**Jim Crow Children #1**

**Bridgeport Library Branch, Chicago, IL, Circa 1963**

Two friends and I visited the Bridgeport Library Branch in Chicago, Illinois.

Bridgeport was the neighborhood of former Mayor Richard J. Daily and is all white. We were three Black young men of 11 and 12 years old. We visited the Bridgeport Branch because we couldn't find the books we needed at the Oakland branch, in the Black neighborhood. We crossed the color line to the other side of the tracks. We were young and didn't know. We were more afraid of avoiding the Black street gangs on the other side of the projects (Stateway Gardens).

After we got our books, we started to walk back home. We had no particular problems at the library other than strange looks (e.g., like "what are you niggers doing here"). Half way back to our neighborhood we were chased by a mob of white youths. They were out for blood. I remember the shouts of "kill those niggers".

We split up and ran in panic. One made it back to the library, one got caught in a storefront, and I ran like hell back to the neighborhood. I didn't make it.

One of the mob members crashed his bike in front of me, a few hundred yards in front of the rest of the mob. We prepared to duke it out, before the rest of the mob arrived. I remember an old white man stopped his car and boomed, "leave that boy alone". I was surely saved from a severe beating. I was literally saved by a stranger. The mob held back and I suffered no more than a few scrapes and bruises.

As I reached the overpass on the Dan Ryan highway at 35th Street, I stopped and waited for my buddies. To my surprise, one stepped off a CTA bus (the one who returned to the library). He was escorted to the bus by the librarian. More surprising was that my other buddy was being escorted by the store owner and a few more white adults to the overpass. He only suffered a bruised jaw from a sucker punch.

I was never so scared in all of my life. We were attacked by a white mob for our brazen boldness to use the white library branch. My mother had to return my books.

Epilogue. I read a few years ago that another Black youth was attacked by a white mob in Bridgeport for playing on a softball field. He suffered severe head trauma and last I heard he was in a coma. I was lucky, he wasn't. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

Kenneth M. Stone, CPA
St. Louis , MO

**Segregation a Shock**

I was born and raised in the north in St. Louis, Missouri. As a youngster of five or six, in the summers my mother would take me and my brothers to Mississippi to see my grandmother where we would spend the summer. What a lot of kids only read about I saw—the separate water fountains, bathrooms, and the movie theaters where the balcony was for colored only (still persisted in the early 70s). This was really a shock for me.

Mom always taught us to love and respect everyone. Nothing momma told me could have prepared me for what I saw. Mom also said that I could be anything I wanted, but that I'd have to work three or four times harder to get it, whereas a white person, just being white was their free admission.

Richard Hill
St. Paul MN

**The Shiny Plastic Letters**

I remember a first grade field trip to the Beaman Bottling Plant in Nashville, Tennessee back in 1960 or 1961. We went on the requisite tour of the facility and at the end, we were taken to the lunchroom. Or should I say lunchrooms. There were two doors, both with signs. On one door the sign read "White Lunch." The second door was labeled "Colored Lunch." What really stood out were the shiny plastic letters. "White Lunch" was in white letters on a black background. "Colored Lunch" was in multi-colored letters, also on a black background. Our school didn't have any African-American students so we really didn't understand the way things were. It didn't make sense then, and it certainly doesn't now.

Thomas Lanier
Nashville,TN

**I Sat Where I Wanted to at the Movies**

I'm a 45 year-old African-American female and I remember at the age of nine years, in a small town Jackson, Missouri. I spent the night with a family member and on Saturday we went to the movies. We paid for our tickets and I began to reach for the door of the movie theatre and was told by a relative, we can't go in that door; we have to enter through this door. I was then led to a side door and up a very dark, narrow set of stairs. I found myself sitting in the balcony of this movie theatre. The white children were seated below. To this day that memory is with me. I don't remember the movie, but I remember that as if were yesterday. I had never experienced anything like that before. I lived in Cape Girardeau, Missouri and sat where I wanted to at the movies.

Beverly Prince
Indianapolis, IN

**If I were Black I would be Fighting Mad**

I went to the South with my grandmother when I was 12 years old. For the first time I saw that there actually were separate drinking fountains, separate everything for blacks. I was shocked and outraged. I knew if I were black I would be fighting mad. As a child, I didn't know what to do, so when I was in a grocery store I mixed all the brown eggs up with the white eggs in the dairy department while my grandmother shopped. It was the only way I felt I could do something to rebel against the injustice I saw.

Cynthia Borman
Englewood, CO

**Nigger Dogs**

I spent my childhood life growing up in the "projects." When I was around 12 years old I took my first job away from home. The job was "helper" for a driver on a soft drink bottling company truck route. Of course, all delivery route drivers were white. The route consisted of delivering bottled drinks to "country stores" in rural North Carolina. My job was to collect the empty glass bottles, put them in the wooden crates, sort them by product, and put them on the truck. The driver would deliver the fresh product and perform the traditional hospitality conversations with the local storeowners.

One day the truck pulled up to a small store somewhere in a rural community and I heard this frightening barrage of barking, obviously from at least two large dogs. The barking came directly from the rear area where the "empties" were stored. I looked at the driver in heart wrenching fear and asked, "What's that?" He proceeded to deliver to me what he probably thought was a completely obligatory lesson. "Those are Nigger Dogs. Now you be careful not ta git too close to 'em, ya hear!" I sat still and confused in the passenger seat, almost unable to move from fear. He then looked me straight in the eye and asked, "You're a nigger, ain't cha?" Being only 12 years old and probably over 50 miles from anywhere recognizable in the countryside, I responded the only way I could, "Yes sir. I guess I am." And that was one of my first practical lessons in the subtleties of Jim Crow and rural Southern culture.

Jim Akins
Grand Rapids, MI

**I Never got Arrested —I got Dirty Looks**

I grew up in New York City. Relatives in Miami Beach, Florida had a daughter my age and the families got us together. When we were about ten, she came to New York to visit then I went to Miami during school holiday. We were in a Woolworth's and I went to take a drink of water at the fountain. My friend was horrified and stopped me because there was a sign that said "colored." She said I had to drink out of the other fountain, that read, "white." I remember being horrified, angry and totally outraged. I couldn't understand why there was a difference. I remember telling her I was going to drink out of it anyway and she started crying, that we would be arrested for drinking out of the "colored" fountain. That scared me (I was only 10 or 11) and I didn't do it. But I remember asking her parents about it (although I don't remember what they said) and then telling mine when I got home, and I swore I'd never do that again. And I didn't. Each time I traveled to the South I would make a point of drinking from the "colored" fountain. I never got arrested although I did get dirty looks, which made me feel proud.

Liz Schick
Richmond, VT

**Jim Crow Children #2**

**Church trip to St. Louis**

I was a pre-teen in the early 60s. We were traveling by bus from Milwaukee, Wisconsin to St. Louis, Missouri to attend a youth church conference. Somewhere in southern Illinois we decided to take a rest stop and get something to eat. This place seemed like a major rest area, as there was plenty of parking and lots of cars. Upon entering the establishment we were told they could not serve us in the restaurant and that we should go around to the back. Being from Milwaukee I had never experienced anything like this and remember feeling both angry and humiliated.

Anonymous
Aurora, IL

**Jim Crow lesson learned early**

As a wide-eyed, brown-skinned six-year-old in 1963, I was denied access to a public movie theater in Louisville, Kentucky when my younger brothers and I went to see a Disney movie accompanied by our black-skinned, non-English-speaking nanny. I was the oldest English speaker in our group, and remember being told that no 'N-WORD' was allowed into the theater. I still remember that old man's face, craggy and wrinkly and most of all — MEAN! Later that day, my parents tried to gently explain the harsh realities of the world to me. But what really delivered the message was that from that point on, I began to notice how some of the other parents in the neighborhood spoke about black people. A real eye-opener for a small child!

Note:

Although I was generally afforded the "privileges" of white society, there were varying degrees of unfriendly comments and actions directed toward me until I left Kentucky in 1985.

James Carrasquer
Portland OR

**Jim Crow was P.C.**

I grew up in southern Florida (Miami and Miami Beach). I have vivid memories as a child during the 1950s of being very disturbed that the "colored" children had shack schools, filthy public drinking fountains and had to live behind a big wall in downtown Miami. Adult people of color were not allowed on the streets of our white neighborhood without an identification card. If they were around after dark they were at risk of being abducted by high school boys on a "coon hunt." Black performers in Miami Beach hotels were not allowed to eat with the guests, use the pool or the hotel amenities. Now, when I hear Caucasians deride "p.c.", political correctness, I am very angry at the joke some white people have made of the civil rights struggle. I am quick to remind them that when I was a child, segregation and all the danger and degradation that went with it, was very, very "p.c.".

Barbara Bradshaw
Seattle WA

**Jim Crow in Philadelphia**

I was the oldest child in a family headed by my single mother. I had three younger sisters, the oldest of which was four years younger than I. We lived in a housing project in South Philly. Next-door was a white family who became friends of our family. The oldest son of that family had an after school job in a dry goods store. When he left that job to go to high school, he recommended me to the owner of the store. I went in to work with him one day to learn the ropes. I was to go to the store the next day to start work. When I arrived, I was told that they didn't hire Negroes and was given trolley car fare to take me back home. I was very disappointed; the money from the job would have helped at home.

I tried to figure a way to show that the store's policy about Negroes was wrong. I remembered that every semester in my school, there was an award given by the Point Breeze Businessmen's Association for the most outstanding graduating student that semester, and that the owner of the dry goods store made the presentation of the award as the president of that association. (Point Breeze Avenue was a shopping area in Philadelphia at the time). I made up my mind to work toward winning that award and by graduation had earned enough points to win. Imagine my satisfaction and pride when my name was announced at graduation, and I went up on the stage to have my certificate and medallion personally handed to me by the same man who just the semester before denied me the job in his store.

Nicholas Chacon
Miami, FL

**Legacy of Jim Crow**

As a white child growing up in Virginia during the 1950s, I witnessed many events--both large and small--that could never be fully explained to me by my parents and grandparents. I could distinguish no real differences between whites and blacks except that of color and I could never understand why a man's skin color required him to be treated differently. My father's answer was always "that's the way it is" even though he hired black men to do labor for customers of his feed and seed business. I never understood why black children did not attend my school or go to the theatre with me. When a black man gave me his seat on the bus as soon as I walked down the aisle, I thought he was simply extending a kindness to a child. I kept pressing for answers but I received none. I guess I took my Sunday school lessons literally-we were ALL God's children.

I remember going around with my Daddy on a Sunday afternoon when he was trying to collect from those who owed him money. He was always patient with those who had little but who still owed him a debt and the black community held him in high esteem. We passed a tree in an out of the way place and he stopped the car and told me that it was the "killing tree". He said nothing more but I later learned that a black man was hung there a few years earlier. Of course the black section of town was off limits to white children; this was "understood". I visited a neighborhood store there on a "dare" from a friend and as I walked inside I saw a group of black men sitting around talking and a man behind the counter. I remember one of them saying as I turned and walked out, "that's Mr. Bill's daughter, it's all right." I didn't tell Mama what I did but Daddy knew what I'd done when he came home that night. The storeowner had called him and told him what I'd done. Daddy told me never to do it again and said that people might not understand. I was one of those people who never understood. I walked past the "colored" rest rooms in the tobacco warehouses and felt sad that the "colored" drinking fountain always seemed dirty. I always thought that if people's actions couldn't be explained to a child, well, maybe people shouldn't do the things they couldn't explain.

Debby Morgan
Ellwood City, PA

**Jim Crow from the Eyes of a Child**

In 1950s Jacksonville, Florida, my recollection of Jim Crow law is vivid. At age seven in 1956, the only black person I knew (literally) was a man named Earl who bagged groceries at the A&P Store in my neighborhood. He was probably in his fifties or sixties because his short curly hair was as white as snow. In the same grocery store, there were separate water fountains labeled white and colored, right next to the big red Coca-Cola machines. I really didn't know why this was and I personally tried both fountains to see what the difference was when my mother wasn't looking. Although my mother never explained it to me, right or wrong, I just knew the fountains were different. I wish now I could tell Earl how ashamed I am today.

Claire King
Jacksonville, FL