



(left to right) Margie Britt, Chuck Saylor, and Narvie Harris

To honor the 40th anniversary of the unification of the National PTA and the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT), *Our Children* was honored to speak with a veteran PTA leader who was active at the time these two great organizations became one. Margie Britt, a proud Georgian and a former Georgia PTA President, has seen a lot of changes since she first joined PTA in 1948. But for her the message has remained the same since her earliest days and before: doing what's best for all of the children of our nation.

Meet Margie Britt

Our Children: Since you were in a leadership position at the time of unification, we'd love to hear your reminiscences of how it happened and about the people who moved for this historic event.

Margie Britt: It started with unification at the national level, which I think was an appropriate place for it to be. There were seven states that had existing state PTA branches that were connected to the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT). Pearl Price, the National PTA President, and Clara Gay, the NCCPT President, signed the document for unification at the American Hotel in Atlanta.

OC: Did you know these two women?

MB: Yes. I knew Clara Gay. She was from Athens, Georgia, and was a very funny lady and a wonderful person to work with. Pearl was one of the most gracious people I have ever known. You know that when some people get to a point higher up, they

don't have the time of day for you. Pearl, regardless of whether she knew your name or not, was always cordial and always had time for you.

OC: Separate state organizations also merged, did they not?

MB: Yes. In my state, a joint committee headed by Doris Hart, President of the Georgia PTA, and Narvie Harris, President of the Georgia Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers, started making plans. It seems the feeling of the Colored Congress was that they had gone as far as they could go in influencing lawmakers and wanted more support in achieving their goals. We were also having trouble in the South integrating schools. The organizations felt that it would be better all the way around if they could unite.

We had a very good relationship between both state congresses. We had to iron out a few things, but I feel like we had a lot of camaraderie with each other. We wanted the same things for all

of the children. I feel that we had a lot of feeling for one another and understanding. Some of the people who were in the Colored Congress came on our board and worked with us. It was a good situation and helped the schools a lot.

Narvie Harris really played a big part. We have a school named for her in DeKalb County. Narvie Harris was a go-getter and a storyteller. She wanted the Colored Congress to be sure that they got their recognition, but after we were together, it was not one of those things that she tried to force. A lot of that had to do with her being an educator, and she was just a wonderful person. She wanted the best for everyone.

OC: How did you become involved with PTA?

MB: I was born and raised in Columbus, Georgia, where my husband and I lived and started our family. Of course, like everybody else, when my first daughter went into kindergarten, I started off as a room mother. Then I was asked if I would be president of the elementary PTA, and I was kind of like bitten by the bug. I served as council president of Muscogee County. In 1959, my husband was transferred to Atlanta, and it seems word got out about what I had done in Columbus. I became president of the DeKalb County Council. I was asked to come on the Board of Managers as Council Chairman. I was also Secretary and Vice President of the Board, and helped with conventions. In 1973, my good friend Helen Neal was on the nominating committee and wanted to know if I would serve at the state level. I served as Georgia PTA president from 1973 to 1975.

I also served on the Membership Committee on the National Board and met a lot of wonderful people from all over the country. My dearest friend, Lillie Herndon, who just passed away, was a great leader as National PTA President. When we finished our

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100th anniversary of Georgia PTA, I retired, but they keep calling me back.

OC: What are some of the accomplishments you look back on with satisfaction?

MB: When my third child came along, I found out that DeKalb County didn't have kindergarten. Well, that set me afire. I had a lot of good friends in our General Assembly who'd say, "Oh my stars, there comes that kindergarten lady again." I was determined that there would be statewide kindergartens. Georgia got statewide kindergartens in the mid 1970s.

That experience got me to thinking. We started with a small group that would go to the Capital and meet with our legislators, but we needed to do something else. So we instigated PTA Day at the Capital. It's held as close to Founders Day as we can. It's modeled on the National PTA Legislative Conference.

OC: What kind of challenges do you think PTA faces going forward?

MB: Membership has been down because of the times, people losing their jobs and can't do for PTA because they have to put food on the table. And I feel that we have a few people who really are not dedicated to the cause, who think it's an opportunity that'll look good on their resume. That distresses me when I see that.

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The thing I like to get across is that you're not doing this just for your child, you're doing this for all the children. You get into it for your child, but you've got to want the best for all of them. I'm not saying people have forgotten it, but sometimes people say "I want that for my child or my school" but don't think about a child in a school system that doesn't have the money. We have to repeat the message over and over.

OC: What does having been a part of PTA mean to you personally?

MB: As my late husband used to say, he gave the best years of his wife to PTA. I couldn't have done it without him. If I had to go to Chicago for a meeting, he was my babysitter. Daddy was the breadwinner, but when he came home, he was willing to stay and look after the girls. Some of the men couldn't have cared less about PTA, but now I think it's changed all the way around. I'm really glad men are getting more involved in PTA and taking leadership roles. We have had a number of men as presidents of the Georgia PTA.

I would not take anything in this world for the experience and the wonderful people I met in my days with PTA and still keep up with a lot of them. It's a godsend to me. I feel so fortunate that I have the privilege to do the things I have done in the state of Georgia and in the nation. **OC**