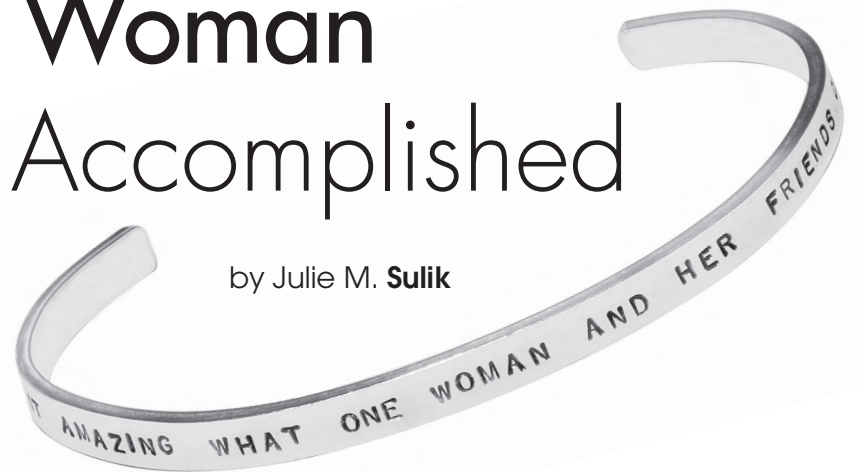


What One Woman and Her Friends Accomplished

by Julie M. Sulik



A timeless ability women share is our courage to speak our dreams to trusted friends, oftentimes engendering their support to make those dreams come true. One Richmond woman's story is an inspiring testament to the power of women's way of networking through friendship.

Lucy Goode Brooks was a working parent who, one day, saw her oldest daughter, 17-year-old Margaret Ann, leave for work, never to return.

Tragically, Margaret Ann had been taken. But no MISSING posters were distributed and no search parties went looking for her. In fact, she was considered a criminal with a dangerous ability: she could read and write—skills her mother, Lucy, had taught her in secret.

No officers of the law were concerned with this missing person, because Lucy Goode Brooks, her husband, Albert Royal Brooks, and their nine children were slaves.

Before Margaret Ann's disappearance, Lucy and Albert had accomplished a miracle, uncommon for slaves—they had kept their family together.

When her master had died, Lucy had taken her children by the hand and marched down to the tobacco warehouses—the preserved cobblestone streets we know as Shockoe Slip. She had searched desperately for "friendly buyers" who would agree to purchase the children, put them to work, but allow them to live with their family.

Lucy succeeded in finding such buyers. It was the one master who broke his word—selling Margaret Ann away—that broke Lucy's heart. The family never saw Margaret Ann again, learning she died two years later in Tennessee.

When the Civil War ended in 1865, Richmond was the destination for droves of former slaves—many of them children. Our city was one of the nation's largest slave trade centers, second only to New Orleans. This is where African Americans experienced the cruelties of the auction block, where they were torn from their families. This is where they returned in the hopes of reuniting.

Many of the children arrived only to discover they were orphans. Lucy's heart went out to these little ones. She did what many women do when they see a need in their community. She went to her friends. As leader of the Ladies Sewing Circle for Charitable Work, Lucy convinced her circle that an orphanage was needed.

With the backing of the local Quaker Society of Friends, Lucy's group petitioned Richmond City Council for a deed to a plot of land. In 1871, at the corner of Charity and Saint Paul streets, the doors of the Friends Asylum for Colored Orphans opened.

Some 137 years later, the legacy of Lucy and her circle continues as FRIENDS Association for Children. Today, FRIENDS is a three-center, multi-service agency serving children and their families in



Two of Lucy's descendants with a picture of their great grandmother, Lucy Goode Brooks: Dr. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (left), chairwoman of the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University and Retired Air Force Brigadier General Elmer T. Brooks.



Julie M. Sulik is freelance writer and graphic designer who serves FRIENDS Association for Children as the Communications Coordinator. She fell in love with the story of Lucy Goode Brooks at a time in her life when she was desperately searching for inspiration.

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Lucy Goode Brooks, with post-Civil War orphans and the orphanage

some of Richmond's most opportunity-challenged neighborhoods.

Serving children six weeks old to adults, FRIENDS offers developmental daycare, youth enrichment, family service support and adult leadership and career advancement. FRIENDS also began a comprehensive music education and performing arts program in 2007.

The mission of FRIENDS is to encourage each individual served to reach his or her full potential for success in life and to give to the community.

As Executive Director John C. Purnell, Jr. says, "Every time a child at FRIENDS succeeds against the odds, we honor the legacy of Lucy Goode Brooks."

Lucy, like so many women before her and after, overcame her losses, and, with the help of her friends, gave birth to something new. Isn't it amazing what one woman and her friends can do? **V**

"ISN'T IT AMAZING
WHAT ONE WOMAN
AND HER FRIENDS
CAN DO?"



The Lucy bracelet supports the work of **FRIENDS Association for Children**, a nonprofit child and family agency that has served the Richmond, Virginia community since 1871.

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