

Gloria N. Logsdon interview by Dr. Edith M. Freeman

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Dr. Edith M. Freeman and Gloria N. Logsdon

History/Context

From September 2013 through June 2014, the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library was one of ten libraries nationwide to participate in the pilot program, StoryCorps @ your library. The American Library Association and the Institute for Museum and Library Services sponsored this program in collaboration with StoryCorps for the purpose of capturing the voices and stories. StoryCorps is a national nonprofit organization and is one of the largest oral history projects of its kind. StoryCorps recordings are archived at the at the Library of Congress and, as part of the StoryCorps Griot Initiative, these recordings are also included in the collection of the Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture.

Transcript

Audio subject log:

00:44 Edith says that she and her sister, Gloria, grew up in Kansas City, Missouri, and asks Gloria about what the influences were that shaped her life.

01:00 Gloria says that they had the best mother and that she worked so hard six days a week. Their mother cleaned houses and sold cosmetics door to door. She acquired her mother's deep faith that education was important as an equalizer.

01:50 She explains that their mother's father was born two years after the Emancipation Proclamation and he was the first person in the family born free. Later he worked as a school custodian, went to night school, and earned his high school diploma.

02:18 Gloria talks about how her mother's unconditional love, hard work, and dignity led them

to believe that they could do anything as long as they kept dreaming and positioning themselves to be ready for when the door [of opportunity] opens.

02:38 Edith talks about how when they were growing up in Kansas City, Missouri, Gloria always had an interest in civil rights at an early age. Edith asks Gloria when and how she became interested in those issues.

02:55 Gloria says that she hated segregation and being treated differently ever since she could remember.

03:20 Gloria tells the story of the only time she ever talked back to their mother while in a department store in Kansas City and they would not let them use the restroom because they were black. She demanded to know from her mother why black people were treated like that and insisted that she could and should do something about it. Gloria swore that when she grew up that she would not let people treat her like that.

03:55 Edith asks Gloria what some of the positive effects of her interest were that she could recall. Gloria says that she was more aware of the existence of black professionals, like teachers, doctors, lawyers, principals, social workers, and dentists. Their presence showed Gloria and Edith that if they did well in school and went to college, then they would be able to take their place within their community.

04:44 Gloria talks about the editors of the black newspaper in Kansas City, the Kansas City Call: Roy Wilkins, who later became the national NAACP executive director, and Lucile H. Bluford, who succeeded Wilkins, and had also sued the state of Missouri because she had been denied admission to the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri. They used the newspaper to lobby for ending segregation and discrimination in Kansas City.

05:35 Gloria talks about prominent black figures in their community, like Judge Carl Johnson, who was president of the Kansas City NAACP. Gloria had an opportunity to get to know him when she became president of the NAACP Young Adult Council.

06:05 Gloria talks about how Judge Carl Johnson helped her when she was transferring to the University of Missouri for her junior year. She applied for a loan and did not hear back. When she told Judge Johnson, he contacted the State Representative and within a week she had the student loan.

06:42 Edith asks Gloria to discuss some of the civil rights activities that she was involved in with the NAACP Young Adult Council. Gloria talks about her senior year at the University of Missouri, during 1958-1959. A black teacher had been turned away at a downtown department restaurant; another teacher, Julia Hill has formed a group, the CCSA, the Community Committee for Social Action and Gloria picketed the department store with them.

07:53 Gloria says that for the first time in her life she felt like she could make a difference.

She picketed every Saturday for months.

08:20 By May, the department store conceded by serving and hiring black people at their restaurants as a result of NAACP and CCSA efforts and negotiations.

09:06 Edith asks about other activities at the local level that Gloria was involved with. Gloria says that she was involved in a number of activities and gives the example of the summer of July 1960, when they held sit-ins at four different restaurants in Kansas City: The Myron Green Cafeteria, Kelsey's, the Forum Restaurant, and Howard Johnsons.

09:35 Gloria talks about the Forum Restaurant having a history of blatantly mistreating black people who tried to eat there. There had been a confrontation with an African diplomat there. They knew that they would not be served there.

10:04 Gloria points out that during her first year in college she became very active in the NAACP and was elected president of the Kansas City, MO, Young Adult Council, so when they did these restaurant sit-ins, the Council would be divided up into four groups (to go to all four restaurants). She was the official leader at the Forum Restaurant sit-ins and spokesperson for the group.

10:50 Gloria dealt with the police, management, employees and press. She describes how the sit-in demonstrations occurred. They were determined that no one else was served and that the restaurant would not make any money that day.

11:27 Gloria continues to say that when kids at the other restaurants were eventually served, they would come join the demonstration at the Forum afterwards. There were legitimate concerns about being arrested, but they were not.

11:43 Gloria mentions that Lee Vertis Swinton, leader of the NAACP Youth Council, was there trying to raise money for their bail, but it was not necessary.

12:00 Gloria talks about a sit-in at Kelsey's Restaurant in Independence MO, the home of President Truman, who had said that "sit-ins" were "communist-inspired"; they sought to embarrass him. Kelsey's eventually served them and fellow demonstrators followed them back to the Forum for a demonstration.

12:40 Gloria says that the following year, President Truman came to the community college that she attended and she confronted him, challenging him to say that there were communists in his home town who dared sit-in.

13:05 Gloria talks about the headline on The Kansas City Star the next day, reporting on how she confronted him and got him to back down.

13:25 Gloria reflects on her experience with those sit-ins, as well as their other activities, had a

profound affect on her because it should that there was something that they could do about the way that blacks were being treated. It was important for them to join together.

13:55 Gloria talks about a stand-in, or drive-in, at the Fairyland Park, a segregated amusement park that admitted blacks only once a year, when schools were closed so that all students could go.

14:30 Gloria tells Edith that she wrote a letter to the local American Red Cross because they were holding a certification class for volunteers at Fairyland. She inquired why they would patronize a place where blacks could not go.

15:05 Gloria says that Sail Park was the only park where blacks could swim.

15:35 Edith talks about how all those demonstrations resulted in Kansas City being among the first cities to pass a public accommodations law in the country and that it made national news. Edith asks how that affected Gloria in becoming involved with Civil Rights at a national level.

16:10 Gloria says it had a lot to do with it and explains that Kansas City, with their NAACP, was a place where things happened. She talks about how the NAACP Young Adult Council had merged with the adult group to protest Hallmark Cards Inc., a company that would not employ blacks then, except in menial jobs. She gives an example of someone she knew who benefited from that progress and that Kansas City became one of the first cities to start employing blacks in executive type roles.

17:15 Gloria says that by her sophomore year in college, she held office in four roles within the NAACP: President of the Young Adult Council, President of the Missouri State Council of College Chapters, President of Region 4 of the state NAACP, and of the National Youth Works Committee, which was composed of youth and adult advisors from each of the NAACP's 7 regions. Gloria says that she was very involved those first two years of college.

18:24 Edith asks Gloria what were some of the other things that she did at a national level related to NAACP, or other national organizations. Gloria says that she attended NAACP conventions.

18:55 Gloria tells the story of hearing a rumor that Senator William Fulbright was in line to become Secretary of State and she wrote a letter to Kennedy on behalf of the NAACP (on December 8, 1960) in opposition of his inclusion into any position within the Kennedy cabinet because Fulbright was known to not be a friend of Civil Rights. She was 19 years old.

20:15 Gloria reads the letter that she sent to Senator Kennedy.

23:19 Edith asks what effect that letter, and other letters like that, had on Senator Fulbright's appointment. Gloria says that Fulbright was never appointed for any position in a cabinet thereafter.

24:10 Gloria tells Edith that writing that letter confirmed that it is possible to stand up for yourself.

24:30 Edith brings up that Gloria had another chance to have contact with President Kennedy and asks Gloria to share that experience.

24:45 Gloria says that in 1961, the Kansas City, MO, Youth and Young Adult Councils were selected as the year's Outstanding Youth Councils. As part of 52nd annual NAACP convention in Philadelphia, Max Roach and Abbey Lincoln performed the "Freedom Now Suite", meanwhile there were pictures on the screen of major events that had happened across the country and the last picture was of Gloria.

26:04 Gloria says that she was wearing a black and green check dress, which was Ann Daisy's hand-me-down. Any time that Gloria was in the news or on TV or when she appeared at events to speak, she wore this dress.

26:38 Finally, the words appeared across the screen: "Gloria Newton: Greatest sit-in-er of them all!" Those words still bring a smile to her face and it was a high point in her life.

27:10 Gloria says that as part of that convention, the NAACP chartered a train, a "Freedom Train", everyone from the convention was to get on that train to Washington, and then to fan out and lobby their senators and representatives to get behind the behind Civil Rights Bill.

28:00 Gloria tells Edith about going to DC as a representative of the NAACP Youth Works Committee, a group led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., accompanied by Roy Wilkins, James L. Farmer, Jr. (co-founder of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)), A. Philip Randolph (President of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), Congressman John Lewis (Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)). Gloria went with the "Big Six" of the Civil Rights Movement to the White House and met with President John F. Kennedy!

29:19 Legislation was not passed while JFK was president, but the bill passed during Johnson's Administration. Gloria says that was her last NAACP convention and one that she would never forget.

29:55 Edith talks about the notion of 'advocacy for others' and asks Gloria to talk about how that became a theme throughout her career and retirement in Florida.

30:20 Gloria talks about how 'advocacy for others' for her began with the Civil Rights Movement, and later evolved. She talks about how her daughter, Elizabeth Logsdon, is a Harvard graduate and became a corporate lawyer.

31:25 Gloria says that her son, Robert Logsdon, is developmentally disabled and is nonverbal. Elizabeth left corporate law to become a special assistant for the President's Committee on

Employment of People with Disabilities. Then she worked for the ADA section for some years.

31:50 Gloria says that Elizabeth has switched careers and is now a special education teacher and seems professionally happier.

32:30 Gloria tells Edith that she is confident that Elizabeth will look after Robert when they are gone.

32:39 Gloria talks about advocacy on both sides, as mother and as a professional when she was head of Children's Mental Health Services for New York State.

32:55 Gloria says that she learned, as Robert's mother, about what children with handicapping conditions need.

33:30 Gloria says that she is active on the Board of Children with Special Needs in Tampa, where Robert receives services. The funding of services for people with special needs has not been a priority in Florida, so the cause still needs a great deal of advocacy.

34:10 Gloria talks about the meaningful relationships forged with other parents of special needs children and to be able to reach out to people that you know for advice, or to join together to advocate services and money for programs.

34:50 Gloria tells Edith that her children are intellectual extremes, but both great children. Every Sunday Elizabeth calls Robert and he looks forward to those meaningful calls.

35:18 Edith asks Gloria if she has any last thoughts to add. Gloria talks about how they both have lived interesting lives after growing up poor in Kansas City during a time of social change.

36:00 Gloria says that she left Kansas City for school in 1961 and never went back and although she and Edith lived in different places, they remained close. Now they live a block away from each other in Tampa, and talk every day, and are best friends.

37:20 Gloria talks about being drawn to Tampa after coming to the area for a USF-sponsored children's mental health conference for many years and now they (she and her husband, John "Jack" Logsdon) have been here for nearly twenty years.

37:40 Edith agrees that she would not have moved to New York – to all that snow – if Gloria had not moved to Florida.

38:07 [End]