

Sheila Florence Oral History Excerpt

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Sheila Florence was one of the first students to desegregate schools in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. When she began attending Chapel Hill Junior High School in 1962, she endured hurtful treatment from her white classmates, who refused to sit by her, used racial slurs, and threw spitballs at her. Here, Ms. Florence remembers her first day of integration.

Audio

File:

Duration: 3:27

Transcript:

Audio Transcript

Bob Gilgor (interviewer)

So you were one of the first four students to go to Chapel Hill Junior High School?

Sheila Florence

Junior High School. Right.

Bob Gilgor (interviewer)

Do you remember your first day?

Sheila Florence

Oh yeah, I remember. That's something you never forget.

Bob Gilgor (interviewer)

Can you share it with me?

Sheila Florence

Well, I got all dressed up so I would look nice, I was thinking I was going to fit in, so I looked nice. And, because it was like 2 or 3 blocks from where I lived, I walked to school so therefore I missed riding on the school bus. So, I walked, I think I went alone. And, I can't remember -- no I think one, my next door neighbor might have been with me, I can't remember who was along. But I know I was scared to death to go. So I went and found my homeroom class and everybody was looking at me, cause I guess I was different. What else was there, I was called names and people shunned me, first day. And I felt out of place. But, I just told myself it was gonna get better. And what else was it... that was about it the first day.

Bob Gilgor (interviewer)

Did it get better?

Sheila Florence

Not much better... Well, I didn't have any friends, everybody shunned me and I was sort of alone, and I felt lost, didn't

know where I was going. And by being in a new school, I didn't have someone to take me under their wing and say, "we supposed to go to this place," or "I'll help you find where we need to go."

Bob Gilgor (interviewer)

Nobody was helping you?

Sheila Florence

No.

Bob Gilgor (interviewer)

Whereas you had those role models at Lincoln High School that you told me about just a minute ago, that you looked up to, did you have any people like that at the new school?

Sheila Florence

No, didn't have people like that. And then at lunchtime I'd sit at the table, nobody wanted to sit over there with me.

Bob Gilgor (interviewer)

Nobody sat with you?

Sheila Florence

No, I had to eat alone, whereas at Lincoln, you know, you had your own, your little buddies and up there, since I didn't know anybody, I'd eat by myself. And I'd just feel alone. People'd be looking, and whispering, and talking, calling me names, and throwing things. It was just a bad experience.

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