

All this happened in the 50's but, I am told, the school is much the same today. It is not in a town and I shall not identify it more than my title has done. It is in a most beautiful part of the state and students come from far and near. There is one change-in the 50's there was Jr. College and that has now been closed, which speaks the change in attitudes toward the Negro.

Teachers are both white and Negro and I had lost my 30 years' position as Public Librarian in a Border Town because I became most actively interested in the Negroes of this town and, unlibrarians like couldn't "keep my mouth shut" or my actions from showing. The last straw was probably asking to be served, with two lovely Negro high school teachers, at a drugstore. One commissioner even said, "What Miss B. is advocating is certainly according to Bible teaching but not ~~not~~ according to the beliefs of this Border town" and so I was summarily dismissed.

This event gave the Border town much more publicity than they anticipated and the Miss. school needing a librarian, I was asked if I would come. I most eagerly agreed and the next 3 years became the wonderful experience of my life.

A few weeks after a teacher comes to this school she is introduced at chapel and it was my thrill to hear said, "Miss B. has fitted in much more quickly than other white teachers who have come to us." Of course I did for I had learned in the Border town to forget color and how easy to forget it among these fine young people. I could understand, at least in part, why the older administrators were so unhappy. The especial Tyrant had lived since childhood in this school and simply had to take out her frustrations on the students and there never seemed to be a day that she didn't do just this.

The Sub-Tyrant really loved the students and gave them much happiness but she feared their "natures" and, at the least hint of any illness, poured the castor oil down their unwilling throats and, I was told, often used corporal punishment on the girls in her dorm. However, we did love her but not the Tyrant and we teachers were quite sure that she read some of our letters before they reached our hands and we knew there were ways she could have done that.

The thing that soon began to bother me was that it was a school of all work and almost no play. The girls cooked and cleaned and the boys worked on the farm and study was very hard for, because they had come from such poor schools. Boys and girls of H.S. age and Jr. College must have "friend girls" and "friend boys" (as it is said in Miss) and it is impossible to prevent this, but there it is desperately tried.

The only kind of dancing that was allowed was square dancing and very, very little of that. The platform of the chapel was the only place for that and that meant that most of the students must be spectators. The dining hall was a huge room with movable furniture. We found that students would be most happy to stack that furniture on Saturday nights if it could be used for a recreation room for that time. That meant a large space for square dancing with several squares and a space for all sorts of other games. There had to be many adults present but I, for one, just didn't see the handholding but only the sparkling eyes and laughing faces. Occasionally a couple managed to escape outdoors for a few minutes but more, a few minutes was almost sure to mean expulsion from the school and no student wanted that. The Sub-Tyrant was ever on the alert (she was old and is dead now & greatly missed, I am sure) and when we once managed to have an outdoor wiener roast it was said that she climbed on a tall step-ladder so she could see every straying couple and of seeing some all students were told to go home almost before the fun had started. She, though a Negro herself, firmly believed that their "nature" must be sternly controlled.



I honestly felt that Jr.C. people should know something about astronomy and of course stars must be studied at night. Not far from the dorms was a lovely little lake and around that lake a perfect walk. Later I learned it was called Lovers' Lane and that not surprising. Sunday nights were just the time for "carrying" (as the students said) the Jr.C. students around the lake. So I questioned the Powers and, after much discussion among themselves (I am sure) I was told we might try this if there was a teacher at each end of the line and in the middle. They actually learned a few constellations and planets but mostly practiced hand holding and an occasional kiss and why not? Probably the Powers liked to brag to other schools that their Jr.C. people studied astronomy so these walks were allowed for most of one winter and then another edict, "No more astronomy walks." The next year I had to do some substitute teaching in science and we came to astronomy so of course I said we had to see the stars so we went out once more and then I was told, "Didn't you know that the command was no more astronomy walks, ever?" I really did not and was glad I didn't know until after that lesson.

Sunday afternoons were pretty boring and daylight seeming safe some of the teachers were allowed to take the whole school on long walks into the surrounding beautiful country. It did require many chaperons for these 200 students and some teachers didn't call this rest but those that did found it great fun. But, again, wild flowers, birds and trees don't come first to teen-agers and the most careful chaperonage doesn't keep an occasional couple from finding a side road but they never strayed for long. Of course those who couldn't stray acted as tale bearers and soon these wonderful walks were stopped. I often wonder if any of these were ever revived but I doubt it.

My first year I was asked to teach a class in what was to be called "Religion for Living"-wonderful idea which really thrilled me. This was for 9th graders 40 of them who were splendid thinkers and eager to learn. But again all boys must sit in front and the girls in the back and you can guess what the boys were always doing and again I say, why not? There was no text so I culled my material from all sources, most of it perhaps from Harry Emerson Fosdick's books. And what discussions! One day I decided to ask them an age-old question "Do all Negroes want to be white as the whites often say?" They couldn't talk fast enough and you can see that my color didn't bother them any more than theirs did me. "No, no, we don't want to be white. If we could do and be so and so we would much prefer to be Negroes." On and on and on and I knowing I would never bring up quite such a controversial question again, but still glad that they would talk.

Every student was required to go to S.S. and church. At first I was asked to teach the girls of Jr.C. and then, at my earnest request, it was decided that being Sunday morning it might be safe to let me teach the whole Jr.C. We met in the library and our subject was Comparative Religion, a subject on which they knew absolutely nothing. First we had religions of the world and then U.S. denominations. They knew they could say anything and were most anxious to do so. One said, "I wouldn't dare tell my parents what we are saying here." and I merely said, "You don't need to tell them," knowing how fine those parents were but how shocking some of the things that other people honestly believe. After S.S. came church and the cliches that were spoken there caused me to shrink, so much so that one day I took one of the young white preachers who came from a nearby theological school and were practicing on us and told him most plainly that it was fine he gave the students something for living and some more things about his religious cliches that so frightened him that he never returned but I hope that when he became an ordained minister he might have remembered one of two of the things I said.



Ever hear of a Rosenwald School? In those days they were all over the South and were certainly better than no schools. Julius Rosenwald had given money for these schools and there was one on this campus. School began for the black children at 7 o'clock and the little folks had to come in on the buses with the older ones (of course many boys and girls lived in the dorms) because mothers and fathers were both in the cotton fields. Some of them were no more than 4 years and perhaps younger than that. School didn't begin at Rosenwald until 9 o'clock so these children must be taken care of in the basement of the library. At first I had the older children but when I was told, "They will not mind unless you take a stick to them because that is the only discipline they have to them" I said, "Then I am through because I cannot do that." So a Negro teacher, who carried a stick, was given the older ones and I the small ones. And that was pure joy. Some had gotten up so early that they had to have a nap and, believe you me, I let them sleep. But they loved poetry, to memorize it and to act it out and of course had had none at home for their mothers knew none and would have been too tired with field work and home work. Thank the good Lord, Negroes are full of fun and delight and poetry - oh I hope some of these children love it.

It was thought that the older Negroes did not hate Whitey then but of course they did, how could they help it? So three years of me and speaking my mind were all they could stand of me or I of them. I filed my resignation to be produced when necessary. A boy and girl were expelled or little more than little more than smiling at each other and I knew the Tyrant would be told what I said on the subject. The next morning early came a messenger with these words, "You are to be off the campus today." So off I was with even tears shed by one of my library assistants who was risking much in so doing but was not expelled in consequence. Perhaps even "they" thought to get rid of me was enough and I suppose I am still referred to as "that Miss Brown."