

and his compatriots. This action was a major victory for the desegregation of the City of Richmond and for the Civil Rights Movement generally.

Fifty-eight years later, Woody Grant looks back with astonishment. “We got back to the campus, and amazingly we began to think about what we had done. And the thing that really surprised us was, supposed they had served us? We didn’t have a penny!”

Mr. Grant would graduate from Virginia Union University and return to Martinsville and try, in his own home town, to implement the nonviolent resistance he had learned from Dr. King. It was not as successful as Richmond because of the lack of funds needed to help people post bail.

Seeking the Promise Land

When the United States Army drafted Mr. Grant in 1961, his main concern was that he would be removed from his desire to serve the Civil Rights Movement. But this potentially dark cloud had a silver lining, for Grant was eventually stationed at APG, where he met and married his beautiful wife, Janice East Moorehead, who became his partner in life and in the struggle for Civil Rights. Following their honeymoon abroad, the couple attended the March on Washington in 1963 and listened along with over 300,000 observers to the hope and promises in Dr. King’s landmark “I Have a Dream” Speech.

Beginning in 1966 the Grants resided in Nashville, Tennessee, where Mr. Grant

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worked with a study and research group to evaluate the causes of death of elderly AA people without medical coverage. The research was supported by a U. S. Government grant to Meharry Medical College where Mr. Grant was an employee and a student. During this time, Grant served as President of the Nashville Branch of the NAACP, while his wife was Secretary.

On April 4, 1968, while packing to travel to Memphis and support the strike of the city’s sanitation workers alongside Dr. King, the Grants were stunned to hear the tragic news about Dr. King’s assassination. The memory on that fateful day remains heavy on the consciousness of Mr. and Mrs. Grant. When asked about his response to the horrible news of Dr. King’s murder, Woody noted that his reaction was “hard to describe” and acknowledged that he “went through episodes of anger.” In summarizing his thoughts on moving forward, the former King student noted “You couldn’t be violent if you wanted to get something done; I learned that.” In 55 years of marriage, Woody and Janice Grant continue to fight for human and civil rights.

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Sharing Our History Through Research and Discussion

Cover: Woodrow B. Grant, Jr. and wife, Janice East (Moorehead) Grant, a prominent civil rights couple (2018).

Introduction

Woodrow “Woody” B. Grant, Jr., a Harford County Civil and Human Rights Activist, is the oldest of three children, born on January 9, 1938 to Mary Francis (Smith) Grant (d. 2/24/2002) and Woodrow Grant, Sr. (d. 3/29/1979) of Martinsville, Virginia. Woody graduated from Albert Harris High School in 1951 and entered Virginia Union University (VUU), Richmond’s Historically Black College, where he earned his Bachelor’s Degree in Biology and Science in 1961. It was while attending VUU that Grant became familiar with the teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was serving as a Visiting Professor. In memory of and gratitude to the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., this pamphlet and the next will celebrate Dr. King’s life with testimonials from Harford County residents.

Encountering Dr. King’s Philosophy

Mr. Grant recollected how Dr. King taught him and others at VUU about non-violent resistance. Dr. King, Grant remembered, was extremely interested in Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian politician and social activist whose beliefs reminded him of the teachings of Jesus.

Mr. Grant recalled how Dr. King taught the students, many of whom were from the

Deep South, to “Resist the kind of laws that were not legitimate” but were becoming more widespread. Dr. King emphasized, Grant noted, that his followers “Make sure the law works for you in a nonviolent way;” and he stressed the need to become knowledgeable of the state laws and how to correctly interpret them, so as not to fall victim to unlawful demands of local law enforcement personnel.

Mr. Grant remembers being energized by Dr. King’s charisma and his ability to ignite students’ consciences about the issues of justice and equality. “We began to listen to him (Dr. King) about what we could do aggressively but not break the law. He talked about nonviolent reaction. The more he talked about that, the stronger we got.” The Greensboro North Carolina sit-in of 1960, Grant vividly recalled, gave the students hope and a cause. “The young men had decided to protest against...not being served in restaurants...they went downtown to a restaurant and ordered food. They ordered it but, of course, were not served. That appealed to us and it kind of fit into what he (Dr. King) was teaching us.”

Memories of *The Richmond 34*

On February 22, 1960, Grant and 200 fellow activists took Dr. King’s message to Richmond’s largest department stores, Thalhimers and Miller & Rhodes, whose “White Only” lunch counters refused service to African Americans (AA). “We decided to go into each of the areas

[of the store where] they served food, so we split our 200 number and went into the restaurants and sat down ... of course, we were not served. White folks got so angry with us.”

Grant recalls, with a little humor, the students’ experience in implementing Dr. King’s philosophy. “See we had already gone through self-training. We had two of the brothers to spit on us and push us around and call us names to see what we would do.” When asked about his reaction to the Whites who spat on them, he answered, “If they spat on us, we ignored it and, of course, we carried these big handkerchiefs.” Meanwhile a good number of supporters picketed outside on the sidewalks.

When the VUU students failed to leave, store officials ordered their arrest. Of the total demonstrators, thirty-four were cited for trespassing, becoming to history *The Richmond 34*. Fraternities, Sororities, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) provided boxed lunches for students on picket lines and bail for the 34 taken to jail but shortly released. All were subsequently convicted.

Grant and the others appealed the verdicts, arguing that they were exercising their free speech by protesting segregation. The state supreme court upheld the convictions. Three years later, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the decision, and cleared the criminal records of Grant and