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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