



Video Story Transcript

It was 1966 in Warrensburg, Missouri

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://youtu.be/kX4rj94CqV4>

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, my name is Joyce Slater. I grew up in the 50s and 60s in Kansas City. I lived in a poorer neighborhood. Growing up I didn't see very many people who were black except for Catherine and Harry and they lived in the basement of our apartment building. My parents would send us down there. They were the janitors. We would play with their cats. We would tell stories. We would - we would rummage through the trash bins looking for treasures. They would come up and eat dinner with us sometime. Have a beer with my dad and when we got a television, they came all the time to watch television with us.

But after a while six - six of us in one bedroom was just a little too much, so we moved. We stayed in contact with Catherine and Harry. They came over ate dinner with us, but eventually we lost track of them.

I went to Catholic school in the neighborhood - grade school and high school.

Now in the 60s, the early 60s when John F. Kennedy was elected, every Catholic thought that their savior had come. We hung on every word that man said. We were in love with him and his wife and his children and when he was assassinated, it was like we had lost our favorite relative. Though the crying sounded through all Catholic high schools, grade schools. We watched that picture of him dying over and over on TV. And we thought civil rights was over. But... Lyndon Johnson picked up the ball and he signed that Civil Rights Act and we moved on and we carried our torches and we - we saluted LBJ.

Well about 1966, I start thinking about going to college. Well actually it was probably before that, but I was poor and it was hard to find a college that would take me and give me some money. Eventually Central

Missouri State Teachers College gave me enough to go to school and I packed my meager belongings and my parents dropped me off at campus and I unloaded everything I had in my dorm room.

I was free, I was free to do whatever I wanted. I hung up my monogrammed towels somebody gave me for graduation and picked out a bed in a closet. And then I wandered around. None of my roommates were there, but I found Catherine.

Catherine was a woman who lived across the hall from me and none of her roommates were there, so we wandered the campus together.

She was black and I was white. I had no idea the racial tension in Warrensburg, Missouri. When we got back our roommates were there and she said to me, "Did you notice all the stares we got?"

I hadn't even noticed.

Catherine and I were the same size. We could trade clothes back and forth. Now one day I put on some of hers. She put on mine and my roommate said, "you want her to wear your clothes. Her skin is so oily. They'll ruin it."

I thought, "well, this is a lot of nonsense."

But, Catherine and I shop together. We were the same size. So one day we walked downtown and we went into a dress shop and we each picked up something and the saleswoman said, "If you try that on you have to buy it."

"I never had to do that before."

And she said, "Not you - her."

So we both dropped what we had and went out. We made a plan. If we were going to shop, I would try the clothes on. She could decide if she wanted it or not. And if she did, I bought it. We'd take it back to the dorm. She'd try it on. If it didn't really work, I took it back.

They were none the wiser. Catherine introduced me to a whole group of women that I never would have known. And we became friends we danced we skated up and down the halls. We, we played games. But we could not go to a restaurant in town together, because no blacks were allowed in the restaurants.

Eventually there was a burger bar that was set up across the campus where we could hang out. Different times for me.

Well time passed, and Catherine dropped out of school. I stayed, and I stayed friends with all of these women.

In 1968 Martin Luther King was assassinated and we all mourned that death.

Within a week Kansas City was - was full of riots. There were riots everywhere and we watched on that little television in the laundry room while whole neighborhoods burned down and their's was part of it.

So we made a plan to go home. We wanted to help each other out... But, on the way home on I-70 there were snipers just waiting for cars of people - black people and there we were.

So we got off of the highway made our way home back roads and we were safe.

It was - it was a strong lesson for me. I stayed friends with these women for a long time until I got married and then it just sort of dissipated. We didn't find each other for a while.

But I will tell you I learned a lot more in college than you would find in the books. And it stayed with me my whole life.