

Grateful for Sharing my Family Legacy of Faith

By T. Dianne Harris



I'm a third-generation, Alabama-born Lutheran. I've been an LWML member for 47 years and am presently the LWML vice president at my church, Trinity Lutheran in Selma. So it was a great honor to share my Alabama stories with my sisters in Christ at the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* luncheon during the Convention in Mobile.



Some of the comments Dianne received at the LWQ luncheon:

"I admire your bravery and courage as a 15-year-old."

"I regret that you and others had to encounter such hatred."

"May I give you a hug?"

"May I take a picture of you ... with you?"

"It was a blessing and honor to be able to share lunch with someone who so bravely participated in such a pivotal part of our country's history."

My first Alabama story was about Rosa Young, known as the "Mother of Black Lutheranism," as she, beginning in 1916, helped start 35 Lutheran churches and schools for African Americans in rural Alabama. She began Mt. Carmel in Midway in 1917, on a plantation owned by Judge Benjamin Miller, the former Governor of Alabama. One of Rosa's students was Walter Hill, and he loved the church and school so much he asked if she would start one near his home on the Tait Plantation, about 20 miles away. The first meeting of what would become Zion Lutheran was held October 7, 1919, in a dilapidated log church that had been owned by the Black Methodists. Walter Hill was my grandfather, and Dr. Young wrote about him and the Tait plantation in her book, *Light in the Dark Belt*.

My second Alabama story was when I was a student at Alabama Lutheran Academy and College, which Rosa helped organize in Selma, in 1922. In fact, I saw Rosa Young many times on campus. She was never my teacher, but she was always busy working with students. In 1965, when I was 15 years old, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. came to Selma to help us gain the right to vote. When he arrived, the number of registered Black voters in Dallas County, where Selma is located,

was 335 people, which was just two percent of the 15,000 eligible black voters. My mother was denied the right to vote three times.

So I joined my fellow students and marched for justice. I told my story in the Spring 2015 *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*. I heard Dr. King speak, I learned peaceful resistance, I sang freedom songs, and I was arrested, booked, and jailed twice. I'm proud that our determination and perseverance in the face of violence and hate earned our people the right to vote with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act in August.

Today I lead guided Civil Rights Tours in Selma, and I always stress the importance of faith, love, and unity in the story of the movement.

My last Alabama story goes back nearly 150 years to just after the Civil War. When I was researching my genealogy, I found a record with the names of two of my great, great grandfathers — Nathan Hill and Battle Scott — and both of them had registered to vote in 1867!

I'm grateful for my family legacy of faith and for the women of the LWML who have been my family for 47 years. Thank you for those many lovely women who responded so warmly to my stories, and the to Lutheran story of rural Alabama. **Q**