

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY MOTHER

by Velma Nanka-Bruce

Her name was Veola Bernice Edwards Sr.

She stood five feet and two inches tall. My dad was six feet and two inches tall, and as teenage sweethearts, he had nicknamed her "Shorty". Instigated by their first granddaughter, all of their grandchildren would eventually call their grandmother "Shorty". These days her children do as well.

Her height aside, Mother was a powerhouse. As an only child of her mother and father, she always longed for sisters and brothers. She made up for it by having six children: four daughters and two sons. Although primarily a homemaker, Mother worked at Kelly Field during World War II.

As a girl she played basketball and tennis. She put that experience to use as the playground supervisor at Lindbergh Park, now known as Dawson Park. As a young woman she won tennis trophies at Central Playground tournaments. Althea Gibson and later Arthur Ashe were names we learned early on because she idolized their mastery. Many early Saturday mornings found Shorty lacing up her white, high top Converse to go and play tennis with regulars like Mr. Alvin Collins and sometimes his brother Mr. Clinton Collins, or young Mr. Samuel Thomas Scott, or Mr. Green who drove one of those cute little T-bird sportscars.

Doubles or singles, she loved it all. Samuel Thomas was shocked by his first game against Mother. Since she was a contemporary of his parents, he expected an easy game. To his surprise she played hard and he had a tough time competing against her. My sister and I watched or made new friends on the swings while we waited for the games to finish. The park was converted to Fairchild Tennis Complex. As a mature woman, when tennis became too demanding, Shorty took up golf and, of course, won a trophy there.

But her main activity outside of home focused on social and civic organizations. Mother served as a precinct judge during elections. She was the PTA president during my entire elementary school career. She organized the school carnival each year and sewed costumes for the annual schoolwide operetta. She was a charter member of the local chapter of Jack and Jill of America and served several years as its president. Mother played bridge with the Messieurs and Mesdames Club and attended duplicate tournaments with the Ace Hi Bridge Club. She was a Life Member of the NAACP and a Friend of the Carver Cultural Center.



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continued



Shorty joined Second Baptist Church at a young age and maintained her membership throughout her life. She worked with the Matrons' Guild and welcomed visitors to the church. I remember when Shorty was in charge of invitations for the Copper Party, a fundraiser the Guild sponsored each year. Our dining room table was overflowing with boxes of invitations and envelopes needing to be stuffed and addressed. It became a family project and Daddy even joined in. So, we started our assembly line and completed stuffing, penning addresses, and affixing postage. Daddy was a railway postal clerk, and when he saw all the boxes full of invitations that we proposed to drop in the mail, he helped us to sort and bundle them by zip codes. He knew there would be a grateful postal worker somewhere. Rev. James stopped by to see the progress and commented that the Guild had given this task to the right person.

Shorty was all for taking advantage of the opportunities integration brought. To pay tuition for me to attend a private high school, and thus integrate it, Shorty took on part time employment. She also wanted us to stay in contact with our roots. She made sure we got to each of the Jack and Jill functions and encouraged us to participate in the Teen Canteen and the church youth groups and choirs.

I was the first Girl Scout in a family of Camp Founder Girls, but Mother volunteered to be a counselor during my Girl Scout camping trip. She attended every presentation and recital we were in. She was always proud of us and reveled in our accomplishments. When tragedy befell our family, she and my father did not hesitate to become responsible for my quadriplegic niece and paraplegic nephew, after she herself had recovered.

Mother has been honored as Mother of the Year by the Top Ladies of Distinction and as the Spirit of the American Woman by J. C. Penney.

An acquaintance pointed out to me that she never saw my mother without a smile on her face. Shorty did everything with grace and a smile on her face, and she inspired the eulogy Rev. Jemerson entitled "A Touch of Kindness".

Starting as early as the turn of the 19th century with organizations like the Progressive Women's Club, San Antonio African American women have advocated for the communities they lived in. Carrying on my mother's tradition of service to the community, I volunteer with SAAACAM and support it with my donations. How about you? Make a donation today and/or join our volunteers in realizing a community archive and museum dedicated to the African American experience in San Antonio.

