

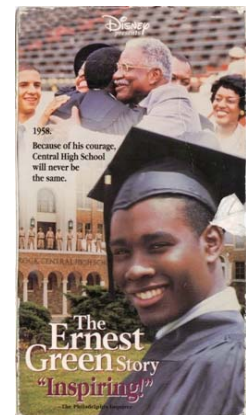
Tough Decisions Are The Ones Worth Fighting For . . .

Santa Barbara Middle School interviews Ernest “please call me Ernie” Green, senior member of the Little Rock 9

For years SBMS 6th and 7th graders have watched the film, *The Ernest Green Story*. This year, while the Teen Press was in DC for the Inauguration, they contacted Ernest Green and set up this phone interview that was conducted last week in the Lotus Theater.

Emily: What did you think of the way the movie told your story?

Ernie Green: Well, I was generally pleased with the movie. It had, as you can imagine, about an hour and a half to tell a set of events that took nine months. But I thought they captured the high points and the low points of my senior year, and I had an opportunity to work with the scriptwriter and was in Little Rock for a week of the filming, and was very pleased with the way it turned out. I always tell Morris Chestnut that I helped start his career, so those of you who are Morris Chestnut fans will know that he’s done a series of movies since doing *The Ernest Green Story*.



Emily: Overall, did it exaggerate or sugarcoat things?

Ernie Green: No, I think it tried to make the point that that was a difficult year. There were few people who were willing to be friendly to us, and I wouldn’t say that it sugarcoated the year that I spent. I think it told the story pretty accurately.



Gabe: Ernie, you went through so many hardships, who or what inspired you to keep going?

Ernie Green: The basic inspiration was my family and the other eight. We supported each other. And then there were people in the Little Rock community who were very supportive of what we were trying to do and their encouragement. And then we heard from

people from all over the country and outside of the United States that were encouraging

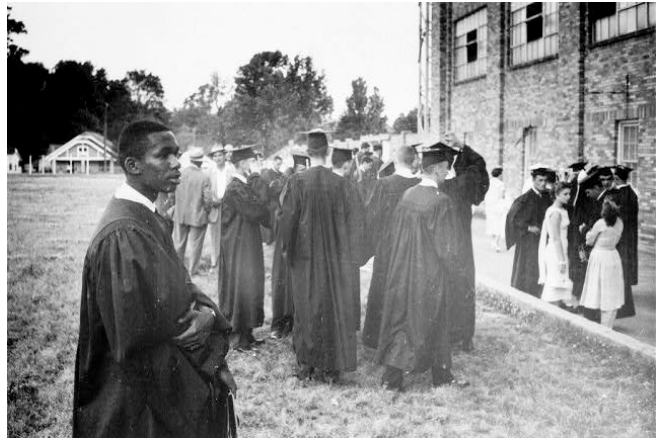
us to finish out that year. And I was motivated personally because I was in the twelfth grade and this was my senior year, and I wanted to complete high school so I could go on to college and continue my education. I had seen people like Rosa Parks and Dr. King and Jackie Robinson. All of them were heroes of mine. Daisy Bates, who was the woman in Little Rock who helped us. All of these were people who encouraged me and kept me motivated.

Ryan: All that you went through at Central High, was there another reason you went there other than to get a good education?

Ernie Green: Well, this is 1957, and I'm sure you studied the Supreme Court decisions on Brown vs. the Board of Education, in which they outlawed segregated education. And this is also two or three years after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Emmett Till murder in Mississippi. All of these things were beginning to occur or had occurred, and I was motivated to not only get a decent education, but to try to improve what I saw were the options for me personally growing up in Little Rock. I didn't particularly like a segregated existence and thought the limits a segregated society put on me didn't allow me to reach my full potential. So, it was about more than education. It was about myself as a person who wanted to have more, and do more, and be able to have a decent job, not one that was prescribed by the color of my skin.

Sam: How do you think the world has changed and what problems do you think we need to work on most now?

Ernie Green: I think the world has changed a great deal. I mean a large number of you were in Washington for the Inauguration so you've seen that change, but what I'd like to see is that we're coming into a world that President Obama will not be an exception, but will be the rule. And whether it is race or gender, whatever the barriers are that we continue to knock them down and that the next governor of California can be a woman or can be of some other ethnic background. All of that has got to occur, and I think you guys are the generation to make this happen.



Erin: After all you have gone through, what was the life lesson for Ernie Green?

Ernie Green: Well, the life lesson I learned was that you need to . . . one, that the difficult decisions are going to be ones in which you generally stand alone or have a few people with you. And hopefully, you are able to stand for a principle and be willing to stick with it. The other life lesson I learned is that I've seen some of the worst behavior of people and don't want to have to repeat that again, and I think we are at a point in time in which we really do have to figure out how to support each other and how to figure out how to live together. It seems to me the



biggest life lesson is that tough decisions are the ones that are worth fighting for, and that's the life lesson I've learned.

TJ: How do use what you've learned in your everyday life?

Ernie Green: Well, as I said earlier, you have principles that you have to be willing to struggle and support and fight for, and that has been something that has helped me in my business life, in my everyday life. Certainly, the Little Rock experience has helped me develop a set of relationships and friendships that I've learned to cherish and have been helpful whether in business or in personal life. And then thirdly, it's the



relationships that I've had with the other eight, the nine of us are a very close and closed group. I said we had a club that formed in September of 1957. It was open for membership on September the 4th, and it closed the same day. And the nine of us are forever linked together. So all of this has been part of the lessons I've learned as I've become an adult.

Graham: Where were you on Inauguration Day?

Ernie Green: I was one of two million people. I was sitting down near the front, and I was there in the seat with my daughter. Other members of my family were scattered around the area, but I was right in front and I saw the president when he took the oath of office with Aretha Franklin and two million of my closest friends.

Graham: What was going through your mind?

Ernie Green: Well, I was very pleased with the fact that President Obama was taking the oath of office, and that I could think that I had something to do with his being there. The most gratifying thing was that as a teenager I was able to be involved in an activity that at them moment I was uncertain whether it was really the right thing and there was doubt by people in my community whether I was doing the right thing. And President Obama affirmed for me that as a teenager I made the right move.

Sophie: When we were in Washington, we asked everyone we met, from Jesse Jackson , to Jamie Foxx, to the guys at Ben’s Chili Bowl what the words “yes, we can” meant to them. What does “yes, we can” mean to you?

Ernie Green: One, is that if you got to Ben’s Chili Bowl, you got some good chili and hot dogs, right? The words “yes, I can” for me mean that you have a plan in your head as to how you want to achieve success, that you’re willing to consider whatever the obstacles are in getting there, and that “Yes, I can!” is the positive affirmation that you’re going to work hard. You might not make it, but you’re going to work very hard at trying to be the best you can, and I think that is what Barack has underscored. There were few people who thought when he first declared that he had a chance to be president, and he proved them wrong. But he proved them wrong not just with bowling over everybody. He proved them wrong by working harder, thinking longer, involving large numbers of other people to help him, and I think that’s the lesson in life that you’ve got to follow.

Sophie: Yeah, I agree with what you said, and also I really think this motto: “Yes, We Can!” ties up with the movie (The Ernest Green Story) that we saw and that you started.

Ernie Green: Well, thank you very much. When I see the president, I’ll tell him that I’m gonna change my movie to *Yes, I Can!*



Harrison: I was wondering, there were so many stories that broke the segregation barrier, from, you know, Jackie Robinson to Rosa Parks. How do you feel your story ranks up there with those greats in our history?

Ernie Green: Well, I don’t know. I’ll leave it to you guys to rank ‘em. But to even be considered in that group of people is a very high honor. I’ll let history determine where it ranks. I only knew I wanted to get the best education Little Rock had to offer, and I’m glad that I stuck by my beliefs and was able to complete that year.

Dan: What do you hope your legacy will be?

Ernie Green: My legacy . . . well, that I was a young guy who believed he was doing the right thing, and that with the support of parents and family succeeded in it, but I

succeeded because I had the critical support. I had people who believed in me, and that hopefully this is the attitude that I can pass on to you that if you've got supporters that believe in you and believe that you can achieve the goals that you set in front of you.

Alright, guys, I'm going to have to run. I wanted to thank you. These were very thoughtful questions, and I wish you the best of luck and that you can get back to Washington for Ben's Chili Bowl. Take care. Good bye.