

Let's sing a song of community

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By Leesa Jones

Did you ever get a song stuck in your head and it seems to play constantly on repeat? It so happened that a song from my long ago came to visit me and stayed for a couple of days. I found myself singing "You sing a song and I'll sing a song, and we'll sing a song together." That's a song I taught to preschoolers 30 years ago in a Philadelphia Friends ('Quaker') School. Now I wouldn't have minded if my favorite Dooby Brothers number one hit 'What A Fool Believes,' or the Isley Brothers "Who's That Lady" got stuck in my head. But it was Ella Jenkins time honored, multi-generational best seller 'You Sing A Song' kept me company for a while.

Ella Jenkins (born 1924) has been called the 'First Lady of Children's Folk Songs. Her album of multicultural children's songs are the most popular of the Smithsonian's Folkways releases. Her music incorporated the respect for all children's languages, cultures and nationalities. She said about her most well-known song, 'You Sing A Song' "that music at its essence was about human communication and relationships." Thinking on those things, I feel the same way about history. History offers us a chance to build positive human communication and relationships if we let it.

Maybe that's why the memories of that song came back to me as I worked on a project for the Building Integrated Communities (BIC) Initiative. The City of **Washington**, the Harbor District Market Alliance and the **Washington** Waterfront Underground Railroad Museum are collaborating it. BIC is a community planning and leadership initiative that partners with North Carolina local government to create inclusive practices and policies for residents born in other countries. A part of the project will sponsor a series of community get togethers which will honor Latin/Hispanic/Mexican heritage and history in **Washington** this weekend.

My passion and love for history is birthed in the fact we are all should be good stewards of our nation's history. From history we can learn to be better people and understand that our history is the story of people who all want the same things; freedom, a safe place to live and to raise our families. A place to educate our children, to enjoy a peaceful life, and to hopefully contribute to the country we are blessed to live in. No, we're not a perfect country with a perfect history, but with all of our flaws I personally would choose no other place to live.

As I want to be a good steward of history, my desire is to see all of **Washington**/Beaufort County's history be given a place at the table, not just certain parts of it. I grew up during segregation and I know what history was left out of the books I read in school. So many ethnic groups have made valuable contributions to **Washington**/Beaufort County's growth, economic prosperity, education, religion and cultural expansion. The Latino/Hispanic/Mexican heritage is strong in our Beaufort County community. The reason I was asked to be part of the BIC Initiative is because of the historical work I do and can document the history of many groups of people coming to **Washington**.

Please come and join us Saturday, April 16 from 2-5 p.m. at Mother of Mercy School Community Room for a community story time, games for adults and children and food. And let's sing a song of unity together.

Leesa Jones is a **Washington** native and the co-founder and co-executive director of the **Washington** Waterfront Underground Railroad Museum.