

Our Neighborhood Notables

Titusville Titans

November 2019

Do You Know Who's Living Next Door?



GERALDINE WINFIELD COLLINS
70+ YEARS

Low Key, is how Ms. Collins likes to serve her community. In her own quiet way, the former Washington School Variety show tap dancer has helped, and continues to support a lot of people to better themselves and improve the lives of their families.

This Titusville Development Corporation, Inc. Corporate Secretary and former community action agency (JCCEO) Human Resource Manager received the 2014 Golden Heart Award from New Pilgrim Baptist Church in recognition of lifetime community service and stellar professionalism.

What does Titusville have that other communities do not?

“Titusville is centrally located. I can easily get to any place I need to go in Birmingham from right here.”

When did you come to Titusville?

I was born in our home at 622 Omega Street. Dr. McCoy, who lived across the street from us with his mother, delivered me. We moved to where I live now in 1940. Daddy did not know that my mother had been saving money to get this house. We were able to buy it and move in that December.

I was the middle child and the only girl. I guess I was spoiled, but I was definitely a daddy's girl. My mother died when I

was just 4 years old. My daddy was left to raise three young children under the age of 6. But he never missed a beat. As young as I was, I remember after the funeral, while daddy was counting out the money to pay Smith and Gaston Funeral Home, our neighbor Ms. Annie Thompson, came to him and said, “Mr. Winfield, Give me the girl.” My daddy replied, “I’m keeping all of my children.” And that is what he did. A cousin stayed with us until he got off work and then daddy did everything for us, cooking, ironing, washing, everything.

Where did your parents work?

Mother was a homemaker, and daddy worked for the Birmingham Water Works. At my father's 90th birthday party, Ronald Mims, who was the Water Works director at the time, remarked that he had checked the records and my daddy had not missed one day of work in 50+ years on the job! Yet, I can still remember him sitting me on the ironing board to braid my hair as a child and keeping us neat and clean.

Geri's mother and father.



Mr. Winfield holds prized collard greens from his garden.

HONEYSUCKLE HILLS

When I was a girl the woods which lay just south of our neighborhood was full of honeysuckle bushes. I guess that is why the area is called Honeysuckle Hills. The old Lusco house sat atop the hill and is still a landmark today. The house was empty for a while when the Italian family moved away, and we kids thought it was haunted.

We were located in a good spot. The Joy neighborhood movie theater was just around the corner. North of us, the street cars ran on rails right up and down Avenue F (6th Avenue). We were still close enough to other family, my uncle lived on 3rd Avenue, and we visited him all the time.



Above: Geri, her father James, brothers James Earl and Tommy, 1940's.
Top: Trip to the Holy Land! Geri was Tour Coordinator in the 1970's for group from Birmingham that included Titusville residents Margaret Alford, Gertrude Brown, Mattie and Nellie Dudley, Lola Hendricks, Charly Mims, Amanda Perkins Gregory Durr White, and Mr. Winfield.



What were the holidays like?

For Christmas everybody's house was decorated, and I remember the family standing around holding hands and daddy praying. Santa brought all the children in the block #5 Union Hardware roller skates. We would all gather to form a skate train down the hill on Center Way, and if you were on the end when the train rounded the curve onto my street, you might go flying off into somebody's yard! We were blessed that every child got something, bicycles, toys... because all the men worked. They had good paying jobs for the times, at places like, Chicago Bridge, Acipco, and U. S. Steel. Our neighbor, Mr. Robinson, was a Pullman porter. Our playmates included the Taylor's, Muldrow's, Frisco's, the Walker's, McCollough's, and Chapman's. And at whose ever house you were playing when it was time to eat, that is where you dined.

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Did you feel safe?

Yes, for the most part. But the most frightening experience was when they bombed the empty lot on Avenue G. It was Mr. Williams' property that we as children had used for a playground. The noise it made when it exploded was terrible. It blew out all of Ms. Tate's windows, the lady who lived next to the lot. Fortunately, no one was hurt. No one was ever caught, but this was in the early 60's so we believe it was the Klan. During that time, I was doing clerical work with the SCLC under Dr. Wyatt T. Walker, and I remember men in uniform following us home from the A. G. Gaston Motel; they carried guns and bayonets, and looked like state troopers or national guardsmen.

What would you like for your legacy to be?

I love community service. I took after my daddy that way, he was always helping people. I am a member of Charms, Inc., a service organization, and we do a lot of work with Children's Village in West End, an agency that was started by a group of Baptist ministers wives.

Of course, my servants' heart has been nurtured by New Pilgrim Baptist Church where I have been a member all my life. I started as a Sunbeam doing children's ministry, and today I work with the Women's Missionary Society. I was very honored to represent New Pilgrim in Haiti, investigating and reporting back on the conditions there. As a result, we built a facility there to use as a school and a church. I was also proud to be a part of the group that walked from the church (then located on 6th Avenue and 9th Street) to Memorial Park, to pray in protest of the city putting marchers in jail. Bull Conner met us at the viaduct, but we would not be deterred, he had to let us through.

National leaders convened in our city in 2003 to install Geri and eleven other women as charter members of the Birmingham Chapter, Charms, Inc.



'Know someone you would like to spotlight? Call The Titusville Development Corporation at 205-252-5526, or send an email to Titusville@bellsouth.net, include Neighborhood Notables on the subject line.