



An Unintentional American Legend

In a story that shows the power of character, Oseola McCarty became something of an American legend in 1995.

Until that year, she had lived in obscurity in the Deep South. She dropped out of school in the sixth grade to help care for an ailing family member and to help her mother with the laundry. After a time she began to do laundry for the business people in the town of Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for fifty cents a load, which amounted to one week of laundry for a family. That's not a lot of money, but Oseola was thrifty and content, and after paying bills each week she deposited what was left in a savings account at the bank.

Year after year Oseola lived a quiet life of integrity. She cared for her grandmother, her aunt, and her mother. She traveled outside of Mississippi only once. She never had an education beyond the sixth grade. She read her Bible each day, knelt each night to pray. She regularly attended Church. She worked and saved and then when she was eighty-six years old, the banker sat down with her to talk about what she wanted to do with the money in her savings account should she die. To her astonishment, she learned she had a quarter of a million dollars in the bank.

Oseola had lived simply in the past, and she wasn't about to change. She decided to donate some of her money to help other African Americans get what she had to do without: an education. So in the summer of 1995 Oseola quietly gave \$150,000 to a scholarship fund at the University of Southern Mississippi, not asking that a single brick be named in her honor.

But word of her gift became known, and Oseola's name soon had greater prominence than if the university had named every building on campus after her. She was invited to appear on a spate of TV programs, including interviews with Barbara Walters, Good Morning America, and each of the major network news programs. She received numerous honors, including a trip to the White House for the Presidential Citizenship Award and a stop at Harvard for an honorary doctorate of humane letters. Her story was featured on the front page of the New York Times, in Ebony, Jet, People, Guideposts, Christian Reader, and Glamour. She traveled from one end of the country to another to be honored by people who longed to meet the modern-day saint.

Moral

Oseola McCarty proves that greatness is measured not by birth or wealth or fame, but by Character. We all have the resources to be great for we all can give of ourselves.

Questions

1. What did you learn about Character from Oseola's Story?
2. Why do you think her story had such an impact on others?
3. Who is someone you can help in the next 24 hours without asking for anything in return?