

Melody

Arlington in the 1960s

Melody Ellison was a brave nine-year old who used her voice to work towards change during the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

Being a young African-American girl in Detroit, Michigan in the 1960s, Melody was faced with discrimination from people, both young and old, who did not like her just because of the color of her skin.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., (Center) leads civil rights Freedom Parade down Woodward Avenue near the Fox Theatre on June 24, 1963, Detroit Michigan. Photo: The Detroit News Archive

SEGREGATION

Here in Arlington, in the 1960s people of color were also being treated unfairly because of the color of their skin. African-Americans were stopped from going to the same movie theaters, restaurants, or even at times going to the same schools as white individuals.

This segregation, or keeping people separate just because of their skin color, made many people, both African-American and white, very upset. Many people wanted

equality and fairness for everyone, no matter what color their skin was. So, they worked together to try to make changes and make things better for all people, regardless of the color of their skin.

In Detroit, just like in Arlington, and Washington, D.C., Freedom Marches brought people of all races together to fight for justice. Melody and her family marched in the June 23, 1963 Freedom March in Detroit. There she heard Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. give his

moving "I Have a Dream" speech. Melody and her family were so inspired by his words that they vowed to always use their voices to help fight for what was right, no matter how scary it may be.



SPEARHEADING CHANGE

Melody and her family were faced with some scary and unfair situations in Detroit. Her sister, Yvonne was not hired by the local bank because she was African-American; her brother Dwayne was followed by shopkeepers who thought he was stealing just because of the color of his skin; and her cousins were not sold a house in a primarily white neighborhood because of the way they looked.



Margarite Syphax presenting keys to a mother and daughter in Arlington, n.d.

Sometimes, these unfair situations happened in Arlington too. However, there were many people in Arlington who worked to fight for equal rights in different ways. One of those people was Margarite Syphax, an African-American woman who worked to help make housing fair for all people, regardless of their race. She went on to become a very successful African-American businesswoman who always worked to help people, regardless of the color of their skin.

Although these prejudices hurt Melody and her friends and family in many ways, no matter how much they were hurt, they always stood up for what was good and what was right. Melody used her gift of song, as a way to fight injustice. She sang in her church choir and used her voice to rise above the hatred and fear that some people had in their hearts. She used her music to work to make things better, to make things *“in harmony.”*



Choir at Lomax Church, Reverend Arthur Walls.

She, along with many of the other adults and children of the 1960s followed Dr. King's message of hope and inspiration when he said, ***“I have a dream, with this faith I will go out with you and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.”***



At 8:45 a.m. on February 2, 1959, four young students from the nearby Hall's Hill neighborhood entered Stratford Junior High School in Arlington, Virginia. When they stepped into Stratford that day, they became the first students to desegregate a public school in the Commonwealth of Virginia.