

Family Matters

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Official Newsletter of the Gillyard-Johnson-Mahoney Family and Family Reunions
A Special Edition Celebrating Black History Month



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African American History and Voting

By: Bettie G. Griggs

At our 2012 and 2014 family reunions, we called upon our family to Get Out and Vote. In 2016, the family history team started our Voting Project, and here we are in 2020, with the theme for Black History Month “African Americans and the Vote.” This year is an important election year and it is also a landmark year for voting rights.

The Family History team is again emphasizing the importance of voting by sharing interviews from our Voting Project (see page 2). Two members participated for this edition; one in her eighties and one in her nineties. They share how they felt being able to vote for the first black President, President Barack Obama and one of them shares how she feels about our current president, Donald Trump.

Because this year marks the 150th anniversary of the fifteen Amendment

which gave black men the right to vote, and the centennial of the nineteenth Amendment giving women the right to vote and the culmination of the women’s suffrage movement, I decided to again share my mother’s story:

It was 1965 and I was a 12 year old little girl growing up in Mansfield, Louisiana. I recall when my mother received her first voter registration card in mail. Seeing tears in her eyes remains etched in my memory. She never missed walking to Billingsley’s corner store to exercise her right to vote. I’m sure I didn’t know what it all meant or why she had those tears in her eyes. What I do know however is this; I am engaged in following issues and making it a point to vote in local, state and national elections because of that memory. When I vote, I honor her and all other blacks who faced persistent discrimination and were denied their right to vote. (Continue on page 4).

Family Spotlight



Tracey Brooks

Family Matters is back shining the spotlight on family members. In this edition the light shines on Tracey Brooks. Tracey is the daughter of Jimmy and the late Shirley Gillyard James.

Tracey was born in Bossier City, Louisiana, the third of four children. She has been married to Brian Brooks

for 5 years and they have 5 children, Dennis, Gavin, Denny, Brianna and Aleah. For over four years she worked as a tutor helping 4th grade students prepare for major test such as the LEAP exam or any subject they were lacking in. Four years ago she and Brian decided that it would be best for their family for her to become a stay home mom and home school their five children, ages 7-13 years old. Tracey says that it has been a great joy.

Tracey also loves to sing, which was deeply rooted in her from her mom Shirley. She was choir director and voice coach for over ten years at the church she attended.

She and her family have a very strong belief in The Most High and truly try their best to live their lives doing His will.

What a beautiful spirit. Keep shining Tracey!

Upcoming Events

April 1, 2020
Next Family Matters
Newsletter

July 30-August 2, 2020
The 9th
Gillyard Johnson Mahoney
Family Reunion

Check our website and your
email frequently for all the
latest information on the
2020 Family Reunion

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" — often referred to as the "Black American National Anthem"— is a song written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) in 1899 and set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954). It was publicly performed first as a poem by 500 school children at the segregated Stanton School as part of a celebration of Abraham Lincoln's birthday on February 12, 1900. The school's principal, James Weldon Johnson, wrote the words to introduce its honored guest Booker T. Washington. In 1919, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) dubbed it "The Negro National Anthem" for its power in voicing the cry for liberation and affirmation for African American people. On January 20, 2009, the Rev. Joseph Lowery, former president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, used a near-verbatim recitation of the song's third stanza to begin his benediction at the inauguration ceremony for President Barack Obama.

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise,
High as the listening skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling
sea. Sing a song full of the faith
that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the
present has brought us,
Facing the rising sun of our new day
begun, Let us march on till victory
is won.

Stony the road we trod, bitter the
chastening rod, felt in the days
when hope unborn had died; yet
with a steady beat, have not our
weary feet come to the place for
which our forefathers sighed? We
have come over a way that with
tears has been watered, We have
come treading our path through the
blood of the slaughtered, Out from
the gloomy past, till now we stand
at last Where the white gleam of
our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years, God of our
silent tears, thou who hast brought
us thus far on the way; Thou who
has by Thy might Led us into the
light, Keep us forever in the path,
we pray. Lest our feet stray from
the places, our God, where we met
Thee, Lest our hearts, drunk with
the wine of the world, we forget
Thee, Shadowed beneath thy hand,
may we forever stand, True to our
God, true to our native land.

The GJM Family History Voting Project



Lula Mae Dixon



Elina Rodessa Mahoney Wilson-Broom

Lula Mae Gilyard Dixon and Elina Rodessa Mahoney Wilson-Broom participated in the Gillyard Johnson Mahoney Family History team Voting Project. We are thankful for the time they spent sharing their voting history with us. During this month set aside to share and honor Black History, we are pleased to share their answers to the following questions.

FM: Do you remember when you were not able to vote? If so, can you describe how that made you feel?

Lula Mae: Yes, I remember clearly not being able to vote. I never really connected my feelings to it until I was asked by the personnel office of my job, "Are you a registered voter?"

My first feeling was one of embarrassment. I felt ashamed to say no.

Elina: I don't have a memory of not being able to vote

FM: Do you remember when you were first able to register to vote and what year it was? If so, how old were you and who or what did you vote for?

Lula Mae: I think it was 1959, and I was in my early twenties. The first time I went to vote, I stood in line for 5 hours. I don't remember what we were voting for, but I do remember people giving us water and food as we waited.

Elina: I remember voting for John Kennedy. I had been intimidated by all the things black people had to endure to get registered. At that election year I braved up, went down and got myself registered. One of the better decisions I ever made.

FM: Do you have a copy of the first voter registration card you received? If so, can you provide us a copy of it?

Lula Mae: No.

Elina: I couldn't find my card. I'm thinking it was destroyed when our house was burned.

FM: Can you provide us with a copy of your current voter registration card.

Lula Mae: Yes. Copy provided for our historical archives *

Elina: Yes. Copy provided for our historical archives.

FM: Did you vote for President Barack Obama in 2008 or in 2012? If so, please describe how that made you feel to be able to vote for and see a black man hold the office of President of the United States of America

Lula Mae: Yes, I voted for President Obama. I thought that was something I would never have lived to see. I was so excited and happy. It felt so good to press that button by his name. It took me back

(Continue on page 3)

The key to coping with a generative disease such as dementia is to keep the faith and know God cares. I've been dealing with my husband's diagnosis for three years and it's an ever changing journey.

I am reminded however that no matter how my circumstances change, God's character remains the same. I must remember that God is in control and He is for my good.

The Bible tell us, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

For some people, one of those things is a degenerative disease.

God didn't say that all things are good. But He does work for good in all things. Therefore, we all are allowed to keep a right perspective and maintain hope.

It's hard to understand the underlying need that prompts my husband's behavior. Many times he may not be able to express his emotional, spiritual or physical needs.

He displays an agitated behavior, wandering, crying, or aggression. I may not know and if you are struggling with a loved one diagnosed with dementia, you also may not know, what's in the heart and mind. We can

take comfort in knowing God knows and cares for us all.

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Wade and Joyce M. Wilson-Simpson

GJM Family History Voting Project (Continued from page 2)

to when we could not vote and actually brought tears to my eyes. Do not get me wrong, they were tears of joy.

Elina: Obama, listen I was at the polls when doors opened. First in line to vote. I was elated that a person of color might be President. I was calling family and friends reminding them to vote. When Mr. Obama won, It must have been one of the happiest, wows in my life. Richard and I are still early voters.

FM: Is there anything else that you would like to share with us about the right to vote?

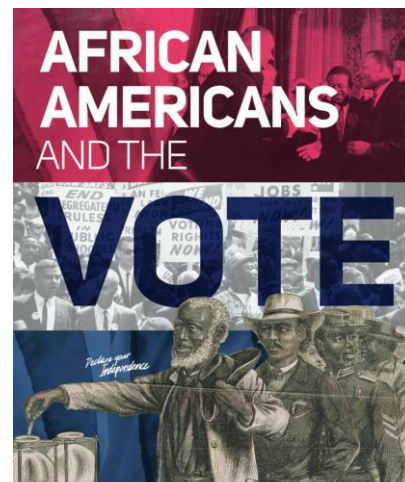
Lula Mae: I want all our young people to appreciate the rights we have been given by many who died so we could have them. Go and register to vote as soon as you reach voting age. Most importantly, once you register, exercise your right, Vote.

FM: How do you feel about our current president, Donald Trump?

Elina: Out the door. My mom taught me integrity matters, and to tell the truth always. Well I guess Trump's mom taught him differently; or maybe lying is something he took up after he grew up. Trump will look you in the face and lie. Trump has no character. Enough about #45, meet me at the polls family. Let's send the orange man back where he came from.

FM: Thank you Lula Mae and Elina for participating in our Voting Project.

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Association for the Study of African American Life and History
2020 Poster

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Family Reunions
Mission:

To focus on the things that shape us rather than the circumstances that divide us; to strengthen and preserve family as God orders our steps. We value God's Plan, Family, Tradition, and Service.

We're on the Web!
gillyard-johnson-mahoney.com

Email Us:
gjmfamilyreunion@gmail.com

You are Cordially Invited to The 9th GJM Family Reunion Family Time...Live, Laugh, Love July 30-August 2, 2020

details at www.gillyard-johnson-mahoney.com

African American History and Voting

(Continued from page 1)

In our Healthy Living column (page 3), Joyce Wilson-Simpson shares her husband's medical diagnosis with us. What a beautiful way to educate us and to engage our support.

This month's Family Spotlight (page 1) shines on Tracey Brooke. I am fascinated by her spirit and that she home schools five children.

The GJM family history team is still interviewing family members and friends for our Voting Project. If you would like to participate, please

contact the team at gjmfamilyreunion@gmail.com

We hope that the team will hear from many of you regarding your feelings about voting, voting for President Obama, the Voting Rights Act or other voting related issues. We are documenting our history; not just this month, but everyday. Be included!

Enjoy Your Blessings!

Bettie

