of the organization--. And oddly enough, my mother was the longest liver of any of those founding persons. She had an idea--. She did, you know, everything on the adult level, what should be done, but she had an idea for children. And she decided--.

My daughter went to a meeting with me one day. I had not been feeling very well, and my daughter had just learned to drive. And she wanted to drive me to the meeting, so I let her do that. And as we got to the meeting, and the meeting was going on, all of a sudden, Mrs. Green said, "Clemmie,"-- my daughter's name is Clemmie, also-- she said, "Clemmie, I have something I want you to do." And so she told her, "I want you to help me start a youth group."

And her daughter kind of looked at me, and you know, whatever. And I just said, "Well, she's talking to you!" You know, whatever. And most of the people in the group--, all the people knew Clemmie. And they kind of looked at Clemmie, and they said--. So Clemmie said--. And her grandmother, who she was so proud of, her grandmother--, and was so much in love with her grandmother--. She looked over there at her, and she looked at--, in that, that view of, Well, you know, I'd love for you to do that, Clemmie, you know. So Clemmie decided she would.

And so Mrs. Green established the first youth group here, along with my daughter Clemmie, starting out by getting her friends, and then getting other friends, and talking with the--, Mrs. Margie Mayes, who was a teacher, science teacher, over at Blake High School at the time. Talk, talking with Ms. Margie Mayes. And she knew Ms. Mayes because she would go over there some nights with me, because I taught night school as well at that time. And Ms.--. She told Ms. Mayes, and Ms. Mayes got up some girls from the school, and they started the youth group. And it was--.

They met at the, the Bethune high rise around there, where the senior citizens lived. And they were there on time. And they would call--, they would say, "Ms.

James and Ms. Green are expecting us. They're expecting us." And it was an interesting affair, you know.

And what happened: they were going to unveil a statue of Dr. Bethune on public land in Washington, D.C. And so the girls said, "Well, we want to go," you know. But it was going to cost some money, and they didn't intend for the organization to pay for anything. But they were going to go, and Ms. Green thought that was just marvelous. And she, she took--, she talked to me and the other sponsors of the-- what do you call us-- the counselors of the--, counselors of the group, because we would be right there to the meetings as well. And she said, "Well, let, let's see if we can go." So about 15 of the girls were able to go, or wanted--, they wanted to go, or were able to go, or whatever. And we needed 30. And--

AB: *For the bus.*

DR: No, the train. We went on the train. Uh-huh. And we needed 30. And so we--, Ms. Green said, "Well, you all can invite some of the adults to go, you know, on your trip with you." And so the adults were invited, so that made the 30 who went. And we were--. We had just the most glorious time. And what happened is--. You see those long pictures over there on my wall?

AB: *Mm-hmm.*

DR: Those are the results of that unveiling of that statue. And Ms. Green is in that big crowd up there at the top, and the other adults who went. And not any of the children went to that. But at the bottom, that is where everybody--. I mean, if you can just look at that picture, you cannot tell where the people stop. You know, it's just so many people that were there. And Ms. Green was instrumental--, OKed the fact. And the children saw the statue unveiled of Dr. Bethune on public land. And it's the first statue of a black person being on--, in a public park at the time.

OK, so we assisted--. Lee Tyson was the person who said the words that Ms. Bethune said upon her last legacy. You know, this, I leave you this and that, and the other. OK, we came back, and Mr. Mostwhite--. Those girls very anxious about doing something, you know, being--

AB: *--to carry on the legacy.*

DR: Yeah. Yeah, yeah! And Ms. Green was right there, pushing him along, pushing him along. And they said--. Mr. Mostwhite was there, and he was sitting on the podium. And they gave him the rib--, the rope of--, a gold rope that raised the, the sheet of the covering from the statue.

And when we got back to Tampa, he had a large picture of Dr. Bethune. And he gave the picture to the girls to decide where that picture should be placed. And

he also gave them the rope. And they decided that the picture should be placed in the Bethune Highrise. And, but the picture is still around in the Bethune Highrise. Now, the rope, I don't know if it's decayed now or not, [Chuckle] but, but it's there. And all--. They did all of that.

And those girls, you'd be surprised. They all have done-- most of them; I would say 75 percent of them-- have come out being young ladies that you would be very proud of. And it was because of their parents, of course. But it was also because Mrs. Green was a great mentor and a great example for them to follow. And she believed in them, and they knew that.

AB: *OK, that's wonderful.*

DR: So I--. That, you know, that's one thing that I, you know, have very close to my heart, too.

AB: *Let us describe the pictures you referred to. They are about 11 by-- what do you say--18 or 19? And they are a group picture of people--. Is that on the mall?*

DR: All over the world.

AB: *On the mall and in Washington?*

DR: No! That's at a hotel.

AB: *Oh! Well, where is this statue? Is it--*

DR: It's at Lin--. I think that park is called Lincoln Park.

AB: *Is it where the Lincoln Memorial is?*

DR: It's at a park where they have a statue of Abraham Lincoln, and two slaves at his feet. OK, and when they were going to place the statue, the--, his back was going to be turned to Dr. Bethune's back. But they realized that they couldn't put his back to her, so they had to turn Doc--, Abraham Lincoln's statue around, so they'd face each other. Wow. [Pause] But they are--. I don't know how long they are, and I [Laughter] don't know why they are.

AB: *But that--. It's a picture at a motel. It looks like it's outside.*

DR: Well, outside. It is outside, the bottom one. The bottom one is outside. And the top one is inside.

AB: *Right.*

DR: You see, the little inset is the statue. And it's Dr. Bethune. And it's a little girl and a little boy with her. Oh, let me see. Right, right here is a little boy and a little girl, and she's standing here, beside of them. You know, she's reaching out to them. That's the, the statue. And this was done in 19--. What is it? 1974. And it's called the Life of the Life--, *The Life and Legacy of Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune*. And it's a memorial dedication. ().

Mrs. Green is over in this area right here. And Mr. Ingalls at eighty-five, right here, and Ms. Padgett, and some woman who took me from St. Petersburg, and so forth (). And I--. To me, now, this is because I love children so much, too. But that's just one thing. But I'm just so proud of all of the things that Ms. Green did- all of them, you know. And everything she took part in.

AB: *What other things do you know of that she took part in?*

DR: Well, she was a part of the civil rights movement. And I'd like Ms. Florene Jo--, () Olive Florene Johnson to tell you about that, because Mr. Olive Florene Jones was a spearhead of--, along with a group of persons-- along with my husband, Harold Reddick-- who did great things in that. So I'd like for her to talk to you about that.

AB: *OK. Do you know of other organizations that she ()?*

DR: Yeah, she was in a quite a number of organizations, though; I can't name all of them to you, honey.

AB: *Just--. Do you remember ()?*

DR: She belonged to the lodges; and she belonged to, I believe, the Eastern Star; and you know, at church, of course. And--. Well, she was just a busy woman. I don't know where she found the time to do all the things she did.

AB: *Did she--. Was insurance salesman--? Was that her ()?*

DR: Yeah. That's the beginning, beginning.

AB: *And then what?*

DR: And then she, she stayed in that area, but she became a higher-level person, you know, in the administrative division, I guess you could call it.

AB: *OK. Central Life Insurance.*

DR: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

AB: *OK. [Pause] Well, you've answered my question. The story that you were going to tell us about children- is that the one--?*

DR: Yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. She had grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and sometimes she would have one of those little kids with her, when she would come to the meeting. If she was supposed to be sitting at one, she would bring it to the meeting, (). And she never let anything stop her. She didn't let anything stop her. And to be as little as she was, it, it was just a pleasure to see her in action.

And she was quiet. She listened to the body. She didn't just go out and do whatever, you know. She, she listened, and she took it to her little staff, I guess- you know, her officers, I guess you'd call it. And they would mull over it, mull over it. And you know, she would come up with the solution for whatever the case might have been.

But the good thing about it: she listened. She listened to the people. She didn't just--. If she had an idea, of course, she would put it forward. And a lot of times, her ideas were suggested. And whenever it was not, it needed a little bit of, you know, a little more--

AB: *Tweaking.*

DR: --tweaking, she would accept it with pleasure. I mean, she would accept it with pleasure. I've seen Ms. Green sit up late in the evening- right here! And my mother lived next door. She'd be over there, too. And they would be--. And several of them--, others of them would be over there, working out what they were supposed to do, and what the national was supposed to do. And she made sure she carried out the directives of what NCNW was all about. And I'm sure she did the same for the other civic leaders--, of the other civic organizations that she was a member of.

AB: *Any other memories of Mrs. Green that you think we sh--, need to hear about?*

DR: Well, I think you have quite a number of people who are going to talk, and they probably will tell you some more things. And I don't want to take up the whole tape. [Laughter] But she was just a woman that I am very proud of. And I'm very proud to have been--, that she, that she came into my life, because she helped mold me into the woman that I am.

And oh, by the way, I'm the first black person to ever be elected to the Hills-- woman, I'm sorry, the first black woman-- ever to be elected to the Hillsborough County School Board. And she was one of the people who was backing me, and, you know, pushing me on, along with many other people. But she was right there in the middle of it.

AB: *She was instrumental, helpful in you getting involved in politics?*

DR: No! We've been in politics all our lives. My great-grandfather--, my grandfather started that, way back when. And then my mother. She wasn't a high-level politician. My mother wasn't. She was like a background person. But she was a strong background person. And my--. I never was interested in--. And, and I too, I became, you know, strong in the background. But I never was interested in politics. It was my husband who was interested in politics.

And this happened for me because we were working for Sandy Freedman, who became mayor. And we were at a fundraiser. And it wasn't a big fundraiser; it was a medium--, you know, a house, you know. And there were several young black guys there. And my older son was one of them. And they had in their mind that they were--, wanted to ask Mr. Reddick to become ()--, to try for the seat that Dr. Lowry had, OK? He was the black man on there. Only had two black persons on the school board, period. Now they got--, you can count them and say they've had three, because now they have Ms. Edgecomb when I left.

But what happened: () one of these guys came up and he asked my son-- asked my husband, rather-- "Mr. Reddick?" And he said, "You know, Reverend Lowry is not going to seek re-election any more. Say, would you be a candidate for the school district?" And it was a county-wide, county-wide thing at that time.

And he said, "Oh, my goodness. What a pleasure to hear this. Say, but you know, I can't do it. If it had happened ten, fifteen years ago, I would have been happy t--. I'm happy now that I would have accepted it. But I'm too old now." My husband was a little--. He was quite older than I. He said--.

And so they said, "Well, if you don't do it, she's going to have to do it." And I laughed about it. I said, "Not me! Never will I!"

So my mother was very ill at the time, and we kept her here in that room, my office there. And it was fixed up like a little, you know, hospital room. And she--. We had our little meeting in there- my son--, my two sons and my daughter, and my mother. And they were talking- you know, saying the pros for it. And they never said any--, nothing against it. They were--. Everything was positive about it, that I should do it. And I kept, "No, I don't want to do this. I don't want to do it."

And I said, "Momma, what do you think about it?" And she said--. And she hadn't been talking to us, because she was just too weak and sick. And she only weighed about 85 pounds at that time. And she strained every muscle in her body to say, "Go...for...it."

And then I had no choice- but to “Go...for...it!” [Laughter] And I did! And I stayed three consecutive terms, and probably could have won a fourth one, but I was tired. And so I said no. No more. Enough is--. And I’m very proud of what I, you know, did when I got there. And this is not--.

This is part of Ellen too, because she would say, “Do what you can. Do the best that you can for everybody. Don’t just take, you know--. Just because you’re black, you know. Take everybody. Remember: it was county-wide, so you know, you got to take the whole county.”

And I did, but I learned one thing: I learned that the black contractors had only gotten \$1,010, I believe it was, the whole year out of the contracts that were being awarded for, you know, buildings and different things like that. And I was so outdone. I said, “My goodness, they shouldn’t have even published that. They should have just left it blank.” And I worked at that, and I worked with that, and I worked with it. And now, today, as of yesterday--. As of yesterday, they--. I think the board--. I think the guy told me--. () told me three million now.

But I made people very upset, you know, because I, [Chuckle] I would talk about it at the school board meetings and with the persons who were in charge of maintenance and those kinds of things. And now they have something that’s real set up very nice, and that’s, that’s it.

When I went in there, they had one little fellow. He had the broken--, two broken computers in there. And when I asked why doesn’t he have a computer, they told me, “Well, he doesn’t know how to use it.” I said, “Well, we have () services for everybody. Can’t we send him somewhere, and let him learn to use it?” You know. And they got rid of him eventually, because I guess (). So that Ellen is a part of my life, and she is a part of my daughter’s life as well.

AB: *And she was a part of your mother’s life.*

DR: Oh, yes (). Uh-huh. Yes.

AB: *Well, is there anything else we should know about Mrs. Green?*

DR: Yeah, there are lots of things, but (). [Laughter] () people- they’ll tell you some things that I have, you know--. I know Florene will talk to you about civil rights. And the other people who knew--.

Ooh! I knew her- she was this great church leader, and she worked with not my aunt, but my cousin’s aunt over there, Sonita Molen. And what is her aunt? And also, she worked with Fostella Smith. And they both were--. They’re dead now. Those two women are dead. But she was a--. They were strong workers in the church over there. It was Sonita Molen and Fostella Smith worked with her. And they’re mentioned in this book ().

AB: OK, well--

DR: And I'd like for you to buy one! I, I'm not selling no books or nothing like that, but it's just so real, and it's just so--. You know, we just need more things like this. She couldn't put all the people in there that needed to be in there. But she is quite a number. It's by Doris Weatherford. And I believe it's sold at University of Tampa, University of Tampa.

AB: *Mrs. Reddick is referring to a book called Real Women: of Tampa and Hillsborough County from Prehistory to the Millennium. And it includes a, a section on Mrs. Green, as well as Mrs. Reddick and Mrs. Reddick's mother, Mrs. Clemmie James.*

DR: And many more.

AB: *And many more. [Chuckle]*

DR: Black and white. And--

AB: *Yes. It's a multi-cultural book: not just black women, but women who were instrumental in building Tampa and Hillsborough County.*

DR: OK. That's great! That's it.

AB: *OK, well, thank you Mrs. Reddick, for your interview.*

[END OF INTERVIEW]