

# Generations of Missouri

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## St. Louis Arch Chapter Seven

Dorothy, age 45 & Barbara, age 18 | 1964

Barbara watched men scaling the construction ladder. They climbed high above the Mississippi River. Only halfway built, the Gateway Arch's legs stood 300 feet above the ground. She clutched her homemade protest sign which read NO JOBS, NO ARCH.

Barbara had lived in St. Louis for her entire life. But it was at St. Louis University that she learned about the city's history of racial inequality. While attending SLU, she'd seen historically black neighborhoods fall into disrepair. White friends and neighbors were moving west to the suburbs. She had been attending meetings of a group that was acting on some of these issues, the Congress of Racial Equality or CORE.

Today's protest was taking place on the construction grounds of the Gateway Arch to address issues of

racial inequality surrounding its construction. For most of Barbara's life, people had talked about the plans for the Arch, a monument dedicated to the westward expansion of the United States. The Arch would be a feature of the St. Louis skyline. It was fascinating to watch workers stack shiny blocks of steel, one atop the

other, implementing architect Eero Saarinen's elegant design. This massive project employed many people, yet very few were Black. CORE's protest centered around this issue. She and friends marched through the construction grounds carrying their signs and chanting, "Skilled jobs now! Skilled jobs now!"

Suddenly two of CORE's leaders, Percy Green and Richard Daly, began climbing the Arch's construction ladder! Barbara held her breath in the July heat as they made their way skyward. The protest was taking place at noon while the construction workers were on their lunch breaks. This gave Percy and Richard access to the ladder. Police officers gathered at the base of the construction elevator while deciding what to do.

"Will they stay up there all day," Barbara asked. "What's their plan?"

"They're making a point, they'll come down in a few hours," someone answered.

Three sweltering hours later, the men did come down. When they reached the ground, the two men lay down. This passive resistance move made it necessary for police officers to carry them.

"I read in the newspaper that Richard got 30 days in jail and Percy is out on bond," Barbara told her roommate, Molly, the next day.

"I can't believe you saw them climbing the Arch. That's crazy!" Molly answered.

Barbara was proud of witnessing and making history. "Sometimes you've got to do something crazy to get things done." She nodded at the poster board and paint.

"Percy's protesting tomorrow at the Old Court House," Barbara said. "Care to join?"

Molly smiled and the two women began to paint.



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