

DeKalb History Center

Lithonia Community Engagement Oral History

Dee Smith

Speaker 1 ([00:00](#)):

Remember stuff. Of course, I don't know if she told you, but her, I believe he was his uncle, and I can't think of his name right now. I'll think of it later. I have a lot of senior moments. He was one of the leading civil rights workers in Lithonia. And the thing I wanted to mention, you got to remember, there were two Lithonias, at least when I was growing up. There was a black one and there was a white one, and the two did not mix. So what happened with one group didn't happen with the other. And the perspectives would've been a lot different because I believe that Lithonia, which was named after the Greek God lithos, I looked that up

Speaker 2 ([00:50](#)):

Once.

Speaker 1 ([00:50](#)):

It has a lot of quarries around there. Oh, a lot of rock quarries. And that's where at least most of the black men worked at that time. My grandfather, as a matter of fact, was a rock mason.

Speaker 3 ([01:07](#)):

What was his name?

Speaker 1 ([01:08](#)):

Paul Harris. Even now I can walk around, not walk around, drive around Lithonia and I'll see a rock building and I can tell whether my grandfather built that building or laid the rocks because there was a certain way he did the mortar. It was always a little mortar, was always smooth around there. And

Speaker 3 ([01:41](#)):

That's amazing.

Speaker 1 ([01:44](#)):

Yeah, I know. He built the wall at Spelman. He built part of, I believe it was the foundation at what is now, I'm trying to think of the church. There is a church, St. Philip's, AME. It is now St. It wasn't there. It was a white church back then. And they refused to pay him after he had laid those rocks and done all of the work. There is, oh, a lot of buildings around Lithonia, DeKalb, and Avondale.

Speaker 3 ([02:33](#)):

Amazing.

Speaker 1 ([02:33](#)):

Yeah, that we know. This was grandpa laid these rocks. Now, if it was today, he would be making a pretty penny, but they didn't pay rock mason as much back in those days. But he was able to raise his family on what he made.

Speaker 3 ([02:51](#)):

Amazing. Do you know how long he worked as a rock mason?

Speaker 1 ([02:55](#)):

Until, I don't know when they started. Okay. But he worked up until he got sick and died, he was a diabetic. And of course there was no treatment for that in those days. See, I was alive. I think he died in 55. But don't quote me

Speaker 3 ([03:17](#)):

On that. The year 55 or the age

Speaker 1 ([03:19](#)):

55, 1955. And I

Speaker 3 ([03:21](#)):

Don't

Speaker 1 ([03:21](#)):

Know how old he was.

Speaker 3 ([03:23](#)):

And that's your mom's father or your dad's? My mom's father, yeah. Yeah. And how many children you said he had? He had

Speaker 1 ([03:32](#)):

Had seven. They had seven, five made it to adulthood. And there's only two left now.

Speaker 3 ([03:43](#)):

And was your raised, your mom was raised

Speaker 1 ([03:47](#)):

In DeKalb County? Yes. She was raised in Lithonia. As a matter of fact, one of the documents I'm looking for is her high school graduation certificate.

Speaker 4 ([03:59](#)):

Fantastic.

Speaker 1 ([03:59](#)):

She had cut it up to fit into a frame that she had. She refused to go out and buy another frame, so she cut it up. But I've got all the pieces. And what's so amazing about it, it says the Lithonia High School for Negroes, and it's that same building of, have you been to Lithonia

Speaker 3 ([04:21](#)):

The high school or

Speaker 1 ([04:24](#)):

Have you been

Speaker 3 ([04:26](#)):

Lithonia? Oh, it's been a long time, but yeah.

Speaker 1 ([04:27](#)):

Oh yeah. Yeah. I would love that. It is where the old high school is right next to the new senior center that they just

Speaker 2 ([04:38](#)):

Built.

Speaker 1 ([04:39](#)):

That's where she went. She and all her siblings went to high school and graduated. The youngest, of course graduated from the school across the street that is now the police station, DeKalb County Police Station.

Speaker 3 ([04:56](#)):

Do you know what year she graduated? Do you remember?

Speaker 1 ([05:02](#)):

48, 49, 50. Somewhere around the there. I think it was 48 or 49. It would be on her certificate.

Speaker 3 ([05:11](#)):

Fantastic. And do you know what your mom did after high school?

Speaker 1 ([05:18](#)):

She got married. That's what women was supposed to do. Then she got married and she was a housewife.

Speaker 3 ([05:27](#)):

Did she live in Lithonia her whole life?

Speaker 1 ([05:30](#)):

Well, after she got married, she and my father, who was also raised in Lithonia, they moved to Connecticut for a while. They stayed up there. She did not like it. She did not. My mother was not going to be a part of the great migration. And you knew about that. Okay. So this is story I've been told. When my grandfather died and she came home for the funeral, she did not go back. So, they soon got a divorce and then she stayed in Lithonia. Thereafter, she remarried another young man from Lithonia. The man she married was a Reynolds. His niece is now the mayor of Lithonia

Speaker 3 ([06:26](#)):

Shameka Reynolds.

Speaker 1 ([06:29](#)):

So Shameka is my cousin by marriage.

Speaker 3 ([06:32](#)):

Oh wow. So Shameka is his daughter?

Speaker 1 ([06:37](#)):

No, Shameka is his niece. His brother's child, Shameka daughter. Actually, his brother's granddaughter. And the person I was calling to find out about Bernice is Shameka's father.

Speaker 3 ([06:52](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 1 ([06:53](#)):

He owns the Tri-Cities funeral home.

Speaker 3 ([06:56](#)):

I spoke to Allison. I spoke to Ms. Reynolds. Oh, well. So, I interviewed Ms. Reid, Olitha Reid, back in November of 2022. And she gave several names of people that we should contact. And one of the people she recommended was Allison Reynolds at Tri-City Funeral Home. And I called Ms. Reynolds a couple of times and she decided she didn't want to participate in the oral history. But I have spoken to her and she is lovely. She is lovely.

Speaker 1 ([07:24](#)):

Who else did she give you?

Speaker 3 ([07:27](#)):

So, I've interviewed Marcia Woods Glenn

Speaker 1 ([07:30](#)):

Hunter. Good.

Speaker 3 ([07:31](#)):

Yeah,

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Speaker 1 ([07:31](#)):

She was the mayor.

Speaker 3 ([07:32](#)):

Yeah. She gave

Speaker 1 ([07:33](#)):

Me, her mother was the first black elected official in Lithuania, and she was my play mom.

Speaker 3 ([07:41](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([07:42](#)):

Fantastic. So I grew up in their house too.

Speaker 3 ([07:44](#)):

Lucia Lester, who was also a mayor in Lithuania

Speaker 1 ([07:49](#)):

Who?

Speaker 3 ([07:50](#)):

Lucia Lester was a name that Olitha Reid gave us. Barbara Lester. I wrote Lucia, or Lucia, I'm not sure. And then I have a Vicky Lester that another person gave me, and I was asking if they were related and the person wasn't sure, but maybe it is Barbara. I could have written it down. She wasn't the mayor. Eileen Har? No. Okay. Aileen Harper.

Speaker 1 ([08:20](#)):

You talked to, have you talked to Harper?

Speaker 3 ([08:22](#)):

I have not. Some people haven't gotten in touch or returned calls or return calls are busy. I know people are busy and things like that. But yes, I'm so glad that Shameka Reynolds is in the mix because I was hoping to be able to speak with her as well.

Speaker 1 ([08:36](#)):

Let me give you my list.

Speaker 3 ([08:38](#)):

Absolutely.

Speaker 1 ([08:42](#)):

If she's still alive. Bernice Shumake, I'm trying to think. Shameka is rather young. She may not know. As a matter of fact, her father's younger than I am, but he might be able to, Ricky that's her father. He might be able to lead you to some other people and I'll talk to some people. Let's see. Shameka, I can't think my brain was on. That's okay. No, I can't think of anybody.

Speaker 3 ([09:19](#)):

That's alright. So you were talking about your mother's second husband was a Reynolds and there's

Speaker 1 ([09:27](#)):

One of the twin boys.

Speaker 3 ([09:28](#)):

Okay. And then how many kids did your mom have? Just me. Just you. You're an only child. So talk about yourself, Dee, and where you, yeah.

Speaker 1 ([09:43](#)):

Okay. All right. As I said, I grew up in Lithonia before my mother remarried. We lived right there on the outskirts. I mean, as close as this pen is to this paper. I mean, the city limits was at our property's edge before we moved. And that was on Arabia Street before we moved to Arabia Street. When we lived outside, outside of Lithonia, still Lithonia address, but outside Lithonia, next door to, oh, what's the name of that school? Elementary school. Oh, I'll think of it in a minute. There's an elementary school right next door to the property, and it is the house that my grandfather built, and it was primarily a little pocket of blacks surrounded by whites.

([10:57](#)):

I tell folks, Lithonia was, DeKalb County was an all-white community and there were pockets of blacks everywhere. Even though we were right there, I remember there was a little girl who was technically, she was our next door neighbor, but we weren't allowed to play together. We were the same age, but we were not allowed to play with each other. So you learn those lessons real early. And one of my earliest memories of segregation was one time, if you leave children alone, they're gonna play. They're going to get along well. It's when the adults into being that there are problems. When we were outside playing, we had somehow gotten together. I mean, we were just little, I guess we were about 5, 4, 5, maybe six years old, somewhere in that little area. And she said, come on, let's go to my house.

([12:04](#)):

I went over to her house. We were going to play dolls. I walked in the house, her mother looked at me and she looked at her daughter and she said, don't bring that thing in this house, so get it out of here. I remember that very clearly. I couldn't figure out why is this woman so mad at me? I haven't done anything. So that was the last time we even attempted to play with each other, and we were right next door all that time. We were kind of isolated. Back then, everything was dirt roads, and if you wanted to go someplace, you walked. Coca-Colas were 5 cents. I remember that. That was like the highlight of the day. If you could walk to the store and get an ice cold, 5 cent, oh, they were so good. Stronger than, as I remember it, stronger than what they are now. I'm still trying to think. Is it Stonecrest Elementary? Oh, it doesn't work. The man who another neighbor was farming, a lot of the land are right next door. This was my grandmother's house, Paul Harris's house. He was farming black man. It was a nice plot, but I don't know if it was the city, the state or the county. Somebody decided they wanted to, that's where they wanted to put the school, the new school

[\(13:49\)](#):

School for white kids. So they used eminent domain to take his farm property. I remember. I remember that stuck to me. I was like, well, if you own something, you own it. And they were trying to explain to this little idiot me that yes, they can, even though you own property, they can come and take it. I think that because it just didn't seem fair to me. It didn't seem right. And now as I look back on it, that may have been my seed when the seed was planted, when I wanted to study law that I never thought about that until now. But how can something so unfair happened? You own the land, but they're going to decide they want to take that land, build a school that your children cannot attend. Okay. So it's interesting. I just thought about that. Wow. Okay. Feel free to interrupt the next question. I don't know where to go. As I said, Olitha, her last name was McGuire then. Our families were close and on Sundays they didn't call 'em play dates. Back then, you just went to play. And of course when you go to play, you were going to be fed. That was just the way it was. So I would either go to her house or she would come over to my house and we would play and have dinner and play some more. Going over to her house was an experience, I don't know if she told you this, but her house was across the street from Lithonia High School, and this was the white high school,

[\(15:55\)](#):

And right next to that was Lithonia High School. Next to that was the swimming pool. Okay. We used to sit out in her front yard and watch the white kids swim.

Speaker 3 [\(16:09\)](#):

She did tell me that.

Speaker 1 [\(16:10\)](#):

Oh, she did? Yeah.

Speaker 3 [\(16:13\)](#):

In fact, we stood out in her front yard and looked at where it

Speaker 1 [\(16:18\)](#):

Used to be. Everything used to be the library was, am I too loud? I did get too loud, I'm country. I'm sorry. The library was around the corner from her house almost across the street. I don't know if you saw it,

[\(16:36\)](#):

Which we could not attend. I did not go into a public library until I was in college, and I remember very well, I was down at Albany State and one of my sorority sisters who was from Albany said she had to go to the library. So I thought she was talking about the college library. But when she took me to this very nice library, it was a public library, had a pond and manicured, beautiful library. Because this was my first time, I was just in awe like, oh, this is what a library is like. Yeah. First time I went to a library. Let's see. Ask me something because I'm wandering...

Speaker 3 [\(17:31\)](#):

Here. You talk about the schools that you attended. Did you attend Bruce Street?

Speaker 1 [\(17:37\)](#):

Yes, I did attend... my mother. I've always been large from my age, and when they built the new Bruce Street, not the one that my mother attended, but the one that's the police station. Now,

(17:54):

When they opened there, I remember they had a parade and I was about five years old and well, my mother told me about this. She took me to the principal, who was one of her former teachers, and asked if she could bring me over and sit in on some of the classes. Okay. Just sit in, I guess free babysitting, I'm assuming now I'm looking back at it. Well, he said yes. So she took me over there and I sat in on the first grade class, had a good time. She said she was expecting them to call her because I started crying and she went back over there and looked there and I was up there teaching the class. I've always been bossy apparently. So at the end of the school year, I got promoted to the second grade. So apparently at some point I had been registered, but I always thought that was funny. So yes, I attended elementary school and then you go to the other side of the building and you were then in high school, Bruce Street High School, believe it or not, I was, oh God, I don't even believe I'm telling you this, but I was the next to the last Ms. Bruce Street.

Speaker 3 (19:23):

Oh, wow.

Speaker 1 (19:25):

Back in that day. I graduated, it was the second or third in my class, which is not saying anything because the class was so small. I still have my high school graduation picture of my graduating class. I went to Albany State.

(19:48):

There were three black schools. I knew I was going to have to go to a state school. My folks did not have enough money. I really wanted to go to Clark. It was Clark College, not Clark Atlanta then. I really wanted to go to Clark, excuse me. But my folks didn't have enough money to send me to a private school, all those AU schools were private schools. And I wanted to fully embrace the college experience, live on campus. And then I realized if I went to an AU school, any of the AU schools, I would have to commute. And I didn't see how that was going to work. So, I had to go away and there were three black schools, schools, for blacks in Georgia, Albany, Fort Valley, and Savannah State. Albany was the one that offered me some money. So I went to Albany State. I got there, didn't know what in the back of my mind, I always knew I wanted to be a lawyer, but people kept telling me, that's not possible. You can't do that. You'll never get work. So I listened. I majored in English, minored in Drama and Speech and drama, pledged a sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha. That was my social outlet. Stayed on campus, graduated in '71, I believe. Didn't have any money for grad school. So I went to work. I got a job as a teacher in Tifton.

(21:59):

That's where I ran. That's in South Georgia. Ran to a full onslaught of segregation and Jim Crow. I remember I was looking, got down there. I was looking for a place to stay. Of course, what do you do? You go to the city you've never been before. You pull out the paper, you look at the want-ads, found a place, made an arrangement with the broker. Went over there and met him. I don't know anything about Tifton. I don't know anything about South Georgia. Less now than I do now. And he went in, I thought it was odd. He did not turn on the lights. When I went in the house to look at the apartment, I thought, well, I said, why don't turn on the lights? He says, oh, they aren't working. Okay. He showed me the apartment and then he started to explain who lived in the neighborhood.



(23:03):

This doctor was over here and this judge, and this is a very respectable neighborhood in the back of my mind. Why is this man telling me all of this? He said the rent was negotiable. When I asked him about that, now I was really dumb. I did not pick up on this, on what he was doing until after a couple of weeks after. And I realized there was no way he was going to rent that apartment to me. That's why he was telling me about the neighborhood. But I found one with one apartment with one of the black teachers. So it turned out okay. Realized I didn't like teaching. Teaching, didn't like me. What did you teach?

Speaker 3 (23:57):

English. Okay. High school. Yeah. And how long did you do that?

Speaker 1 (24:05):

One year, like I said, I didn't like anything about South Georgia. I didn't like Tifton. I didn't like teaching and teaching didn't like me. Maybe if I had some support or a mentor or something would've been different, but I didn't like it. I knew. So I came back and I had a variety of different jobs. There's one job I turned down and I regret to this day, I could have been, most of the jobs I took was secretarial jobs, and I could have had a secretarial job with an ACLU. There again, I let somebody talk me out of it. Oh, that's the biggest regret of my life. Eventually, yes, eventually I went back to Georgia State to get a master's degree in public administration because most of the little jobs I had had were in that area, nonprofits.

(25:18):

And when I was going in, as I was about to finish my Master's, Georgia State decided to open the School of Law. There was one classmate, she got a Master's and turned around and went without interruption and went straight into the school of law. And she was fortunate enough to be in the first graduating class. Me? I had to come out, raise some money, which I did. But I finally got into the School of Law, which was exciting. I was finally where I knew years and years ago I wanted to be. While there I was on the move court (?) team, didn't win the state competition, but at least I got to compete. I was president of the Black Law Students Association, BLSA. What else did I do that I was there?

Speaker 3 (26:24):

Did you do any more, I know you said you were in AKA at Albany State. Did you stay in that affiliation? Are you still in that affiliation?

Speaker 1 (26:34):

Once you join a black sorority, eternity, the Divine Nine, you're there for life now. You're either financial or you're not. So no, I'm not financial, but you are there for life. That was one of the things, once you're in, they can't take that from you. So, I still go to some of their events. I'm just not affiliated with any chapter or anything. I remember coming back and I was going to join the graduate chapter here. There was only one graduate chapter in the metropolitan Atlanta area, and that was Kappa Omega, one of the oldest chapters in the nation. I don't know why I didn't go ahead and sign up with Kappa Omega. Transportation. That was it. They were meeting on the west side. I was still down here in DeKalb County. So yeah, I still stay in touch with my sorority sisters.

Speaker 3 (27:48):

Do you know Gwen Russell Green? She's been in it.

Speaker 1 ([27:53](#)):

She

Speaker 3 ([27:54](#)):

For a long time. So, you got your J.D., I'm assuming at Georgia State. And then

Speaker 1 ([28:00](#)):

I clerked with, did an internship, (my tongue) with Justice Wener (or Waltner?), which I was so glad to do. Oh, what a wonderful man!

Speaker 3 ([28:17](#)):

Tell us about him.

Speaker 1 ([28:18](#)):

Oh, was it not? Oh, what can you not. He brilliant, fantastic brain. He let me sit in on a couple of sessions with lawyers, arguing. You couldn't do anything. All I couldn't do is sit in the back of the room and watch. Introduced me to the other justices. I remember one of the other justices, and I cannot remember his name. We got to talking one day and everybody walked in and I noticed they looked over at us and couldn't figure out what was going on. And later, one of the other clerks said, what did you do? I said, what do you mean? He doesn't like anybody, but he seems to like you. So that was interesting.

Speaker 3 ([29:20](#)):

What was your main, I don't understand how law school works, but did you specify a particular area?

Speaker 1 ([29:28](#)):

Now you have to take all of the required courses. There are a few electives you can take that you have to take all of those required. One thing I am very proud of, I passed the bar on the first go around. I did not have to... As a matter of fact, I passed the bar before I graduated. You could do that back then if you only had so many hours left. You can go ahead and sign up to take the state bar. I did. And luckily I passed and I was so proud of that.

Speaker 3 ([30:10](#)):

So, you were obviously drawn to, in your younger years, you were drawn to that imminent domain case.

Speaker 1 ([30:17](#)):

Did I ever,

Speaker 3 ([30:18](#)):

Did you pursue real estate or whatever that would be called?

Speaker 1 ([30:21](#)):

Called. It was interesting you asked that. Property was one of my favorite classes. I never got involved in an imminent domain case. As a matter of fact, the only one I've heard of was, I think I retired by then or

almost ready to retire. The only one I've ever heard of was the one down in Stockbridge. This flower owner had a shop that had been, I think his family had been in that particular location for years, downtown Stockbridge. But a private developer had signed a contract with the city of Stockbridge to build a new city hall city complex. And in order to do that, they had to tear down the complex that was there, which included this little flower shop, flower and gift shop. Well, the owner flower and gift shop did not want to sell. So the issue was can a private developer, not a government official, we know the government can use eminent domain, but can private entity use eminent domain to take land for a government or something close to that? As I understand

Speaker 2 ([31:56](#)):

It,

Speaker 1 ([31:57](#)):

Apparently they can. I don't know how far that case went though.

Speaker 3 ([32:03](#)):

Interesting. So how long did you practice law?

Speaker 1 ([32:11](#)):

I don't remember. I did several different areas. I hated domestic relations. I hated folks getting divorces. I tried that. Oh, domestic. Ach! I hated that. My definition of a divorce to otherwise intelligent people arguing over a Tupperware bowl. I mean otherwise they're intelligent, but the emotions get involved and okay, I did that. I did criminal.... I can't remember what else. Anyway, I ended up doing local government law. I liked that. And that's when I retired. That's what I was doing. I was working with the city of Atlanta Public Defender's office in the area of housing.

([33:24](#)):

When people will come by and want to condemn somebody's house or find them for being a hoarder and they're a hoarding. I think I almost wrote the book on that. Nobody had ever heard of hoarding and it's out there. So it's so interesting. I would have to find social services to help these people meet some of their needs. And a lot of it was psychological, so I felt like I was helping people. Okay. Domestic. I hate it except for adoptions. I liked adoptions. Criminal...criminals are interesting. They really are interesting. Some of them are smart and some of them are not so smart. I said, some of the cops are smart, some of them are not so smart. It is usually funny. What else did I do? I can't think now. And when I walk out of here, I'll think of, I'll say, oh, I didn't mention this, this, and this.

Speaker 3 ([34:39](#)):

We can have a part two. So, when did you get involved with the DeKalb NAACP?

Speaker 1 ([34:45](#)):

When I was working at the public defender's office, there was a young lady there who was, I think she was the third vice president of the DeKalb NAACP, and she started selling memberships. So I went ahead and got a life membership. I said, oh, okay. This is worthwhile. This is something I need to do and I don't want to have to keep thinking about renewing my membership. So I did that and started going to the meetings and eventually I was elected to the board, which is called, what do they call the board? And see, this is why I went ahead and retired. I was having too many of these senior moments we call 'em,

and they are very, very embarrassing. And I knew I couldn't be up there making an argument. All of a sudden my brain goes blank. I couldn't do that. I retired in 60, no, sorry, at 60. That would've been 2010. Yeah. That's why people kept saying, why are you retiring? They just didn't know that my brain was deteriorating. Anyway, executive board. See if I started talking about something else. Come on. So I was on the executive board for several years. I served as chair of several committees. One was legal redress there, brought by legal expertise. Yes. Where people have a legal problem. They would follow it with a legal redress committee. Very strict standards. There was one that could have been a huge class action suit. I can't talk about it because it's still me.

Speaker 2 ([37:03](#)):

Okay.

Speaker 1 ([37:06](#)):

Legal redress. What else did I do? I'll tell you. Remind me to tell you about Remembrance. As a matter of fact, let me make a note myself, because I was chair of three committees at once.

Speaker 4 ([37:23](#)):

Oh wow.

Speaker 1 ([37:25](#)):

And I'm trying to think, oh, black history. I did the Jubilee. I was chair of the Jubilee Committee. Okay. Jubilee when? Celebration of the date when Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. I did that for about 10 years, and I still have each one of the programs if you guys would like to see those. As a matter of fact, I'll probably end up turning it over to you guys. Oh, great. Okay.

Speaker 3 ([38:02](#)):

Yeah, that'd be great!

Speaker 1 ([38:04](#)):

One of them you'd be interested in. One year we decided to honor the unsung heroes of DeKalb County. Olitha was one of those. So were several of the people who integrated Lithonia High School. Oh, I wish I had brought that. It's sitting in my garage. We're just going to have to have lunch and I'll let you go through those books and you can look at...

Speaker 3 ([38:40](#)):

Mind. Be F. Oh, that'd be fantastic!

Speaker 1 ([38:42](#)):

Okay. And then there's a Remembrance project. Now, how does the Remembrance project come along? One year while I was preparing to do the Jubilee program, it was a year before I was talking to a young black male and I told him I was from the N-A-A-C-P DeKalb. That child looked at me and said, what's that? I said, you don't know what the N-A-A-C-P is. No. So then I knew we were in trouble. We need to do something. So that year, you know, I would plan these things a year ahead, I decided we need to do a little education this year. So, I decided to focus on, I know we had Emmett Till, just saying who these people are and what they did.

Speaker 2 ([39:52](#)):

Marcus

Speaker 1 ([39:53](#)):

Garvey and I decided to do lynching. We did the Great Migration. But when I would have to research all of this stuff,

([40:07](#)):

And as I was researching the lynchings and what I was going to say, I could only give a couple pages. I ran across the Equal Justice Initiative in Montgomery, Alabama, and I saw that they were doing this, I call it the Lynching Museum, but it's the Museum for Peace and Justice. And I know that's wrong, but it has another nice long name. Have you been there? I haven't. Oh girl, you got to go. No, I want to. Oh, you got to go. It's on my list. They have these obelisk hanging, which each state. So we decided, well, I wrote about all of that and researched the people who had been lynched in DeKalb County. And I found what the NAACP had done about lynching. There was a referendum. They kept sending to Congress to stop lynching and making it a federal crime. It was a whole bunch of stuff. Anyway, one of the other things we decided to do was to take a trip, sponsor a bus trip to Montgomery, Alabama to see EJI's two museums. And we took a busload of people down there, and I think all of this is still at the History Center, but I've got some more to send you guys only Remembrance project, but it's in your archives.

Speaker 4 ([41:47](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 1 ([41:49](#)):

We went down there and at the end of one of the tours, they had these computers set up and their plan then was to partner with local entities to bring these markers to the community. I immediately went over there and signed up. When we got back home, I sent in a proposal telling them why we want to have a marker in DeKalb County, why we should have a marker in DeKalb County. We went to the, we found a location. We put together a coalition. And this coalition, Melissa was on that coalition. It was a unique coalition. I've never seen anything like it. We had diverse religious groups, political groups, I mean groups that don't get, when was the last time you saw the Republicans or Democrats agree on anything? You name it. People came together for this coalition. We started raising money.

([43:09](#)):

Oh, my mind is wandering again. We went to the county commission and the CEO and actually sat down and met with separately when we met with the CEO and told him what we wanted to do and that we wanted to put this marker right in front of the courthouse. You've seen the marker? Yes. We want to put it right there. And we told him, he said, why you want it there? I said, because we want to give these people as close to justice in death that was denied to them when they were alive. So at the end of the presentation, he looked at it, he says, okay, I like it. What do you need from me? And people have since told me he doesn't do that. And sure enough, he had his parts department to dig the hole. I mean, there was a fountain there. They removed the fountain, they prepared the hole for the marker. They planted the flowers. We had planned a whole service. We were going to have a service at the Maloof building, a whole program. And then we were going to march from there over to the site and unveil the statue. One week, maybe it was two weeks, two weeks before we were to have this program, the stay in place order for Covid (2020) hit two weeks. As a matter of fact, I was busy calling people, don't come, don't come.

([45:06](#)):

When we went to the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, the vote was unanimous. That doesn't happen a lot. So we knew we had the county fully behind us and we got it there. So, we have done, we've even planted a remembrance tree and we partnered with Trees Atlanta for that. And that's over at Reverend Dallas Church, Rainbow Park Baptist Church. We have three markers in DeKalb County. One is in the city, DeKalb in the city of Atlanta. That's the one on Ponce de Leon at Oakdale. One in Lithonia and one in, where's the third one? Oh, where's the third one?

Speaker 3 ([46:06](#)):

I can see the jars of soil in our case. I think one says Lithonia and one says Redan. But maybe that's the same one.

Speaker 1 ([46:15](#)):

That's Redan. That's a jar of soil. That's another story. Remind me, tell you about that Redan. Wait a minute. See, this is why I had to retire from law. I'm trying to think. Lithonia, the main one's downtown Decatur.

Speaker 3 ([46:35](#)):

Lithonia. Decatur.

Speaker 1 ([46:36](#)):

Yeah. The main ones downtown Decatur that lists the names of all of the victims. All four of them. These are the four recorded victims. We know there are a lot more than four people, but Lithonia and then where else? Oh, at Oakdale, the one on the corner Ponce in Oakdale. So that's three. And that one's the one for Mr. Porter Turner. Shaune Griffin was very instrumental in helping to get that through, set up in that neighborhood. I knew I was going to be help in that neighborhood. The one in Lithonia commemorates the death of three people. One is Mr. Hudson, who was actually killed in Redan, but there was a Lithonia connection. So we decided to put it up in Lithonia along with the two unknowns who were killed. Now I'm going to tell you about Redan, which is there is a young lady, she doesn't live in Lithonia. Her name is Rosalyn Hurley, I think she lives in Conyers. She took on this project like a duck to water. She was, I mean she just excited herself. She did the research for Mr. Hudson. That was his name. Ruben, Ruben Hudson. She was able to find where, approximately where the Redan Depot used to be because they pulled them off the train in at the Renan station. Problem is, there are houses there now, but we did find a low park close by and we were able to get soil. So it was near the spot. She also found the graves of some of the people who lynched him.

([49:07](#)):

That wasn't, yep, that was there, and there was a little black cemetery. As a matter of fact, Olitha's family plot is right in that little cemetery. It is a little tiny. Somebody will have to show it take you there. You wouldn't be able to find it.

([49:31](#)):

But she found all of this, and the reason I bring all this up is because the coalition was full of people like that who had an interest in what was going on and wanted to really get involved and they brought their talents to bear. There is no way in the world I could have done this. And I keep telling, telling people, this was God's project, not mine. Because every time we needed something, it would appear or someone would appear who could take it on because it was just wonderful. I sit back and go, all right, go on, God, let's see what you going to do next.

Speaker 3 ([50:18](#)):

Okay. Is the coalition still working? What are they working on?

Speaker 1 ([50:22](#)):

Well, I feel that if we had something that big, we would call them and they would come together. But right now people are so busy. The latest thing we have done was you've heard of the book and the 1619 Project, all of that and House Bill, I can't remember the House Bill number, the one that says, oh, you can't talk about black history and all of that good stuff. We've been tackling that. As a matter of fact, what we did, we bought a bunch of copies, hard copies and digital copies of the 1619 Project and gave them to the DeKalb County Library so that people would not have to reserve a copy stand in line to get a copy. So we did that and we figured the library was the best place to do it because if we did it through the school systems, it would cause a lot of controversy and going through the library system was a great way of getting around that. So, they had digital copies of the 1619 Project and the child's version of Born On the Water, I think it's called, bought a bunch of those books, or at least we sent them the money and they bought...

([52:08](#)):

A bunch of those books. We also took on the Black History Month project. Now last, our last Black History month program, and you can still access that on YouTube. We talked about this whole book banning and the restrictions and theme was our history is under attack and we had a panel discussion, which is something we had never done before. We had the lawyer who is currently representing the Cobb County teacher that just got fired. I can't think of his name right now.

Speaker 3 ([52:55](#)):

What happened with the teacher...

Speaker 1 ([52:57](#)):

This is just within the last few weeks, the Cobb County Board of Education fired him or her, I don't know, because of something divisive. I think it was a her and she was teaching advanced classes and something had come up and I can't exactly what one parent complained. So they fired her. I know he's representing her now...

([53:34](#)):

And I can't think of his name. It's sorry. We had two students who had attended DeKalb, no, Decatur High School. One is now at Emory, and I think one is at University of Georgia now. They're currently developing inclusive curriculums. They have started their own foundations. So we wanted to have them on to show that students want to know about the truth of our history. So they're taking it on themselves. The adults won't do anything. We had a couple of teachers to talk about how this law is affecting them and it's so vague. They don't know what they can teach and what they can't teach. So it's quite good if you get a chance, watch that program. Now we're trying to decide what we're going to do for the next Black History Month program. So that will be the focus of our next meeting. And you asked me if they're still active. Well, there's a small group is still carrying this on, but I think the larger, I'm almost certain that if we had something big, the larger group will come back. We even wrote the position paper for the branch, DeKalb NAACP branch. The Remembrance Project did. We went up to the Board of Education and we delivered that position paper and let the board know, even though they weren't a problem, we made it sure to thank them for what they were doing. But the way this law is written, it puts them in a bad position too.

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[\(55:41\)](#):

So we wanted to say, look, this is how we feel about it. We know you're in a bad position, but the truth has to be told we can't rewrite history.

Speaker 3 [\(55:58\)](#):

That's right.

Speaker 1 [\(55:58\)](#):

Yeah.

Speaker 3 [\(55:59\)](#):

I'm going to stop there. Okay.

Transcribed by REV AI

Edited by human, J Blomqvist, archivist, DeKalb History Center, November 2024

Dee Smith interviewed by archivist J Blomqvist, DeKalb History Center, June 2023