

“Urban Suburban” by C. Uhuru-Sasa Brown

One of the most significant days of my life was Tuesday, November 1st, 1966. I was 10 years old, in Mrs. Driscoll’s 5th Grade class in Room 204 at Twelve Corners Middle School in Brighton. Brighton finally, and reluctantly, complied with the federal and state desegregation laws and 5 female students were starting school at TCMS.

Fifth Graders were the youngest class in the school and the oldest age of the students that were on the bussing program. An accurate interpretation of circulating bulletins & newsletters explained to Brighton residents that the oldest group were girls, so aggressive behavior was not expected. The magnitude of unmerited offense in this condescending approach was evidenced when meeting the children that rode the bus to integrate Brighton and to have access to equal education. They were the nicest kids imaginable. They were obviously beyond well raised, polite, kind, considerate, children with obvious compassion for everyone.

I sat with them during lunch on November 1st. They were so likable, that I sat with them every day until we graduated high school. They greeted the other students at Brighton with no replies. As the years passed, they got good grades. They were not invited to anyone’s home for dinner, parties, sleepovers or anything whatsoever. They lent a level of humanity, consciousness, decency, awareness, and beauty to my life, which was available to all the students in Brighton. They were so pure, intelligent, warm, and genuine. For me, they were the heart and soul of the school.

The next eight years showcased the lack of inclusion in school dances, proms, float building for Homecoming, etc. The children from the city were well aware of their exclusion. Their brand of grace & class was their perseverance through the isolation, which was admirable & exemplary. They graduated with no invitations to any graduation celebrations, except for the ceremony at Eastman Theater. They’ve all done well for themselves in the years since.

It was hurtful & enlightening to witness their experience in Brighton. I realized that the kids received the education that they rode the bus to Brighton for. It was not limited to academics. They learned a lot about people & life. So did I. Civil Rights is a large part of my life as a result of my own experience. I think we knew more than we wanted to before - but it was now confirmed. The saddest part was that the young residents of Brighton, the children of privilege, wasted their platinum opportunity to enrich eight formative years of their own lives to enjoy and learn from some of the nicest kids at school. The very nature of privilege is to take the best things in life for granted.

I’m so grateful for my last 54 years, largely influenced by this experience.

Having only my eyes to see through, this writing is not about Brighton or about me. It can, however, shed light on the state of events in 2020. The time to care is sickeningly overdue.