

The Power of One

by Tom Kohler

It is a Sunday afternoon, a few hours before the Jewish New Year begins. A small group of people of varying ages, races and backgrounds gather in an interior room at the May Street YMCA.

We have come together to celebrate the 95th birthday of Miss Addie Reeves, a woman whose strength, love and generosity have touched each person in the room.

We are her disciples. Even though we do not all know each other, we are immediately linked because of this woman. She belongs to all of us—by action, involvement and leadership.

Ms. Reeves takes a seat at a table laden with casseroles, and cakes, each made with love and brought for the celebration. Next to her sits Waddie Welcome, a man with piercing eyes. He is the reason many of us have had the privilege of knowing Ms. Reeves. Ms. Reeves and Mr. Welcome have known each other for more than 50 years. Mr. Welcome has needed “someone to worry over him” since his mother died 40 years ago, and that is what Ms. Reeves has done.

The program for this day honoring Ms. Reeves is simple. We will share prayers, songs, stories and food. The day starts slowly as many of the members of Ms. Reeves’ church are involved in a program at a neighboring church. The group grows from a few to 30 by the time the program begins.

There are prayers and songs. The prayer asks for God’s blessing. The song proclaims God’s love. The words flow from the heart. Nothing is rehearsed. Two men, one from the church and one from the disciples, stand to praise Ms. Reeves. Each speaks of her kindness, sense of family, outstanding cooking and outstretched hands. As these men tell their stories, little outbreaks of knowing laughter punctuate the room. The master of ceremonies asks for words from others.

A man, a stranger to us, stands. He has heard of this gathering by simple chance. He and his family made sure to come. He lived across the

street from Ms. Reeves in Yamacraw Village. She set a place for him at her table every night, a plate and a cup turned over, waiting for him to stop by, turn it upright and share dinner. She is his “second mama.” Ms. Reeves would sometimes come get him when his mama was “cutting his behind.” He also tells us that Ms. Reeves would dress up in costume every Halloween and “scare the pants off the children.” That was more than 40 years ago, and he is now 48.

Another raises her hand. This woman tells how years ago Ms. Reeves took her around to show her how to look after sick people. Over the years, Ms. Reeves has looked after hundreds of people. She does this in many ways: over the telephone, calling to check on friends in ill health; by visits; or by moving into a person’s home and nursing him or her back to health.

Another woman tells of taking this way of caring into the community and her church. Using Ms. Reeves’ example, she started a mission society in her church. Many acts of responsibility and kindness can be traced to Ms. Addie Reeves.

A prayer is offered, the buffet line forms and the food is shared. Two young people, moved by what has been said, speak with Ms. Reeves and Mr. Welcome. They have had enough of seeing Mr. Welcome in his room at the nursing home. They know he needs a place to go. They know he is 82 years old and that his deep cry has been to leave the loveless and careless confines of the nursing home. They offer their home.

The Power of One . . . over time . . . by example . . . in a thousand quiet ways. . . to live the life of faith and committed action . . . to do small things with one person . . . and to allow others to grow braver and stronger by watching. The Power of One.

What power to do good do we all have? Can we do it as quietly, gently and elegantly as this woman? That is hard to know.

Can we do it? That is easier to know.