

Rosenwald Park Campaign A Tribute to Congressman John Lewis

Creating the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park



"All the other pleasures of life seem to wear out, but the pleasure of helping others in distress never does."
JULIUS ROSENWALD



WE'VE LOST AN AMERICAN HERO

Near midnight on July 17, the news flashed across the world that Congressman John Lewis had died from pancreatic cancer. Just as he fought courageously and with hope for civil rights and reconciliation for so many years, he fought this dread disease. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, John Lewis never, never, never gave up.

It was indeed a sad day for America as John Lewis was a true American hero.

In March 2019 several Rosenwald Park Campaign representatives met with Congressman Lewis to enlist his support for the planned Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools Act. The subject was personal for him – his first school was Dunn's Chapel Elementary School in Pike County, Alabama, a Rosenwald school, the same school attended by his mother.

In his book "Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement," Lewis recounted some of his experiences at the school:

"I loved school, loved everything about it, no matter how good or bad I was at it ... some of my sweetest memories are of standing in front of my classmates, having finished reciting a poem or reading a short essay, and hearing my teacher tell me I had done a good job... Most of all though, I loved reading, especially about real people and the real world. Biographies were my favorite ... By the time I was in third grade, I had learned that there were actually black people out there who had made their mark on the world – Booker T. Washington, Joe Louis, Mary McCloud Bethune, George Washington Carver."

He also shared anecdotes during the meeting. As we were leaving, the last thing he said was "One always has to have hope." And when the legislation was introduced in June 2019, Congressman Lewis was among the first co-sponsors in the House.

John Lewis received many honors for his actions for freedom and equality for all. At the 2011 Medal of Freedom award ceremony, President Obama said:

"Generations from now, when parents teach their children what is meant by courage, the story of John Lewis will come to mind – an American who knew that change could not wait for some other person or some other time; whose life is a lesson in the fierce urgency of now."

Upon receiving the Elie Wiesel Award from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2016, Lewis said:

"We didn't give up. We didn't give in. We kept the faith. . . we must never hate, for hate is too heavy a burden to bear."

In making his meaningful mark upon the world John Lewis kept the faith and retained hope; the nation has been enriched by his life.



Meeting with Congressman Lewis on Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools legislation
Photo courtesy of Byron Buck

KEEP THE FAITH

Thirteen summers ago I was a volunteer in a program that gave shelter in a church to families experiencing temporary homelessness. Among our guests were a woman and her ten-year-old son named Zach. One evening, another volunteer gave Zach a biography of Congressman John Lewis, written for young people. It turned out that another volunteer had contacts in Lewis's office, and so we were able to arrange for us to make a visit there.

The next thing I knew Zach and I were in the Congressman's office, and he and Zach were deep in conversation. What I had thought would be a ten-minute photo-op turned into an hour-long visit. John Lewis asked Zach what he was interested in, and the two had a long talk about basketball. They talked about school and hard work and then went on a tour of the office, which was packed with memorabilia of the Civil Rights movement.

When it came time for us to leave, we asked the Congressman if he would sign Zach's book, *John Lewis in the Lead, A Story of the Civil Rights Movement*. On the book's first page Lewis wrote "Keep the Faith," and signed his name. Later, over lunch, I asked Zach what he thought that meant. Keep the Faith. He paused a moment, then said, a bit tentatively, "Never give up?" Yes, I said. That's it. Never give up.

John Lewis never gave up! Especially during this difficult summer of isolation and unrest, we all need to hear those words anew.

Thank you, John Lewis, for encouraging America.

Stephanie Deutsch



Congressman John Lewis explaining a historic event to Zach.
Photo courtesy of Stephanie Deutsch

For more information visit
<https://www.rosenwaldpark.org>

Please submit your ideas and recommendations to
info@rosenwaldpark.org