



Video Story Transcript

STAND UP! REDLINING DURING THE GREAT MIGRATION AND MARCHING IN MARQUETTE PARK WITH DR. MARTIN LUTHER

By: Storyteller
Mama Edie McCloud Armstrong
www.storytelling.org/MamaEdie

Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/F6lMXyw5-N0>
<https://youtu.be/Mbw7zzMLKWM>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

My name is Edie McCloud Armstrong. It was August 5th, 1966 that I was 15 years old. I remember waking up feeling so excited. I was joyful, a little bit scared, and brave, all at the same time. I'd never felt quite that way before. I remember, as I was eating my breakfast, I was deep in my own thoughts. And my father had made me this wonderful breakfast of bacon and eggs, and toast, and fresh, squeezed orange juice. But as I was eating, I kept replaying in my mind the newscasts that my parents and I had been watching over the previous days and weeks, that were leading up to this very special time. You see, there was going to be a march in Marquette Park, one of the neighborhoods on the southwest side of Chicago. And this was one of the areas where they used the practice of redlining, which was intended to keep African-Americans and other, so-called minorities from the housing market.

Well, this was going to be a bit of a problem because this was also right in through with the time of the Great Migration. And the Great Migration took place roughly between 1914 and the 1970s. And this was a time when waves of African-Americans were coming from the slave south. They were trying to escape situations like the lynchings. Those Sunday afternoon, after church, kind of lynchings, where men, women, and even children sometimes were hung from trees. They were trying to escape church and home bombings. They were trying to escape the Jim Crow laws that barred them from restaurants, restrooms, from playgrounds, and swimming pools, and churches, and in movie theaters, and play theaters, where even they performed but

1

© 2011-16 RaceBridges Studio. This lesson plan is part of an initiative for educators called RaceBridges Studio. It is a project that seeks to provide free tools for teachers and students to motivate them to build stronger and more inclusive communities. This transcript may be freely used, reproduced and distributed for educational purposes as long as this copyright information is displayed intact. The transcript included in this unit is copyrighted by Mama Edie McCloud Armstrong. Used with permission:
www.storytelling.org/MamaEdie

they weren't allowed to go and enjoy them. They were coming to northern cities and western cities, both big and small, in search for a better life. But it was difficult.

For one thing, they needed to find someplace to live. So, when they came to a city, for example, like Chicago, and many of them actually managed to get enough money to ride the train in the colored section, or the negro section, which was actually right behind the engine. Now, that might sound kind of exciting but in that section, that's where the soot and the ash came. So, you got these people dressed in their Sunday finest. And they had to sit in an area where they knew that they would probably just have their wonderful clothes all dirtied up but they didn't care about that. And they had their lunches packed in shoe boxes and brown paper sacks, sometimes even including a loving piece of homemade pound cake. They were on their way to find a better life.

But, again, they needed somewhere to live. Now, in cities like Chicago, there were many neighborhoods where people only wanted as neighbors, people who looked like them. So, when the African-Americans were coming in droves, I mean they were really coming, there was so many that they ended up crowding into areas that were getting quickly overcrowded. And the services, the landowners, were no longer providing the services to maintain the hygiene and the safety that they once did. Even the trash, the trash wasn't getting picked up on a regular basis. And so, the communities ended up turning into what we now call slums.

Now, it was an easy thing to try to blame the residents for the conditions that were allowed to take place. But churches, like Quinn Chapel, were very, very instrumental in helping the African-Americans find someplace to live. They found them little tenement places and sometimes they were able to rent a room or they got little kitchenettes, until they could find a place of their own and send for their families to join them. So, there was a lot of support there. And that was a good thing because in other communities, for example, in Marquette Park where that march was going to take place, that was a neighborhood where African-Americans only went through in order to get to Midway Airport. Because it was very clear that we were not local there.

Hmm. So, the day came. The day of the march. And Dr. Martin Luther King had been invited to Chicago to lead that march. Now, some of the nuns from my elementary school in Inglewood, St. Carthage, had asked some of our parents if they could escort us to that march. That was kind of a risky thing for a parent, especially my father, who was from Georgia, who knew about what life could be like. But they prayed on it and they decided to let me go. And I'm really, really glad they did because I felt like it was my turn to stand up for justice. And I wanted so much to do that and to do a good job.

Well, what happened was that, that morning after I finished eating, I went to my mother's room to say goodbye and she started asking me all the practical things. She looked at me and she said, "Now, now, did you, did you pack your lunch?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Did you get your jacket because you know it's going to be a little bit chilly out there later on?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Now, did your father give you a little piece change?"

"Yes, ma'am."

And she was just asking me all these questions. But then she said, "Now, Edith, stay alert and make sure you stay right close to the nuns and to your other friends. And make sure that you don't look in their faces. Don't look in their eyes. They don't like that because they'll think that you're challenging them."

“Yes, ma'am.” I had never heard that before. And so, my father even though St. Carthage was only like two blocks away, he insisted on driving me to school that day. He talked quietly with the nuns off to the side for a while and then when it was time for him to go to the car, he turned and he looked at me. And he came and gave me a big hug.

And he just gave me a quiet smile that said, ‘I’m proud of you, girl.’ It didn’t even need any words. And so, he got in his car and he was gone.

And within minutes, we were on this specially chartered bus. They were maybe about 20 of us. And while we were going along, we were kind of chatting and, and, and joking even a little bit, trying to break the tension because we were nervous. We didn’t really know what to expect. None of us had ever had an experience like this before. But then, as we got closer to where the march was taking place, we started hearing the crowd. The noise of the crowd, the voices were getting louder and louder. And we heard these angry shouts and these chats. And we looked out the windows and we saw people throwing their fists up into the air. And we could just imagine what was coming out of their mouths. And suddenly, we weren’t real sure if we actually wanted to get off that bus.

But then we knew we did because it was our turn. Our ancestors had marched. They had died. They had struggled for hundreds of years. It was just our turn. So finally, it was time to get off the bus. And as we were moving towards the street where the marchers were, I suddenly felt like I was in an old movie where we were being led to the Lion’s Den, with these throngs of angry people on both sides of us surrounding us. I searched the crowds on both sides and there were no kind faces there.

And as we continued to walk down the street, I remember there was one particular woman who came up to me. A mother. She was shorter than I was and she began to curse me right up in my face. And then her young son who looked to be maybe about nine years old, he came up and started cursing me too. I had never even heard a little boy curse like that before.

I’d never looked into the face of hate. I saw it that day and it was ugly and it hurt. But I was frozen stiff. I was so shocked with the way I was being accosted. I just stood there and so finally, one of the nuns came to get me. She got my hand and she guided me. I don’t even remember which nun it was but it didn’t matter. All I knew was that I wasn’t going to let go of that hand. And as we made our way to the rest of our friends and to the other nuns, we continued to move forward. And, and I still heard the jeering crowds but all of a sudden, the intensity of that jeering, of their sounds, began to become a little bit muted. Because suddenly, I started hearing the san... song of the marchers up in the front. And the sound was getting louder and louder. And they were singing the song, “*We shall overcome, we shall overcome. Someday.*”

And I feel that somehow, through the music, we did overcome. There was a lot that we’ve overcome. There’s a lot that we have yet to overcome but we on our way. I cannot give up hope on this country. I will not accept that this country is hopelessly adolescent, and le... and bigoted. That there is no chance for us to heal. That healing is already taking place. And in fact, there was a celebration on August 5th, 2016 that honored the 50th celebration, the 50th anniversary of that march in 1966, again, in Marquette Park and I was there.

I had been invited as a special guest along with other people who had also been there 50 years ago. And when I went over there, I can still feel some of that hate floating in the air. Wasn’t as intense this time but I could feel it. It was, it was like a ghost that didn’t want to go away. A spirit that didn’t want to rest. It’s still there but is starting to dissipate.

And I’m grateful for that. And this time, a very special treat was that I was able to march this time with my sister storyteller, and friend, Susan O’Halloran, who is the producer of these videos. Now 50 years ago, Susan

was 15 too. (Sue, I hope you don't mind me telling your age, girl.) But anyway, she wouldn't have been able to march with me at that time because she lived in one of those red lining neighborhoods. So, her parents wouldn't have allowed it. But now here we were.

I called her up and said, "Girl, you would not believe what's happening. You got to be there." And so, the organizers of the march, they contacted her, and we were able to march side by side. There were poets and songs and speeches by people like Reverend Jesse Jackson, Senator Jackie Collins, who I went to St. Carthage with. There was Rabbi Capers Funny. There was Brother Rami Nashashibi, who's the executive director of the IMAN, which is the Inner-city Muslim Action Network that spearheaded this great celebration. **This was an intercultural, interfaith collaboration of people who knew, that we had it in us, to make this country live up to what it purports to be, what it promises to be. That we're here to require that it fulfill the commitment of truly being the land of the free and the home of the brave. And I'm just grateful I was there.**