

Commemorating King

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For Anita Davis, the times when fire hoses spewed water and vicious dogs and brutal police officers battered civil rights' marchers, seems like it was just yesterday.

"I have not forgotten," said Davis, the former freedom rider, who has been an active member of the NAACP since she was 16 years old. "There are vestiges of the movement that (have) stayed with me forever."

As the first vice president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Tallahassee, Davis has dedicated her life to the betterment of the black community.

She first worked for the organization in Buffalo, New York from 1963 to 1969 as a freedom rider assigned to specific areas.

"As one of the freedom riders, we took buses and cars down to West Virginia, Alabama and Tennessee to help black communities with voter registration."

Davis was young at the time when the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. had only begun to galvanize people for the civil rights movement, but even to the young freedom fighter, King was more than a man.

"He was a visionary," Davis said. "He saw what could happen and taught us how to co-exist peacefully and still get what we want."

She believed in the move. She believed in the movement, admired what King stood for and marched to demonstrate the unyielding fight for equal rights. Davis said the spirit of activism remains with her to this day.

"The excitement of being part of the civil rights movement has never stopped," Davis said.

She said much of the activity occurred in the large, metropolitan areas, but when she relocated to Tallahassee in 1979, things were not as she initially expected.

"When I moved, I thought the South would be more progressive than it was," she said.

"There was a looming sense of fear that stayed for years with the integration of schools and so forth."

After an unsuccessful search for employment, Davis decided to go back to school and graduated from FAMU in 1990 while continuing to volunteer for the NAACP.

Davis has since sought to relinquish the state of fear and depression in the South by speaking to groups, mentoring children and – since the NAACP specifically deals with civil matters – helping others in need.

"So many people are smiling to keep from crying," Davis said. "I invest my time in the community to one day reap the benefits of everything we have fought for."

Most of her time now is spent answering and returning calls from people in a legal bind.

Davis said freedom is not a one-time occurrence, but a perpetual struggle in which many people are still comfortably complacent.

"Even today, some people believe their place is still in the back of the bus," she said. "Freedom is not free, but it is something you must continually fight for. You have to stand up and say you can't take it anymore."

Davis has been working with the NAACP for 51 years and continues to fight ever-evolving forms of racism in honor of those who have made sacrifices.

"Dr. King gave his life for us and still today the struggle continues," Davis said.

"It has just taken on a new three-piece suit and a new hairdo."

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