



Video Story Transcript

A CHILD'S EYE VIEW

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q78BjV2lyK0>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

My name is Cynthia Changaris. I was born in 1948 in Charlotte, North Carolina in the deeply segregated South. And I have some memories from that childhood that I wanted to share with you today. One of my earliest memories, I was so excited because mother was taking me across the town of Charlotte by bus. I had never ridden the bus. And I know how short I was because when we sat down in those two front seats that face each other, my old feet didn't reach the floor. I could kick the bus; you know, make good noise, which mother didn't like. And I saw people getting on the bus and going to the back. And every time I saw someone get on the bus and go to the back, it was someone who was a black person and I said, "Mama, why do they get to sit in the back? I want to sit in the back."

She said, "Shh! I don't agree with it. Just hush!"

And a man overheard my conversation and he said, "Ma'am, I'll take her to the back of the bus if you want me to." So, I took his hand. I went to the back of the bus. He helped me stand up on the seat so I could look out the wide window and look at all the cars and the people and everything. Ah! He prevented me from falling down when the bus lurched and I was happy. But I kept that memory of who got to sit where and why did it happen.

And I knew my mom didn't agree with it but she didn't say anything straight out to me either. Now when I got a little bit older, six years old, I went to school. But before you go to school you have to go get new dresses. So, I got six brand new dresses that I twirled around in one evening. And then after the dresses, the health department. I had to go get typhoid shots and I was not happy about that. However, we had to sit a long time

in that health department on these wooden benches. And on this side, there were two water fountains. One said colored, one said white. There were two women's restrooms. One said colored. One said white.

I said, "Mama why are there two water fountains?"

She said, "I don't agree with it but that's the way things are."

I said, "Mama, if I drink from the colored one, am I going to turn colored?" I just wanted to do things right, you know, but I never forgot that memory of thinking this is really not right and it's not... it's not the way I think things should be. Just a little girl but I was confused.

Now I... also around that time, had... my mom had a maid. Her name was Laura Ruth. Laura Ruth came to iron for my mama and to babysit for me when Mama couldn't stand it anymore, which I expect was fairly regular. I don't know, I was a pretty active kid. Now I didn't like Laura Ruth because she was very strict and she would yell at me sometimes but I did love her boy. His name was Sammy. Me and Sammy used to get behind the bushes next to the house where we had this little fort. And we would trade off Crockett... Davy Crockett hats, you know, the kind with a raccoon tail on 'em and we would sing that old song that we heard on TV every night.

And we had our pistols in our holsters and we were protecting the world from everything. I loved Sammy and every time he came with his mama, I was happy but there was one day he didn't come with his mama and I was still quite young. I think between five and six.

And, um, I said, "Mama, where's Sammy?"

She said, "Honey, he died!"

I said, "Oh, Mama! Well, will he be here next week?"

She said, "No, honey! Died means he's not going to be here again."

I really couldn't capture all that in my brain. I know I didn't take it in but I do remember listening to everything. And I know I heard my mama talking to my aunt Bet on the phone and she said, "Oh, Bet, if that child would've had a good doctor, he wouldn't have bled to death from getting his tonsils out." Now my mother would never have told me that but I know I overheard it and something in my heart went "crack" about it. I knew it was wrong and I knew it was because Sammy was black and he didn't get to have a good doctor.

Now I grew on up in the segregated South. I can remember lots of other strange feelings like if I saw a whole host of black boys walking toward me, I remember feeling nervous and wondering, "Why do I feel nervous? They're just people." But I was kind of going inside myself trying to figure all this out.

I was 12 years old when this incident occurred. Mama and I went up to Winston-Salem, North Carolina because my Aunt Sarah (we called her Sister), she had fixed it up so that the Presbyterian black women of the church and the Presbyterian white women of the church were going to hold a meeting in one of the biggest churches in Winston-Salem.

It was enormous and I remember walking in just being totally shocked how big it was. There must have been, oh, I don't know, 20 rows of people and it was filled up but me and my mama and my Aunt Sarah were the only white people there. I noticed that I had never been in a minority before and I noticed that I kinda liked it.

I kinda liked it. And I saw my mother lean over to sister and she said, "Oh, Sister, I'm so sorry that none of the women in your church came to see this and to be a part of this worship service."

And Sister just sat while the worship service went on. I know there were prayers and songs and whatever but sister sang a solo; she had a high, high voice. It sounded like it could crack but it never did. And she sang the song from Ruth, "Entreat me not to leave thee nor to turn from following thee. Thy people will be my people. Thy God, my God." I always loved that song; I heard it more than once.

And when that finished, we passed out candles. Mama and me and Sister on the front row - everybody else behind - so we were the last ones to leave but the first to get lit up and this was my favorite part. When the lights were turned down on the church and the lights flowed upward from our candles as they lit row to row to row to row, it was a glow that just touched my heart in every way. We marched out - the last ones to get out the door - and we were singing, "We are climbing Jacob's Ladder. We are climbing higher, higher. We are climbing ever upward!"

And as we marched out the door, there were six police cars with their blue lights going like this and men milling around. And I said, "Mama, what is it?"

She said, "Shh! Keep singing!" And I did because she was firm and we sang all the way up on a hill and we made a huge circle and we looked inward. As we looked inward, every face there glowed. Those candles glowed all of us in a beauty I won't ever forget. And we sang, "We are climbing Jacob's Ladder. Soldiers of the Cross. Oh, may we go higher and higher!"