



Afterword

I've worked anywhere you could work to get some money. The only decent long job I've had is here in Baltimore; I've been a custodian at Park School going on thirty years. The rest of the jobs were just in and out, here and there. I did marry in North Carolina, but my wife and I divorced. We had a daughter, and she's still in Raleigh, where she's a nurse, doing good. I remarried and got separated, but I have two sons by that wife. My youngest son is in high school, and my oldest one, he went back down South.

I was honored because Park School where I work gave me a yearbook in my name, and a whole page, dedicated especially to me, and they had a big assembly.

One of my brothers works here at the school, too, and the Alumni Council of The Park School made a scholarship fund in our name honoring us for all our years at the school. The scholarship helps kids who live in Baltimore, whatever color they are.

The school gave a big party for my brother and me. They surprised us with a proclamation from the Maryland House of Delegates. It's very official. It declares the scholarship to be the law. Now, the proclamation certificate is up on the wall of the church where my mother is a deacon. She was the first woman deacon of the church. They have a parents-and-child corner there, and they put pictures up when anybody's kid is doing something good. They do that to try and influence the

young people and try and help them see what some of the people are doing that come from that area. My brother and I, we're very proud of that.



A Note about This Book

More than four years ago, when my younger daughter was twelve, she heard Leon Tillage address an assembly at The Park School of Baltimore, as he does every year as part of the curriculum. She came home from school and told me about it.

“Leon grew up in the South,” she said. “He talked about the olden days. It was awful.”

We sat for two hours that afternoon, talking about what Leon Tillage had said. Well before she finished explaining, I felt that this

was a story that should be told to more than just the seventh grade at The Park School. It seemed to me the world should be listening to him.

I made an appointment to meet with Leon. I told him how moved my daughter and I had been by his story, and I proposed that he try to tell it to a larger audience in book form. I asked if he would allow me to try to help him. He agreed.

By the next day Leon had spoken his story onto a tape for me. The text for this book was transcribed from that original tape and from two other tapes that were made later for clarification purposes. We have tried very hard to be faithful to and respectful of Leon's own precise voice. All editing was done with his participation and approval. We tried to restrict the changes to bridging the gap between the spoken word and the written word.

In anticipation of making collages for this

book, I read many books, fiction and nonfiction, about the American South in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s. Leon and I also made a pilgrimage to his old home in North Carolina. I saw all the places that he talks about in the text. Many of the buildings are no longer there, but I have walked on the actual ground where they used to be. The house on Mr. Johnson's farm is gone, but Leon was able to show me traces of its foundation, and pieces of the fireplace structure are still there. Providence School is no longer standing either, but I saw an antique potbelly stove in the house of Leon's brother. Together both brothers showed me where the wood used to be placed. I was warmly welcomed by all of Leon's family. I listened to them tell family stories. I studied the family photographs. I took many of my own.

Finally, with the feeling that even one picture would be too many for Leon Walter

Tillage's words, I have chosen designs and patterns as accompaniment for this text. The collages are made with soft black mulberry paper on top of heavy white stock.

What amazes me most about Leon is his prevailing optimism. When I ask him how he can stay as he is, he talks about his parents and his strong religious upbringing. He talks of his parents' strictness, and also of their constant unconditional love, strength, and support. He speaks of his mother's difficult but successful struggle to keep the siblings together after his father's death.

"But, Leon," I've said many times, "you have no bitterness. How come?"

Leon smiles. "What good would that do? I know there were bad times," he says. "But you know, there were rejoicing times, too."

Leon has witnessed major changes for African Americans in his lifetime. By participating in the marches, he himself helped to

make these changes happen. This fact alone must contribute to his positive outlook. In telling his story, Leon Tillage is continuing his peaceful protesting by helping to educate people. We all need to know and to remember the history over and over again. We all need to help the changes to continue.

—*Susan L. Roth*

