MM

A HISTORY OF THE BLACKS OF NORTH TULSA

AND MY LIFE

(A True Story)

by Mrs. Mabel B. Little

I came to Tulsa, Oklahoma on Monday September 21, 1913, from Boley Oklahoma at the age of 17. A drop out from Boley high school, I had only $1.25 in my purse. It was my aim to come to the big town, make enough money to further my education at Langston University.

My first job was as a maid at Tulsa's finest hotel the Brady, located at Archer and Main Streets,(Still standing and housing the Good Will center). My Salary was $20.00 per month with meals. Since room rent was $2.50 per week, I could not save enough to pay my tuition at Langston.

At about this time, I met a wonderful young man, Pressley Little, came into my life. We fell in love and were married by the late Reverend C. L. Netherland, December 22, 1914.

I united with the Mt. Zion Baptist church (to which my husband belonged on Bebruary 5, 1915, during the first 40-day revival meeting conducted by Rev. R. A. Whitaker. My husband was a junior Deacon and I began teaching in the Sunday School, sang in the choir, led the young peoples Missionary Depatment and was active in the B. Y. P U., Ever Loyal group, etc.

My aunt, Mrs. Lydia Taylor, who was a graduate of Poro College of Cosmetology, trained me in this trade she had learned in St. Louis. I opened my first Beauty Shop in our three-room "shotgun" house on East Independence street in 1915. Business grew so fast that I sought and found a larger location near Archer and Greenwood. This building was owned by the late Rev. Woods. It was then I secured my first operator. (Operator was Rose Syrus, Now living in Chicago.) Business continued to prosper (the Lord blessed in a big way!) so that larger quarters became necessary, up-stairs in the same building. With a customer list of 600 regulars, two more operators,, Cleo Matthews and Thelma Davis, business was good.

Mr. Simon Berrybrought the first transportation to Black Tulsa in the form of a "Jitney". He used Model T Fords with no tops and for a nickel one could ride from Marshall Place to Archer Street. Later Mr. Berry put his first bus in operation and extended service to Lansing street as well as Greenwood. Soon there were many buses serving both lines. Mr. Berry built a huge bus garage, established the first swim pool for blacks, opened a recreation park now the city-owned Lincoln Park, thereby giving employment to many blacks. Mr. Berry sold his franchise during the city effort to consolidate all lines into one covering all parts of the city. He would not sell, however, until there was a stipulation the black labor would be continued employment as drivers. There should be a memorial erected to this man who had the vision and wisdom to serve his people so nobly. He was a pilot and reportedly owned his own plane--the first black to do so.

THE RIOT

The question has been asked so many times. "How did the Riot start?" There was a young Black named William (Dick) Rowland who entered the elevator of a department storeon Main Street. There was a white girl and a white man on the elevator. Dick Rowland accidently stepped on the girls foot and immediately apologized.. She accepted the apology. The white man claimed that Rowland insulted the girl. She denied it. Going to the street, the white man began sending rumors that a black man had insulted a white woman. Soon the rumor was over the city. Dick was arrested and put in the county jail for safe keeping.

Tulsa had one black policeman, Mr. Bonnie Cleveland, trusted and loved by all blacks. He was affectionately called Uncle Bonnie. On this occasion, he called the black peo;le together and said,"I'm going to stay in the jail with Dick and don't worry, there'll be no lynching." And. he assured that no harm would come to Dick. Later, in front of the courthouse where officers had talked to the crowd and it was dispersing,

someone fired a shot and, of course, pandemonium broke loose. Firing continued all night with street lights being shot out. Machine guns were set up on Brickyard hill by dissident whites. Black people were shot at, homes were riddled and set afire. Airplanes dropped incendary bombs to enhance the burning of Mt. Zion Baptist church and business buildings. The beautiful new stradford Hotel, a fine structure were blown asunder. It was downright war against thousands of poor black people segregated in a section of town Not even a hardware store and without ammunition. Only the guns that were for home protection or hunting did the blacks put up a fight.

With all the hardships and losses resulting from this WAR on North Tulsa, Blacks cleared the debris and with little help from the City of Tulsa whose authorities sat silently by while hostile factions prowled the area looting and burning. Our home was looted of furniture, clothing after running us away. Many panic stricken people walked to Turley, Claremore, and away from the disaster zone.

The malita finally came from Oklahoma City to correct the matter. We were brought bakc to the city. Our men were put in jail and interned at the fairgounds and Convention Hall. Women and children were placed in churches in the downtown section and guarded by soldiers. The christian white women cameto our rescue with food, bedding and things for children. My nephew Alfred, who resides with me now, was a small five year old at the time.

Like the Children of Israel did at Jerusalem. With heavy hearts, crushed spirits, we prayed and asked the almighty God to give us strength and courage to go forward. It took plenty of faith and courage to go and get things--make bricks with straw--to make a second start at building our homes and buildings. We lost a large number of wonderful people who left Tulsa to live in other cities. Hotel owner Stratford moved to Chicage. A. J. Smitherman who edited the black weekly paper TULSA STAR

lost power to return

The Tulsa Star was succeeded by the OKLAHOMA EAGLE, Started by W. H. Baughman. It is now owned and published by Ed. Goodwin. This black paper stands as a monument to North Tulsa blacks giving good news of what black people are doing. Thanks to Mr. Goodwin for his contribution to North Tulsa blacks. I knew Ed. Goodwon as a boy and he was known affectionately as "Sugar Man". May God continue to bless him and his wonderful family.in every way.

NAMES OF BLACK BUILDERS TO REMEMBER

Doctors: A. M. Key, R. T. Bridgewater (first in Tulsa, black)
C. E. Smith, B. A. Waynes, Augustus Payne,
E. F. Bryant, R. A. Jackson (slain in race riot)

Dentists: J. J. McKeever. E. L. Hairston, S. E. Kimbrough.

Lawyers: H. A. Guess, R. Jones, I. J. Spears, Freeman Martin
B. C. Franklin. T. C. Chappelle

Hotels and Rooming Houses: O. W. Gurley, A. Huff (First black rooming-house owner at Archer between Boston and Cincinnatti),
Bill Phillips, Mrs. Titus, The Morgans, A. Carr, Mrs Sanders.

Grocers: Clinton's, McGregors, Grants, Curry's, Smith's, Hooker's

Cleaners: H. J. Caver, Jones

Druggists: B. T. Bryant, A. L. Ferguson, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Kyle

Theatre: Mrs. Loula Williams (Who also operated Williams Confectionery, largest ice cream and fruit retailers in Tulsa.)

Garage: Wesley Williams (First black in Tulsa to own an automobile

Other Businesses: "Bully" Smith, Pool Hall, Hardy Brothers. Pool Hall, Garment Factory, Mr. and Mrs. Johnny Wells; Lillie's Cafe Cincinnati and Archer; Barber Shop, Rev. C. L. Netherland at Archer and Boston (where present John 3:16 Mission is). Doc's Beanery (Doc Hughes), "Hamburger" Kelly Mr. and Mrs. B. Kelly. Real Estate: Tom Gentry, W. B. Grayson, Charles Earle, Wes Williams. Photography, Rev. J. E. Hooker. Dry Goods, S. D. Hooker. Taxi: (Horse Drawn) A. Williams

Written 5/24/71

After paying rent from 1918 to 1921, we decoded to erect our own building for the beauty shop as well as a new residence. Two weeks after moving into our new dream house, disaster hit and both places were destroyed by fire during the race riot June 1, 1921. Seven years of saving and working, paying cash, sacrificing to meet an objective, all spoiled by needless burning. We had about $50.00 cash money left. Mr. Pressley and his sister, Mrs. Susie Bell Johnson ran the Little Cafe with a reputation for good cooking that kept people lined up waiting to be served their specialty--Chicken or smothered steak with rice and brown gravy.

After the burning of all business places and many homes, there was a rebuilding spree. Mt.Zion Baptist church, that had just been completed, was now a total loss. A long period of struggling had seen the building rise from a tabernacle with sawdust covered ground as a floor,to a beautiful edifice. The church was destroyed on June 1, 1921, following untrue rumors that the church was used as a storage place for ammunition. In an effort to rebuild Mt. Zion, Rev. R. A. Whitaker was arrested several times. Our friend and brother, the late, bondsman J. H. Goodwin would bail him out. What a friend was Mr. Goodwin to Rev. Whitaker and Mt. Zion Baptist Church. He also made many contributions in helping develop North Tulsa's rebuilding efforts. His real estate, undertaking and finance business played a prominent part.

The struggle to regain a normal existance was hard. In July 1921 we erected a small three-room house on the corner of Marshall Place and Greenwood. There was no electricity, water or gas. We had to cook outdoors with wood as fuel. We had to dig wells for drinking water. The lot had been bought in 1916. It was formerly a farm and had just been offered for development as an addition to the city. We had to cut corn stalks and clear the ground in order to build the house. Only a few people lived out here. There was no transportation.