On April 10, 2015, Wayne State University held a special ceremony to posthumously award the honorary Doctor of Laws degree, *honoris causa*, to Viola Fauver Gregg Liuzzo for her work as a civil rights activist, for which she ultimately sacrificed her life. As a tribute to Liuzzo’s legacy and contributions to social justice, the university has established the Viola Liuzzo Scholarship Fund in the College of Nursing.

Supporting the Viola Liuzzo Scholarship Fund

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Photo courtesy of Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University
Remembering Viola Liuzzo

In March 1965, Viola Gregg Liuzzo traveled to Selma, Alabama in response to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s request for support of a voter registration drive in that state. On March 25, after the last of three protest marches held that month, Liuzzo was shot and killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan on Highway 80 outside of Selma while she helped transport marchers home.

Liuzzo's decision to go to Alabama was driven in part by the events in Selma on March 7, 1965, known as Bloody Sunday. She watched the brutal assault on protesters in a news broadcast and felt compelled to join the fight for civil rights. Politically and socially active, Liuzzo was a member of the Detroit branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She knew firsthand about the racial injustices that African Americans often suffered in the south, having spent part of her youth in Tennessee and Georgia.

At age 39, married, white and the mother of five, Liuzzo did not fit the typical profile of a civil rights activist. While this is partly why she did not draw the same kind of media attention that other civil rights advocates received, her murder and the events surrounding it paved the way for the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Shortly before her death, Liuzzo returned to school, enrolling part-time in the College of Nursing at Wayne State University. It is perhaps not surprising that Liuzzo sought education in a field that often attracts those who want to serve humanity. Five decades after her death, Liuzzo's memory continues to inspire the Wayne State community because she perfectly embodied Dr. King's exhortation that “everyone can be great because everyone can serve.”

How You Can Help

By contributing to the Viola Liuzzo Scholarship Fund, you support first-generation undergraduate nursing students who demonstrate financial need and a commitment to giving back to the community. Scholarship support allows these students to focus on their studies and reduces the burden of student loan debt.

Checks can be made out to Wayne State University with "Viola Liuzzo Scholarship" noted in the memo line.

Please mail checks to: Wayne State University College of Nursing | 5557 Cass Avenue | Detroit, MI 48202

Or you can give online by visiting go.wayne.edu/give-nursing and selecting the Viola Liuzzo Scholarship. If you have any questions, please contact the College of Nursing at 313-577-6967. Thank you for your support.