

Ellen Green Remembered



Hillsborough Remembers

Irma Trust
by Priscilla Lakus
August 31, 2007



This is an interview with Mrs. Em--, Irma Trust. Right? Correct?

Irma Trust (IT): Correct.

She lives in Tampa, Florida, in the city of Port Tampa. And Mrs. Irma Trust is the daughter of the late Ellen Green, the subject of our oral history project. The interview is being recorded on Friday, August the 31st, in the year 2007, in Mrs. Trust's home. The interviewer is Priscilla Lakus, representing the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library system's oral history collection project.

Priscilla Lakus (PL): *Ms. Trust, I understand that you're the daughter of Mrs. Ellen Green. I've had the pleasure already of interviewing several other people that knew your mother from different points of view. And I think maybe I'd like to concentrate my interview with you more as she was your mother and how she influenced you as your mother. So could you maybe start off by giving us some insight into what she felt, you know, what she tried to teach you as a child, when she was your mother?*

IT: Yes. My mother was a single mom- a single parent, I should say. She had two children: a son, who is older than I am, who is not able to be here for the interview. And she had me as her baby daughter. She reared us as the best she could, instilling in us life's ups and downs, and what to expect, and how to go about achieving the things that we wanted from life. She sent us to school every day, and we were known not to miss any days, unless we were ill. She cared. She devoted her life as a young woman to us to make sure that we had the things that we needed and some of the things that we wanted.

PL: *[Chuckle]*

IT: Our education was an important factor with her. And we went to school; we achieved, as being in--. Nowadays they have a different title for the grade levels, but when I reached the ninth grade, I was the valedictorian of my class.

PL: *Oh!*

IT: When I was in high school--. Because we went from elementary, junior high in one school. It was almost like a one-room school, but it was a one-building school, because all the rooms were in a small building. When I went to high school, which was Middleton High School, located in the Belmont Heights area, I was the salutatorian of my class.

PL: *What an honor!*

IT: And the whole three years that I was there, I think I didn't miss for two days.

PL: *[Gasp] My gosh.*

IT: And by having attained the status of being the salutatorian of the class, my grade levels were high; my GPA, as they call it now--

PL: *Mm-hmm.*

IT: --were high. So I will accredit that to my mom, because she was a high achiever. Her educational level was not the type that we have today. She was a self-educated person. She went from elementary school and maybe to what they call a junior high school, and she finished that. And all of her other education establishments quotas were self-learned.

PL: *So she very--. She valued education ().*

IT: She valued education to the highest. And she took up everything that she thought she could that would enhance whatever she was trying to achieve, vocationally and educationally.

PL: *I also understand that your mother was quite a religious person.*

IT: She was- very religious person. Uh-huh. She respected Christianity as forerunners of life. That's how she achieved as much as she did. Because if it had not been for her Christian () and her Christian faith, the evils that surrounded her would have encompassed her. But she didn't let any evils--, because she was a quiet achiever.

PL: *Yeah, someone told me that she was a small woman that carried a big stick.
[Laughter]*

IT: Exactly. Exactly.

PL: And she was very determined, but always in a very nice way. But she--. When she saw that something had to be done, she just went ahead and tried to do it.

IT: Yes. She was a small woman. She was a small woman in stature, but she was in a giant in which she was pursuing.

PL: Right. And of course, we know of her--, some of her accomplishments. She was president of the NAACP. She was a former president of the National Women of--

IT: National Council of Negro Women.

PL: National Council of Negro Women. That's right. And she held that post for many years.

IT: Many years. And she went from the state of Florida to Washington, D.C. and to New York. She traveled over.

PL: Mm-hmm. How was that like when you were a child, and she was involved--?

IT: Well, most of her travels were--. Basically, when I was in high school, or just getting out of high school--. And she did it--. [Pause] She did it. That's all I can say: she did it.

PL: [Chuckle] Because--

IT: And when she did it, it was done.

PL: Right. Because I read, you know, different things about her, different articles, especially a very nice article that the mayor, Pam Iorio, had written about her, and talks about the sit-in demonstration that they had downtown. And she was a part of that.

IT: Exactly.

PL: And then some other people told me about the movement that she did, but--, in the schools to get schools here in this area for the children, so they didn't have to be bused so far. So she was involved in a lot of--, a lot of changes.

IT: A lot of things. And like I said, you wouldn't have ever known it, just by--. I would say her radical activities- the quiet spirit that she went about doing it. And when it was finished, it was done.

PL: [Chuckle]

IT: She didn't have to have anybody, really, to push her. She was her own initiator.

PL: That was great. I understand she met a lot of very important people in her life as well.

IT: Exactly.

PL: Did you have an opportunity to meet some of them?

*IT: Yes, I did, on her--. I don't want to be mistaken, but I think it was her 80--,
[Pause] 81st birthday. Alexis () Herman, who was in the Clinton administration, came down from Washington to be at that celebration.*

PL: Mmm! Wonderful.

IT: Uh-huh. And one of the senators from the state of Florida was at--

PL: ().

IT: --() Club. And many people came to celebrate her birthday.

PL: Did she--. In her lifetime, did she get a chance to meet the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.?

IT: Mm-hmm.

PL: She met him?

IT: Mm-hmm.

PL: Wow. That had to be something.

IT: Yes.

PL: Did you have an opportunity to meet him?

IT: No, I didn't do the things that my mother did, because my first inclination is, I didn't ever want to be labeled-- and I don't mean as a negative-- as Ms. Ellen Green's daughter, because I didn't want anybody to expect out of me what she had done.

PL: Big shoes to walk in.

IT: That was big shoes to walk in. And I was afraid I couldn't fill her shoes.

PL: I can understand that.

IT: I was a registered nurse, and I worked three to eleven for twenty-three years. So most of the things she did, I was working. I got a chance to () quite a few of the local meetings, and you know, all of the other activities- I basically missed out on them. But I do know that she did them. But she was a giant of a woman.

PL: I think one of the best stories that I've heard from talking to different people was one that came from this pas--, well, the mayor, Pam Iorio. She said that she had interviewed your mother. And your mother shared a picture of herself receiving some kind of an honor. She--. Iorio couldn't remember what the honor was. But in the picture, your mother is all dressed up, because she's going to get an honor. But she's wearing an apron. [Chuckle]

And it just says volumes of the lady, that, you know, obviously, she must have been helping out in the kitchen or doing something, you know, and then simply forgot to take her apron off. But, you know, somebody who's being honored doesn't do that usually, you know. So she just pitched in anywhere where she was needed.

IT: Exactly. She was a helper in any area where she could fulfill the obligation.

PL: Mm-hmm. Quite a lady.

IT: Quite a lady. And since I've been under the circumstances I am now, I had a chance to just sit and think about the things that she did.

PL: Ms. Trust, by the way, is referring to the fact that she is--, she's going through a pretty tough illness right now. She's incapacitated to a point, but she's very much high-spirited, and is--. I'm pleased that she's able to--, is well enough to have this interview with me. But yes, it does give you time to sit and ponder, and think and reflect.

IT: Yes, it does, and you know, just injecting this one statement--. My grandmother was the same way. She didn't go about with all these civic and social activities. But my mother got her sweet spirit from my grandmother.

PL: Sounds to me like you're a family of strong ladies. [Laughter]

IT: Yes. The same identical way.

PL: Well. Are there any particular story, or is there a story that comes to mind that you can share with us about your mother from the time that you were a child,

or growing up or something--? A family incident, or something that comes to mind that you'd like to share with us? [Pause] I haven't really given you a lot of time to think about it. [Laughter]

IT: I've got a lot I could share, but I wouldn't want to put them on tape. [Laughter]

PL: [Laughter] OK. Well then, we won't go there. Well, to wrap up the interview, I just leave it open-ended. Is there anything else that you care to say?

IT: Well, it's not about my mother, but I'm just so sorry my brother couldn't be here. And he had surgery two weeks ago.

PL: Oh!

IT: And he would have loved to have had a chance to be on this interview.

PL: Well, there's always the opportunity when he comes down, and we know that he is in town, that maybe we can do something to, to take that opportunity to interview him. We can leave that open.

IT: And she always said, whatever she achieved, let her works speak for her. She didn't want anything- any radical movements--. Just let her works speak for her. And it does.

PL: It certainly does.

IT: All over the southern part--

PL: Yes sir, ().

IT: --of the United States. Because she was, and she still remains, Mrs. Ellen H. Green. That name--. You speak the name--. She has many nicknames. But you speak that name, a whole lot of people recognize that name.

PL: That's true.

[END OF INTERVIEW]