



Video Story Transcript

EXPECTATIONS AND SURPRISES-SCHOOL SEGREGATION AND TRACKING IN THE 1960s

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A6UKkeLIyDU>

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.

Hi, I'm Andy Offutt Irwin. In 1967, at the end of my third-grade year, Mrs. Smith, my teacher, wrote on teacher's comments there in the spring, with Sheaffer blue washable ink, fountain pen ink because she didn't believe in ballpoint pens even though they existed. She wrote, "Andy is just slow."

Now this story isn't about me but it is about how this white boy experienced some of the feelings that my black friends felt during desegregation. I'm not saying that I felt what they felt but I certainly felt. By the end of my fourth-grade year, I mean, my second fourth-grade year (you heard me), um, they closed the black school during that summer. So, when my fifth-grade year came along, um, the black kids from the black school moved into the white school and, therefore, they tracked us into five groups.

Group five were the smart kids; group one were the dumb kids. I was in group two. All of the black kids from the old school came into groups one and two. They had a short interview with some white person who I'm sure scared 'em. And that's where they were put. That's how they segregated the schools within the school.

Well, most of my friends were black because there were only a couple of white kids in group two and they're both in prison. And we became friends. I became friends, in particular, with a guy named Johnny Norrington. And then in my fourth-grade year, I mean fifth grade year, uh, there was Cynthia Banks. Cindy and I both moved up to third group together and then she went on to group four. I could tell she was one of the smartest kids that I knew in those groups. She went on to be one of the smartest kids in high school and went

on to be our class president in 1977.

And that's kind of how desegregation worked - the legal integration of schools worked. When we came into the eighth grade, all of the kids in the same county from the eighth grade were in the same school. That school had been the old black high school and, therefore, half the faculty, at least, had taught at the all black high school. And desegregation and integration were working. I'm not saying we were plural yet but it was happening. And by the time we were seniors, my friend Terry Kelly (who's black), he and I were the leads in "Bye, Bye Birdie." I played Albert Peterson; he played Birdie. And by the time Terry and I went to college together (and we were roommates together all through school), we crammed four years of college into six years to get people to stop forgetting about that he was black and I was white.

And by the time "now" happens that people my age have grandchildren (not that I have grandchildren) but the people who got married when they were 10 years old, they have grandchildren. Those grandchildren don't remember what it was like and don't even really know what happened. In my town Covington, Georgia, we have a black Superior Court Judge; we have an African-American sheriff. We've had a black mayor, sitting mayor, when the previous mayor had to step down. And the mixed city council elected him mayor to fill out the term. And that's what's going on in my new South, thanks to legalized desegregation.