

Martha Franck Rollins—“Life Journey with God”

Life is a gift—every person, challenge, place, and event is an opportunity for learning and a call to action – a point of courage. What’s important to me is not a snapshot of my outer achievements, but a close-up showing lessons learned and actions taken—for this is who I really am becoming on this life journey with God.

1943-1961—The Small Southern Town Years

Martinsville Va. March 22, 1943-- September 1961

- A small town of less than 20,000, Martinsville, “the sweatshirt capital of the world,” was known for tobacco, moonshine, furniture, textiles and auto racing.
- It was Patrick Henry’s home place-- a place with his fierce spirit of independence, a place that was still fighting the Civil War.
- My class of 1961 Year Book theme was “The Old South” and spoke of happy, lazy days on the plantation being served mint juleps by “attentive Negro servants.”
- I lived on Plantation Road between A.P. Hill and Jeb Stuart Streets on land formerly belonging to one of the Hairston Plantations
- I saw racial inequities—black waiting rooms, no lunch counters, and seats at the back of the bus.
- I was 3rd generation in a textile family. Like Boaz, my father was a landowner who sat at the gates with the elders (actually he probably also built the gates.) And like Boaz both my dad and mom “noticed” and empowered people in need.
- Being Presbyterian, I learned faith as a call. *I will bless you so that you will be a blessing.*

My first multifaceted entrepreneurial “adventure” was converting my brother’s baby stroller into a traveling lemonade and Girl Scout Cookie cart. I babysat, took my product to the customer, made money on lemonade, and won the “most GS cookies sold” award – all in one business venture.

1961-1968 Duke University Years--1965 BA with Distinction, 1968 Master of Arts/Teaching

I was Phi Beta Kappa, an Angier B. Duke Scholar and graduated with Distinction in Religion.

During my first 3 years Duke was all white except for the maids and janitors who silently worked while we were in class. My senior year Duke was integrated and one of the 11 students, Joyce Hobson Johnson, was in my dorm. She runs a similar ministry of reconciliation in Greensboro—The Beloved Community.

I developed the language of relationships in a two-year honors study on I and Thou by Martin Buber. “All Real Living is Meeting.”

I created a candy business to make money for spring break.

1963—Summer at Henry Street Settlement House in New York

- My first black boss and black roommate put a face on the inequities I had seen growing up. After hearing Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., I continued to see racial and economic injustice and now questioned, “Why? And how do I fit into the solution?”
- **That summer, I recognized** that my personal journey was calling me out of the culture and values of “the Old South.”

1970-- The Carillon Civic Association Years

- After college, my husband and I moved to Richmond, Va. – the Capital of the Confederacy. Along Monument Ave., “Southern Generals” faced north to protect their way of life.
- The realtor told me “You don’t want to live there. It’s a **changing neighborhood.**” How changing it was to be for me—life changing. The realtor said, “When the neighborhood goes in 5 years you can get your money out of the house.” We were the first white family to purchase a house since the Carillon area had been “broken.” In retrospect I would call the neighborhood “fixed.” I lay awake the first night imagining our house turned into low-income flats. The next morning I

thought, “I am not going to let a realtor define the future..” So I went out and started meeting my neighbors.

- **Meeting Imogene, Harold and Abbot:** When Imogene Draper, a black neighbor my age, said, “I am from a little town you probably never heard of—Martinsville,” I comprehended at a deeper level the unspoken reality and consequence of centuries of enforced racial separation and inequality. My neighbors Abbot Lambert and Henry Marsh became my “cross cultural mentors” willingly sharing their knowledge and their friendship to me and my husband Randy Rollins
- Banding together with others to form the Carillon Civic Association (CCA) I learned “**the power of we.**” We envisioned a place where “good neighbors come in all colors.” Mobilized by this vision, members of the CCA worked together to encourage our neighborhood and our city into new ways of “thinking, being and doing.”
- The Richmond Times Dispatch had a column that said “**colored houses for sale.**” In the late sixties it dropped the word “colored” but left the separate column as an unspoken tool of segregation. We demanded that the column be removed. The paper resisted. Working with the Justice Department we made the paper remove the column and publish an apology in its place for two months.
- In May 1972 the CCA organized and held its first **Arts in the Park** outdoor art show by The Carillon. The event made the entire city aware of our neighborhood as we fought against *under-the-table steering*. Arts in the Park is a now a thriving summer-long event drawing thousands of people from throughout the city.
- In the 1970’s the Carillon area was selected by National Neighbors (in a **Ford Foundation project**) as one of three successfully integrated neighborhoods in the country – and the only one in the South.
- In 2016 the Carillon neighborhood was given historic status in national registry for its work in civil rights housing and education. **1972-2002 –Business years: Martha’s Mixture – *We sell antiques that are fun to live with!***
- In 1972, in response to my husband’s edict that there was no money for furniture for 5 years, **I thought of a better way.** I borrowed money, rented a building, purchased antiques and told my husband at dinner that night that I was opening an antique shop.
- Within a year I opened a supporting furniture restoration business. In working with many employees I began to witness that *as people restored furniture in the natural, they themselves were being restored in the spirit.*
- **I observed** the economic inequity of very wealthy whites coming in the front door to shop and the very poor blacks coming in the back door trying to make a meager living.
- In working with employees of a temp agency **I began to wonder** how come so many hard working black men did not have regular jobs. While working together I learned that the label “ex-offender” was a barrier to getting jobs. I hired as many as I could and then tucked this awareness away in my mind to ferment for future action.
- In business **I learned** supportive counseling skills, business strategy, responding to problems.
- During those years, **I determined** that I wanted to make a difference by using this experience to work for social change.

2002—2012 Founding Boaz & Ruth: responding to our systemic problems of race and class.

In looking back, I am awed by how each challenge solved and lesson learned – networking, tending grass roots, developing entrepreneurial ventures, persevering over obstacles – enabled me to cast a vision, gather supporters, and raise the funds to found Boaz & Ruth in January of 2002 at age 59. I opened the B&R training store in December 2002 with a staff of 2. The reentry-training program began in February 2003 with 7 trainees. By 2005, we had added a second store, a sandwich store, catering, repair and restoration, home repair, furniture moving, and eBay sales. December 2007 Firehouse 15 Cafe opens as well as Sunny Days family thrift clothing.

2014- Present—Co-founder with Danita Rountree Green of Coming To The Table –Richmond,

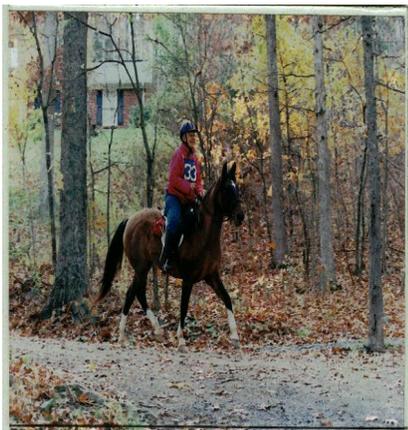
We work to heal the wounds of the legacy of slavery and the many forms of racism and inequity it has spawned by facing truth in history, by connecting consistently and intentionally across racial lines, by taking steps to heal both present wounds and historical trauma and by taking actions to change systems and structures. CTTT-RVA has now become the largest local Coming To The Table group in the country.

2019—Helped CTTT-RVA to incorporate, to obtain 501c3 nonprofit status and to receive a \$1 to \$1 \$250,000 challenge pledge as an intentional reparational act from a descendant of Virginia planters.

Personal/Professional Awards

- [Virginia Women in History Award](#)—2017
- Richmond Times Dispatch Hall of Fame Award—2015
- Resolution of Commendation from Virginia Legislator 2013
- Center for Inclusive Communities Humanitarian Award 2012
- National Association of Women Business Owners Community Service Award-2011
- Invited to the White House in 2009 to represent Boaz & Ruth as one of 100 nonprofits recognized for approaching national problems in innovative ways
- Winner of John Jasper Award for Contribution to African American Community-2007
- Distinguished Retail Merchant of the Year Award—December 2007
- One of 15 winners of national Purpose Prize award for Innovation—September 2006
- YWCA Outstanding woman of the Year in Religion Award—2006
- Heritage community Service Award presented by City Council—2006
- Lifetime Member of Presbyterian Christian Women 2005.
- Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Epsilon Chapter for Outstanding Service to Richmond 2005.
- American Business Women’s Association as the 2004 Richmond STAR for outstanding achievement in Small Business Ownership 2004
- National Association of Women Business Owners Entrepreneur of the Year Award—2001
- Home Selected to be on Virginia Historic Garden Tour—1996 and 2005 (Hostesses for the tour were graduates, neighbors, trainees from Boaz & Ruth)
- Martha & Randy’s home featured on HGTV—2002
- Martha’s Mixture selected as “Best Antique Shop in Richmond”—1990-2002

Much of What I learned about life came from riding horses.



To finish is to win
Look Beyond the Jump
Envision the Mountaintop
Persist through the brush
Trust in the dark
Say “no” to fear
Ride with consistent contact
Small stresses produce endurance for the long ride

