

Forgetting to share traditions

You've heard about the tree.

And you also know the story about this Mattamuskeet Apple tree that grew in my neighbor's front yard and the wonderful tradition it represented.

If you know me, you've heard me tell the story until your eyes glazed over. If you regularly read this column, you've read about it.

Now the tree is gone and the story has to change. It's not a happy one anymore.



D.G. MARTIN

Just in case you've somehow missed my telling of the original tale, here is a summary.

Every fall, I "stole" a few small, gnarled green apples from my neighbor's tree. He knew, but didn't complain.

As a part of an annual ritual, I peeled a few of these apples, cut them up, removed the rotten parts, took out the worms, and made a cobbler that was fun to share with the tree's owner and with a few friends who appreciated its tradition.

This little ritual meant more to me than the good eating and the sharing with friends.

The tree came to Chapel Hill as a young sapling from Lake Mattamuskeet in Hyde County. According to legend, the variety originated when the Mattamuskeet Indians found the seeds in the gizzard of a wild goose. It is well adapted for the coastal region because it keeps well—perhaps because it is very acidic when first picked and then keeps well in storage as it mellows.

All this is important, but my love for this little apple tree had more to do with how and why it came to Chapel Hill.

Because the tree's former owner, H.G. Jones, was curator of the North Carolina Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill and director of the North Carolina Department of History and Archives, local history groups all over the state invited him to speak at their meetings.

When they offered payment for his talks, Jones refused. As an employee of the state and the university, he said, "such visits were a part of my job. But, word got around that I would accept an apple pie. And most of the groups I spoke to would give me one to take home when I finished my talk."

A number of years ago, he went to Hyde County to talk about the history of Lake Mattamuskeet and the surrounding region. Jones was surprised when, after his talk, nobody presented him with the traditional apple pie.

A few days later, the Mattamuskeet Apple sapling arrived and was planted in his front yard. Adapted as it was for the coastal climate, the little tree nevertheless thrived in the Piedmont soils of Chapel Hill.

My ritual of the Mattamuskeet Apple cobbler has been a continuing reminder of the unselfish, extraordinary service of Jones, his university colleagues, and other state employees—"because it is just part of the job."

A few months ago, when Jones told me he was selling his home and moving to a retirement community, I should have known my treasure was at risk. How could the new owners be expected to know that this funny looking tree was a treasure?

But I didn't remember a responsibility all of us have. It is to tell newcomers about the traditions that go with the territory they have taken over.

I didn't do my job.

This spring I looked forward to watching the tree's blooms burst forth again and hoped for the autumn harvest that would make its way into my ritual cobbler.

Last week when I walked by to check on the tree, its buds were indeed pushing out from the branches. But the branches were on the ground along with the supporting limbs and the trunk that had been hacked apart.

My favorite tree is gone.

Nothing but a ghost from now on, my living icon turned into a mere memory.

The words on the newly relocated memorial to Thomas Wolfe on the Chapel Hill campus came rushing to mind: "O lost, and by the wind grieved, ghost, come back again!"

I will just have to find other ways to remember what Jones did and what we should do. Maybe, somehow, someday, another sapling will make its way from Lake Mattamuskeet to Chapel Hill to help us never to forget.

D.G. MARTIN is the host of UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs on Sundays at 5 p.m.

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Dorothy Height broadens horizon

"We African-American Women seldom do just what we want to do, but always do what we have to do. I am grateful to have been in a time and place where I could be part of what was needed."

This is the quote inscribed on Dorothy Height's Congressional Gold Medal, which is Congress's highest honor and one of the many dozens of awards Height has received over her extraordinary life, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom. The Congressional Gold Medal was presented to her on March 24, 2004, her 92nd birthday. A few days ago, as Height celebrated her 94th birthday and the start of another historic year at a National Council of Negro Women awards gala dinner honoring women trying to follow in her footsteps, those that have reached "Uncommon Height"—Radio One's Cathy Hughes, Young & Rubicam's Ann Fudge, and Bennett College President Johnnetta Cole. At the dinner, she repeated those words.

She has been and is an extraordinary lantern and role model for me and for millions of women and remains a determined and vibrant, long haul social change agent blessed with uncommon commitment and talent. Her fingerprints are quietly embedded in many of the transforming events of the last six decades as blacks, women, and children pushed open and walked through previously closed doors of opportunity.

Even as a young girl, her speaking skills stood out, and she attended New York University, in part, with a \$1,000 scholarship from a national oratorical contest sponsored by the Elks. She completed both her bachelor's and master's degrees within four years, and went on to do postgraduate studies at Columbia and the New York School of Social Work.

On November 7, 1937, which Height remembers as the day that changed her life, she was the 25-year-old assistant director of the Harlem YWCA. She had been chosen to escort First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to a National Council of Negro Women meeting, and there she met NCNW's founder and president, the legendary Mary McLeod Bethune. Bethune was very impressed with young Height, and invited her to begin working with the NCNW in addition to her role in the YWCA leadership. She became Height's close friend and mentor. In 1957, two years after Bethune's death, Height became NCNW's president—a position she held until 1998. She is now the President Emerita and Chair of the Executive Committee, striving to ensure NCNW's long-term stability by endowing its beautiful headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue, site of a former slave auction pad for with the blood and suffering of our ancestors.

During the Civil Rights Movement, while so many women were playing vital roles that weren't featured in the spotlight, Height was always up front with a seat at the table. She was often the only woman in the room with Dr. King and the rest of the "Big Six" leaders as they planned many of the Civil Rights Movement's key strategies. And she was on the stage—she should have been a speaker—at the historic March on Washington. She led the NCNW membership as active participants in the movement and reminds us that women were its backbone—unseen but strong. One of the cornerstones of NCNW's civil rights strategies was Wednesdays in Mississippi, which brought together white and black northern women to travel to Mississippi to develop relationships with black and white southern women, educate themselves and each other, and create bridges of understanding between the North and South and across racial and class lines. CDF is building on her legacy through Wednesdays in Washington and at Home to make our leaders see and respond to our children.

Later, NCNW developed a range of model national programs focused on Black women's and families' needs such as employment, child care, housing, hunger, health care, and youth development. Under her leadership NCNW founded the Bethune Museum and Archives, the first institution devoted to black women's history, and raised the funds to purchase their Washington, D.C. headquarters—the only black-owned building directly on the historic corridor between the White House and the Capitol. Height also began the NCNW's wonderful Black Family Reunion Celebrations twenty years ago, emphasizing the traditional values and strengths of black families at a time when too many people focused on the black family's "breakdown." Height has always understood how African-Americans' needs connect to a larger global mission as well.

Through it all, Height's intellect and strength have remained as sharp as her signature sense of style. A new musical based on her life is called "If This Hat Could Talk," and anyone who knows Height and her trademark gorgeous hats understands just how they chose that title. Personally and CDF have always been profoundly inspired by and grateful for her extraordinary example of leadership and service. Just as the quote on her medal says, we have all needed Height—and she has always steadfastly done what she had to do.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN is president and founder of the Children's Defense Fund.

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Convert East, West boulevards to King Blvd.

Charlotte will now join the other several thousand cities around the world that have kept Dr. King's "Dream" alive by honoring him with his own street. Although I am elated that this "Dream" has finally come true for our city, I do have my concerns as to how the choice will be perceived by future visitors and newcomers to the area.

I am the tour director of Queen City Tours and have been developing and conducting tours of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County for over 13 years. Our company has given a tour of Charlotte (And Mecklenburg County) for at least one person from every state in the U.S. (Including

Wyoming and South Dakota) as well as over 40 foreign countries. To date, we have conveyed the history of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County to nearly 35,000 guests, and the majority of those that visited in hopes of moving here have - after taking our tour.

On our popular Charlotte Black Heritage Tour, we spend a great deal of time conveying the history of Old Brooklyn - the most prolific link to Charlotte's black heritage. Although it was once a thriving community, older Charlotteans (And historians like myself) are aware of its dilapidated condition before urban renewal in the late 1960s and early 1970s. During this time frame, more than 7,000 black residents, 1,500 structures, and over 100 black-owned businesses were disenfranchised. Those that could afford it moved to Hyde Park off North Beatties Ford Road, and the low income blacks were forced to move to Earle Village in First Ward and other low income housing apartments - other segregated areas of Charlotte. In fact, the only remnants from Old Brooklyn that remain are the gymnasium from Second Ward High School, the A.M.E. Zion Publishing House building, the M.I.C. (Minority Investment Company) building, and Grace A.M.E. Zion Church.

When we convey this history on our tours, the majority of our guests (black, white, and other) are left with a feeling of dismay regarding the souls that once occupied Old Brooklyn. They also agree that placing the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. statue in Marshall Park (1980) was a nice gesture but not enough to heal the social wounds inflicted by the eradication of most of Charlotte's true black history.

Logistically, renaming Second Street to honor Dr. King creates its own set of puns, irony, and criticism. For instance, "Did Dr. King's 'Dream' dead-end at the Blake (Formerly Adam's Mark) Hotel?" "Will I be able to listen to the entire Dr. King's 'I have a dream' speech while driving along Second Street?" "Can Dr. King's legacy be summed in less than a mile of pavement?" And for future reference, "If Dr. King's 'Dream' was to integrate blacks into the American society why is Old Brooklyn now predominantly white? And finally, "Which interstate exit for Dr. King Boulevard? Oh, the John Belk Freeway?"

I am aware of past failed efforts to rename existing streets to honor Dr. King, however, there should be no rush to "just get it done." Fourteen years ago I contacted the King Center in Atlanta and I also spoke directly with organizers of successful efforts to honor Dr. King via a roadway. Based on my research, prior efforts in Charlotte have failed because it is difficult and almost impossible to rename a street already named in honor of a historic person or event. Choosing Second Street ended that unsuccessful drought, however, how will your history play out? Do you want to be remembered as the brave soul that created a potential negative impact on the life of a martyr?

Why not rename East and West boulevards? Although they do not exit from an interstate, they can be accessed from the airport - a major gateway into the city. In addition, those of us that are natives or have been here for quite some time are aware that the two streets are mostly segregated. Was it not Dr. King's dream to truly integrate the American society? Why not join the blacks and whites that live along those segregated streets physically and perhaps socially? Like Second Street, these streets are not named in honor of any historic person or event. Finally, your time to reflect on Dr. King's "Dream" will be greatly extended while driving along that stretch of asphalt. In turn, your legacy will not be in danger of potential reverse admiration.

JUAN WHIPPLE is director of Queen City Tours in Charlotte.

