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Smithy Reynolds Was Mount Airy's Rosa Parks

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While most people associated with the beginning of the Civil Rights movement are well aware of Rosa Parks refusing to give up her bus seat to a white woman, few may be aware that a local woman took her stand six years earlier.

In May of 1949, a tall, dignified woman boarded a Carolina Tennessee Bus and took a seat near the front. Because she was black, the driver insisted she move to the back. Smithy Reynolds, 57, refused.

Two and a half hours later, still holding her ground and the bus not moving, she was arrested and charged with violating the Jim Crow law. At that time it was such an usual act for a black woman to do, the driver stood up and told the passengers "to relax," according to a *Mount Airy News* article dated from that time.

Reynolds did not appear to be someone who was a rebel. She was a family woman, a single mother who had raised seven children on her own, a religious woman respected and loved by her employers, the Jarrell family of Toast. She could read and write and was well spoken.

"She was real proud," said Kester Jarrell, 72. Jarrell was a child when he knew Reynolds. His father, Fred Jarrell, is who bailed her out of jail for \$100.

"My father would have done anything in the world for her," said Kester's sister, Mildred Jarrell, 71. "We just loved her death."

Reynolds worked for the family as a housekeeper. Fred Jarrell ran a general store that was located on U.S. 89 in the Toast area. Reynolds lived in a house behind the store in the Sandy Level area. When she needed help, she knew who she could depend on.

"We all worshiped her. She was so sweet. I can remember her rearing her head back and laughing," Mildred Jarrell said.



Caroline Beamer/The Mount Airy News

MILDRED JARRELL: Jarrell remembers her father, Fred Jarrell, bailing Smithy Reynolds out of jail for \$100.

But it was Mildred's father who helped Reynolds from time to time, and bailing her out of jail was one of those times.

"She told me about it," Kester Jarrell said of the incident. When she recounted the story to him, she wasn't embarrassed or ashamed. "She knew what she wanted," he said.

Reynolds went to court and was found guilty and fined \$25. According to the newspaper article, she appealed and paid a \$300 bond. No further information is available about the appeal. However, Reynolds' granddaughter, Sonya Dodd, 48, of Mount Airy, said that she plans to do some research at the Raleigh court archives hoping to learn the outcome of the appeal.



SMITHY REYNOLDS: Reynolds was 57 when she boarded a Mount Airy bus and refused to sit in the rear.

"Grandma Smithy" was how Dodd knew her.

"She was absolutely wonderful," she said of her grandmother.

Unlike Kester Jarrell, Dodd said her grandmother never told her the story of refusing to move to the back of the bus.

"I didn't learn until recently," she said, her grandmother having died years ago.

When Dodd did learn about the incident, her respect for her grandmother grew.

"She was a person of noble, yet humble qualities. She was so strong, a single mother, a family woman, a Christian woman. She was of the Primitive Baptist faith," she

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said.

Dodd told her own children about what her grandmother did. "They can't appreciate it, what it was like then for a black person. And she was alone. I can only imagine what my

grandmother went through."

Dodd said she will keep reminding her three children. "I want them to tell their children and they tell their children," she said.