



Video Story Transcript

Too Crazy to Know Better

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Link to YouTube Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZ__0i4A6zI

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.

I'm Jay O'Callahan. I'm going to tell a story that Sandra Harris, a storyteller from Indianapolis, has given me permission to tell. It takes place in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963. I tell it in the voice of Sandra Harris.

I'm Sandra Harris. Nineteen sixty-three, I was living in Birmingham, Alabama. I had two children. I was pregnant. My husband, Ed, was away and I read in the newspaper Dr. Martin Luther King was, he was going to be speaking at the 16th Street Baptist Church downtown Birmingham. So, I got a babysitter and went down to the church. And I felt so welcome. Here I was pregnant, only white person in this whole church and I squeezed in. And it was so crowded, people were standing around the back and talkin'.

Dr. Martin Luther King, he stood...and there was presence. And I wrote down what he said at the end and I'm going to read that. He said, "I don't need to tell anyone here tonight, what a long struggle this has been and it's not nearly over. But brothers and sisters, let all who oppose us know this. We will stand in the face of poll taxes and we will cry 'Freedom!' We'll stand in the face a job description, discrimination, and we'll cry 'Freedom!'" And by then everybody knew that every sentence was going to end with "we'll cry Freedom!"

He said, "We'll stand in the face of hatred, we'll cry 'Freedom!'" On and on he went. "Because we're children of a living God and citizens of this great country. And we will stand and cry 'Freedom!'"

But by that time everyone is crying, "Freedom, freedom, freedom!" I'm not exaggerating. It seemed like the walls of that church were vibrating. And I knew this was not a movement. This was a revolution. And it was going to succeed, no matter what the cost. Course, I didn't know the cost was going to be five years later, Dr. Martin Luther King was going to be murdered. I didn't know just a few months later, there would be a bomb placed inside of that church, 16th Street Baptist Church, four girls are going to, were going to die. Those girls, I

always carry, this. Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Cynthia (*Carole*) Robertson, that was the cost.

Well, I didn't get involved in the march all the way from Selma to Montgomery. I didn't face the hoses. But I did get a call just a few weeks after Dr. Martin Luther King was there, from a friend of mine, Jan Tomasack, from the Unitarian church, to go down to the superintendent's office. You see, Dr. King had asked the students to come out and join the demonstrations. All of them were arrested. And the superintendent had expelled them. Some of these students were seniors and it was not fair. So, I went down, six white women, went into the office superintendent. I waddled in, eight months pregnant. And the superintendent was furious. We would, we would dare to challenge his, his decision. And he kept saying over and over, "I told those children, if they participated in demonstrations, they would be expelled and I'm true to my word!"

Well, he went on and on and on. There was no meeting place. And so finally I said, "Dr. Stow, Do the students read? Do they read the Declaration of Independence?"

"Course, they do."

"Do they read the Bill of Rights and the Constitution? And do they read..."

"They read all of that stuff and we give them a test."

And I said, "Well, that's good and maybe they learned a little more than you expected them to learn." Well, he was furious. He went on and on. We left.

My husband, Ed, and I, we joined something called Alabama Council of Human Relations. And this is blacks and whites talking about the future. We decided the thing to do was to go to one another's homes, talk things over. So, we had a black couple, one Sunday, come, and after that the phone calls began, threatening us and our children. We're staggered, we're terrified. So, Ed and I decided to call my mother in Nashville, Tennessee, 200 miles away. I said, "Mother, Ed and I need to talk. Can you take the children for a few days?"

She said, "Fine."

I was working so Ed took the children 200 miles. The moment he stepped into my mother's house, the phone rang. He picked it up and a voice said, "You don't deserve to live!" Oh, we were shocked. Nobody knew we were going to Nashville. Not even our best friends. We had heard about the phone being bugged. But now we knew. It was bugged. We didn't know for sure, but it was it was said that there was a state committee that bugged the phones of people they didn't like, like us. Now we're worried about the life of our children. We knew what they could do. These people with violence.

We know because back in 1956, Ed and I were in college in Birmingham and Nat "King" Cole was in town. He was going to be singing at the Birmingham auditorium. And that was wonderful because most artists wouldn't come because of segregation. In those days the blacks have to sit up, upstairs balcony, white folks downstairs. So my, so, Nat "King" Cole said, "I will come. Two concerts; one for whites, one for blacks."

So Ed and I go to the white concert and Nat "King" Cole is singing. Then we heard this commotion and turned. Six men were running down the aisle and they were shouting, "Get him!"

Those men jumped up on the stage and they started beating Nat "King" Cole. Kicking him and knocking him down. Finally, band members got up and they pulled them off. Security members come. Nat "King" Cole was hurt, he was taken off stage. The band began to play "This Land of Liberty." Then Nat "King" Cole came out on the stage and stood there...and he started singing. So, we left with all those memories of those songs but

we left with the memory of that violence. That stupid meaningless violence. And now that violence was turned towards us and our children.

Well, Ed was accepted to graduate school in Boston. So, we left for the frozen north. At least our children safe.

Now, I like to tell that story because it reminds me of the courage of all those black people, all those white people who fought for freedom.