

Delores

By: Barely Functioning Writer

“Segregation is the adultery of an illicit intercourse between injustice and immorality.” - Martin Luther King Jr.

Delores Brown was born in 1944 in Brooklyn, New York. She was the fourth child in a family of 10. She had lived in Brooklyn her whole life and went to school there as well. Schools in Brooklyn at that time were quite diverse. Students came in all different colors, shapes, and sizes. In 1951, when Delores was seven, her parents decided to send her to live with grandparents on her dad's side. They sent Delores and her sisters Carol, Eva, and Gene in July to Jamestown, South Carolina. Her parents wanted to buy a new house because they lived in a tenement, so they sent the four sisters away so they could save money. Delores's mother came with them for the ride to South Carolina. Delores's Uncle Samson had an old Cadillac and said he would drive them there. It was a 12 hour journey with none of the modern technologies we have today to keep them entertained. Delores mother had packed fried chicken, white sliced wonder bread, a thermos with water, and apples. She packed all this food because the further south they got they were no longer allowed to eat in the rest stop restaurants due to the segregation. Many restaurants once only allowed black customers to order take-out (Shah). The rest stops were white only and the same went for the bathrooms. Delores was not aware of these rules because she was too young to understand.

Delores, her mom, and her sisters arrived in South Carolina just after the 4th of July. Her mom stayed for a few days, but left with her brother to go visit her parents who lived sixty miles north and then went back to New York. Once settled down, Delores experienced what most people call culture shock. Culture shock is the feeling of uncertainty, confusion, or anxiety that people experience when visiting, doing business in, or living in a society that is different from their own. (Segal) The differences between Brooklyn and Jamestown seemed endless. The first difference was that her grandparents' house was also a farm with no electricity. The farm had cows, pigs, 2 horses, a mule, and 2-3 dogs that stayed outside. Delores liked this part of her grandparents house because she was fond of animals. Everyone who lived at her grandparents had to lend a hand on the farm. If you wanted to live there, you had to work. Her grandparents spoke English, but it was Gullah English, so she couldn't understand them most of the time. a creole language spoken by the Gullah people (also called "Geechees" within the community), an African-American population living in coastal regions of South Carolina (Wikipedia) . This was also the first place she had ever lived without indoor plumbing. There was only an outhouse, which she despised. Also, outside of school and work, everyone would walk around barefoot because it was “too hot for shoes”. The ground was mostly sand as well, so the sand would get into your shoes causing irritation. Though all these were unusual to her, she would not learn of the biggest difference until school started in August.

Delores's school (school name unknown) was an old building made from boards, and it was completely segregated. All the teachers and students were black while white kids went to their own school. South Carolina districts believed that the education of African Americans was unimportant. The state had few African Americans schools that went past 10th grade. Delores's school only went to the 7th grade. While she was in South Carolina, the court case Briggs v. Elliott was going on. "Immediately cease discriminating against Negro children of public school

age in said district and county and immediately make available...educational advantages and facilities equal in all respects to that which is being provided for whites..."(Harry Briggs). Due to Briggs v. Elliott, South Carolina implemented the idea of separate but equal though it did not seem to reach the small town of Jamestown. The school had old style desks and a stove that burned wood for heat. The classrooms were also shared due to the school being so small. The 3rd and 6th grade shared a classroom and 1st and 2nd grade shared a classroom. During this time the majority of Black schools had a situation similar to this due to the fact that they were not given any funding. In North Carolina, students at Adkin High School, a segregated black school, realized the extreme inequality between their school and the white school. John Dudley, a former student recounts how his classmates and himself dealt with this injustice, "So, that week, leading to Monday, we strategized. And we had everybody on board, 720 students. We told them not to tell your parents or your teacher what's going on. And do you believe to this day, 2013, nobody has ever told me that an adult knew what was going on." They decided on a coded phrase that was read during morning announcements. Every student in the school walked out, picked up placards that had been made in advance, and marched downtown to protest. The students refused to go back to school for a week, and eighteen months later, Adkin High School was renovated and given a brand-new gymnasium (Library of Congress). Each grade didn't have that many students, so they just split the room in half. The school also did not have indoor plumbing, but had outhouses. Students were not allowed to go to the bathroom alone though. The teacher would line everybody and take them out to where the outhouses were located. The students would then use the 2-seater outhouse that had 2 partition between the holes in the boarded bench seat. She hated that.

Delores was not so much bothered by segregation, but more by the rules and people at the school. Gene and Delores were both in 3rd grade while Eva was in 6th grade and Carol was in 8th. She also went to school with many distant cousins of hers. There were people in the school as old as 20 years old in 8th grade. Delores started school early so she was the youngest in her class straight through her whole school career. Delores's teacher was named Mrs. Price. Mrs. Price had a fair complexion, grey hair, and was "one mean old bitch." During class one day, Mrs. Price had asked a math question and Delores knew the answer so she raised her hand. Mrs. Price did not choose her, but chose a student who got the answer wrong. Mrs. Price decided to call on another student for the answer and once again Delores raised her hand. Once again, Mrs. Price didn't choose her. When she wasn't chosen again, Delores sucked her teeth out of annoyance. Her cousin, Vonzella, heard this and decided to tell the teacher. Mrs. Price proceeded to call Delores up to the front of the class because she felt as though she had been disrespected. Delores did not realize she did anything wrong, which seemed to be another change between the south and the city; another cause of culture shock. Culture shock can arise from an individual's unfamiliarity with local customs, language, and acceptable behavior (Segal). As a matter of fact, Delores didn't even realize she had sucked her teeth. Mrs. Price asked if what Vonzella had said was true, and Delores denied the accusation. Mrs. Price told her to hold out her hand and Delores did. Mrs. Price then hit her hand with a green switch. Delores yelled, cried, and snatched her hand back. Mrs. Price told her to put her hand back out and Delores screamed "No!" and refused to put her hand back out. Mrs. Price called a 6th grade boy to force her hand out, and Mrs. Price

hit her two more times. Corporal punishment was an important part of the educational experience of many children educated during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Taylor). Till this day, corporal punishment is technically legal in all 50 states, but currently only 19 states allow this type of punishment in schools (Connor). Many people believe that corporal punishment will deter children from misbehaving out of fear of being hit, but according to the National Commission for Protection of Children Rights, “Everyone needs discipline, particularly self-discipline. But corporal punishment is not a form of inculcating discipline. Research has consistently shown that that it impedes the attainment of respect for discipline. It rarely motivates children to act differently, because it does not bring an understanding of what they ought to be doing nor does it offer any kind of reward for being good.” Her sister, Eva, tried to come to her defense, but was threatened with the same thing. She returned to her desk and cried. Her hand was red and swollen. Her grandmother had to put some ointment on it. She also developed a fever that night and couldn’t go to school the next day. When it was time to return to school, her grandfather took her to school in the wagon to talk to Mrs. Price. He told her “not to hit his grandchildren because they are from the city and they don’t know it’s bad manners to suck your teeth.” Delores didn’t raise her hand ever again that year. Another time, Mrs. Price asked her to spell the word “sit”, but Delores heard “she”. So she started, but someone said “she said sit” and so Delores spelled out “Sh-it”. Mrs. Price tried to hit her again even after what her grandfather said. “What a nasty bitch she was,” Delores said when asked about her teacher this year in November; 68 years after the experience.

Delores hated going to school with older boys. There were 3 boys aged 12-15 in her 3rd grade class. They were allowed to leave school at noon to work on their fathers farms until the reaping season was over. Also kids were allowed to leave school to help pick cotton and tobacco. Most of the boys smoked. She also didn’t have a very vivid social life in South Carolina saying, “I didn’t make any lasting friends except for the classmates that also happened to be distant cousins who I’m still in touch with several times a year.” Though Delores hated the school, she enjoyed the change in pace from the city. She felt as though because her grandparents lived on a farm and because she had such a vivid imagination it was like living “in a dreamland.” Her grandfather would tell ghost stories to keep unwanted host visitors off the front porch. She liked her grandparents house, reminiscing about the house she said “Their room smelled of vanilla, cinnamon, and tobacco smoke.” She also had never seen a woman smokes a pipe, but her grandmother did. Her grandmother also had two kitchens. The first kitchen was for cooking regular food and her grandmother cooked using wood. The second kitchen was at the very back of the house and her grandmother would prepare the meat and cleaning. Delores at the time was too short to see what her grandmother was doing in the kitchen, so her grandmother got her a stool to sit on so she could watch her cook. When she left to go back to the city, she wouldn’t see her grandparents again for another five years. They both passed away by the time she was 16. Delores didn’t like going to a segregated schools because, “The teacher was so mean, the books weren’t good, we had to walk to get to school and it was chilly in the mornings. We had to carry our lunches and most of the time it was fruit or a sandwich.” When she returned to New York for 4th grade she struggled because the curriculum in New York was much higher than in South Carolina. She had to work very hard to catch up with the rest of classmates. She hated this

because she had always been at the top of her class. One year in South Carolina and suddenly she was at the bottom of her class. Despite that, she was relieved to be back home. She said, “That one year in South Carolina was the worst year of my life.”