

DELORES MILLER PARKS: IN HER OWN WORDS

AN UNSUNG SHERO OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT OF ST. AUGUSTINE



Woolworth lunch counter Sit-In and picketing,
St. Augustine, FL September 1963



My involvement in the civil rights movement was a part of my life that I will not forget. I was one of the seven, who was released from jail after my mother “*signed me out*”. We lived around the corner from Dr. Hayling (Rollins Avenue). I was in many of the demonstrations. I can recall many days at Dr. Hayling's office and home. When I reflect back to 1963/1964, I can recall sitting at the Woolworth counter and being arrested for refusing to vacate; walking the picket lines, attending the mass meetings and non-violent workshops. I painfully recall being dragged on my knees from the entrance of Martins Restaurant on US 1 and taken to the St. Johns County Jail. I remember trying to integrate St. Augustine Beach, with a group of others; as we were surrounded by state troopers, only to have the KKK pull us under the water in an attempt to drown us. I thank God, because I did not and still do not know how to swim. I can still hear the bullets being fired as we marched at night around the old “Slave Market”.

I was arrested only four times, but I will carry the memories with me forever, as a reminder of how far we have come and a motivation to continue the dream! On the last arrest I can still visualize being put in the “sweat box” at the county jail because we refused to stop singing. I kept a log of that last arrest written on paper towels. I also have Dr. King's autograph along with C.T. Vivian, Andrew Young, Dorothy Cotton and others. I kept a scrap book of many of the things that happen during this history making period. My contribution was not unique; it was not an act of bravery, it was something I believe we all did because we were compelled to do it. I remember Dr. Hayling as a man of principle and integrity; he had to do what he did. It was in him; people with integrity who stand up for what they believe.

Initially, I was somewhat angry about the treatment we received from our oppressors. I wanted to hurt them the way they hurt us, but I distinctly remember Dr. Hayling introducing me to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his dental office one day. I can still visualize Dr. King sitting in Dr. Hayling's' office, dressed in a light blue shirt and dark navy blue trousers. I don't remember the exact words he spoke to both Delores Horn and I, but he talked about “love” and “non-violence”. I was so impressed by this man's “love for his enemies” that the anger I carried in my heart was instantly dispelled, never to return again!

As a result of my participation in the movement, I was one of several others chosen to spend time with families who came from out of state to support the movement. I spent a portion of the summer with the Lukens family in Darien, Connecticut. It was an experience I will not forget. I recall going sailing with them and became sea sick. They treated me like the color of my skin did not matter. They also took me to the New York State Fair.

My life was positively impacted by my involvement in the events that took place in St. Augustine in 1963/1964. It was a refining stage we all had to go through. I was a tall, skinny, dark skinned Negro girl that learned to accept and value myself regardless of what others thought or wanted me to think. It was a learning experience that would keep me motivated, focused, grounded and determined to live a life that was pleasing to the God that created me!

What have I done since leaving St. Augustine? I will be sixty-five this year. I was married for thirty-four years to a wonderful husband, Nathaniel Parks Sr. (deceased). I am the mother of two children (Natasha & Michael) and grandmother of four. I graduated from college at age fifty-three; from Arcadia University in Glenside, PA., with a bachelor's degree in Business. I have worked over thirty-two years in Banking/Investment Advisors/Trust Administration; for Bisys Retirement Plan Services, PNB/CoreStates/Wachovia/Wells Fargo as a bank officer (Trust-Officer and Assistant Vice President in Trust). I retired from banking and trust administration; and returned to Wachovia as an Account Administrator. I am currently semi-retired working as a part time Receptionist for Wells Fargo Advisors. During my banking days, I helped to establish the Independent Minority Association for the Growth of Employees (IMAGE).

I am active in my church, The Mt. Airy Church of God in Christ (approx. 3500 members). I serve as a superintendent for the outreach Sunday school. I serve as the Servant Leader for the church's Nursing Home Ministry; have been a Disaster Team volunteer with the American Red Cross for almost ten years and also serve as a Volunteer County Ombudsman.

I have visited St. Augustine many times, since moving to the Pennsylvania area in 1968. My Mother, Montine Miller-Culbreath passed in 2004, and I find myself visiting less frequently. I still have a brother, John Miller and sister-in-law, Carolyn in St. Augustine. I promise to make a special effort to stop by Accord the next time I am in St. Augustine.

Delores Parks