WIBIO Phillips

Transcript from Caption File

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3 In the 1960s,

 Milwaukee was divided.

4 The black community

 lived in the north

5 the white

 in the south.

6 The 16th Street Viaduct

7 was the bridge that connected

 the two communities

8 but more than just a river

 separated them.

9 Things were getting tense.

10 The inner core

 was falling apart

11 and families

 were left with few options.

12 The black community

 was hurting.

13 Something had to give.

14 Two people bravely stepped up

 to lead the way.

15 Vel Phillips

 and Father James Groppi

16 were an unlikely

 pair of heroes.

17 Vel's story

 is a tale of firsts.

18 She became the first

 African American woman

19 to become

 a Milwaukee alderwoman

20 and to introduce

 a fair housing law.

21 Listen, I just didn't see why

 I should not be able to live

22 anywhere in the city

 that I could afford to live.

23 James Groppi put himself

 through seminary school

24 driving buses.

25 While few others bothered

 to listen to the troubles

26 of the inner core,

 this bus driver lent an ear.

27 The words of the people

 went straight to his heart.

28 When someone black

 came to me and said

29 "Look, Father, they won't rent

 to me beyond 27th Street,"

30 at that time,

 what did you want me to do

31 as a white priest

 in an inner city parish?

32 No, that was my fight.

33 He was not that man

 who kindled the fire.

34 He was the one

 who kept the lid on it.

35 That's the reason

 Milwaukee didn't burn.

36 Father Groppi

 joined the struggle

37 for Civil Rights

 in Milwaukee.

38 Their weapons

 weren't bullets or bombs.

39 They fought by marching,

 a lot of marching.

40 The two

 started with big steps.

41 Vel proposed a new

 city-wide fair housing law.

42 But it was rejected

 on a 20 to 1 vote.

43 Father Groppi became

 the NAACP Youth Council Advisor.

44 The group picketed

 white-only establishments

45 held prayer vigils

46 and sang

 Christmas carols

47 to those who didn't think

 they'd make good neighbors.

48 In the summer of '67,

 cities all over the country

49 including Milwaukee,

 had violent riots.

50 The streets seemed too dangerous

 for anyone, anywhere.

51 On August 28, 1967

52 Father Groppi led the first

 small group of marchers

53 through thousands

 of hostile people.

54 Groppi announced:

55 We'll never stop until

 we get complete human dignity.

56 We're going to get

 fair housing legislation

57 in the City of Milwaukee.

58 We're going to walk

 until our feet our tired.

59 Then we are going to walk

 on our ankles, and on our knees.

60 [applause]

61

62 For 200 days, they marched

 through angry crowds

63 tear gas,

 and violent outbreaks.

64 The marchers' dedication

 to their cause

65 was stronger

 than all of these.

66 Martin Luther King, Jr., sent

 a telegram to Father Groppi.

67 *"You are demonstrating*

 *that it is possible*

68 *to be militant*

 *and powerful*

69 *without destroying life*

 *or property.*

70 *Please know that you have*

 *my support and prayers."*

71 In 1968, Martin Luther

 King, Jr.'s assassination

72 brought together

 blacks and whites.

73 It was time.

74 In Washington, DC,

 President Lyndon Johnson

75 signed a national

 Fair Housing Law

76 so that people could live

 where they want to live.

77 After that,

 the City of Milwaukee

78 passed Vel Phillips'

 Fair Housing Law, too.

79

80 Phillips:

 It took a long time

 simply because it was new

81 it was controversial,

 it was political

82 and it was--

 just difficult, but we did it.

83 If we just go with

 the Declaration of Independence

84 and the United States

 Constitution

85 we've got everything

 to work with.

86

87 After years of struggle

 by the people of Milwaukee

88 the city was finally

 starting to come together.

89

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