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## A Bridge Over Troubled Waters: Testimonies of Black Women's Experience of Desegregation in the South

Marketa Bullard

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A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS: TESTIMONIES OF BLACK WOMEN'S  
EXPERIENCE OF DESEGREGATION IN THE SOUTH

by

MARKETA BULLARD

(Under the Direction of Ming Fang He)

Abstract

This is an inquiry into school desegregation, Black Women, and spirituality with the focus on three young Black Women who desegregated a small rural high school in the South. Theoretically drawing upon the works of Alice Walker (1983, 1997, 2006), Audre Lorde (2007), Emilie Townes (1995, 1996, 1997), Toni Morrison (1988, 1993, 1998), James Anderson (1988), and William Watkins (1993, 2003, 2001, 2005, 2006), I gather testimonies of key events that help understand desegregation in Queensburg, Alabama, a fictional town that represents many rural Southern towns during the era of school desegregation. Methodologically drawing upon oral history (Brown, 1988; Haley, 2004; Harding, 1981; Ross, 2003) and fiction (Gomez, 1991; Banks, 1998; Walker, 1982; Morrison, 1998, 2008), I create three fictional characters, Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise and invent fictional events, settings, and plots based upon oral histories collected. I use a metaphor of a-bridge-over-troubled-waters throughout my dissertation while the bridge symbolizes hope, peace, and faith and troubled waters symbolize turmoil, separation, and inequality. I capitalize the “B” in the word Black, “W” in the word Woman, “F” in the word Female, and “S” in the word South/Southern to empower historically marginalized and oppressed individuals and groups. I used a lower case “w” in the word white, “m” in the word male, and “m” in the word men to challenge dominant

and privileged individuals and groups.

With Black Women's spirituality as a central theme, each chapter begins with a verse from a gospel song that testifies to the importance of race, place, and gender, and the power of spirituality. Testimonies of Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise raise challenging questions about segregation and desegregation in history and the current state of schooling. How did desegregation occur at Queensburg High School? Why is a school such as Queensburg High School still segregated 40 years after desegregation? What did it take for these three Southern Black Women to desegregate Queensburg High School? How can we use fiction, desegregation, and Sankofa to improve education today? Why does the public in the United States sit back and tolerate educational inequality? I hope that experiences of these Southern Black Women provide testimonies to empower marginalized and disenfranchised individuals and groups to build a mighty bridge over turbulent troubled waters to create hopes and dreams for all to reach their highest human potential.

**INDEX WORDS: Womanism, Desegregation, Segregation, Education, Oral history, Fiction, African Americans, Women, Spirituality**

A BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS: TESTIMONIES OF DESEGREGATION  
STORIES ON HOW THE SPIRIT SAW US THROUGH

by

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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2013

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STORIES ON HOW THE SPIRIT SAW US THROUGH

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## DEDICATION

I am grateful to God for giving me the courage to approach my own bridge. It has guided me into a closer personal relationship with you. This work is dedicated to all of those who navigate troubled waters and yearn for the opportunity to approach the bridge. Accessing the bridge is your destiny. The Spirit that is the central being of life will guide you and never leave you in troubled waters if you trust It.

*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me ~ Philippians 4:13*

Thank you ...

My Fiancé (Montgomery Myers) for loving me for who I am... you are my best friend. You have wiped my tears, encouraged me, and taken care of me during this process. You continue to encourage me and be my biggest cheerleader. I love you.

My family (Mama, Daddy, and Charm) for helping me each step along the way...this is OUR degree. You all are my foundation and without the roots that you helped me plant I would not be able to bear good fruit.

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## PROLOGUE

### *A Bridge over Troubled Waters*

Don't trouble the waters  
Get a long  
Why don'tcha Why don'tcha  
Let it be  
Still waters run deep  
Yes, it do  
Like a bridge over troubled water I will ease your mind  
Like a bridge over trouble water I will ease your mind

Troubled waters must be approached with confidence and assurance. Despite the danger, vacillation, and complex nature of troubled waters, they must be approached with confidence, assurance, and conviction. Each step into the water brings new understanding about self and what brought you to the water. Looking back at the past helps to bring clarity and truth to what has prepared you to journey into troubled waters.

*"I am so perfect so divine so ethereal so surreal. I cannot be comprehended except by my permission"* (Giovanni, 2012).

I am BLACK, FEMALE, SOUTHERN, and AMERICAN. I have always been aware of my "multiple consciousness" (King, 1995). I have always known that I possessed a different kind of perspective because of all the different parts of me. However, I am unable to separate these parts of me because they all make me who I am. Because of the acute awareness of my multiple consciousness, I am driven to excel exponentially. I must be smarter, quicker, savvier, "the best" of everything. Nikki Giovanni's (2012) poem *Ego Trippin* referenced above illustrates the pressure that I feel to do exceptionally well at everything. It is my spirituality that keeps me sane and my multiplicities united. Du Bois (2005) talks about the African American having a double

consciousness. He states, “ the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with a second-sight in this American world,- a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets himself see himself through the revelation of the other world”( Du Bois, 2005, p 12). I contend that Black Women in the South have multiple consciousnesses that are revealed through different lenses—race, gender, geography, and religion. King (1995) purports that Black Women have multiple consciousness because of the intersection of being Black, Female, and oppressed. Therefore, Black Women have unique epistemologies based on their multiple consciousness and often experience various levels of oppression. King (1995) declares, “It is in confrontation with multiple jeopardy that Black Women define and sustain a multiple consciousness essential for our liberation” (p. 312). These complexities drive me and other Black Women to define our place in society among the best. This consciousness has driven me all of my life.

In order to maintain my sanity, I put my trust and belief in a higher power that is superior to me. My personal relationship with GOD is uniquely mine. This is one thing that the world cannot define for me. Allowing myself to believe in a GOD that does not have a particular gender or color, but just IS, lets me know that I was created in its image, and I am O.K. with my identity as a Black Female in the American South. My GOD allows me to BE and respect who I am with my Black, Female, Southern self and all that completes my identity. Alice Walker proclaims, “All people deserve to worship a God who also worships them. A God that made them, and likes them” (Walker, 1997, p.25). Fortunately, my sanity and the sanity of many African-American Women are connected to our belief in a God that loves unconditionally and loves each individual exclusively. It is my belief that Jesus is the Son of GOD who was sent to earth to give everlasting life to

all those who believe in his resurrection. Many African American Women see Jesus as a savior and co-sufferer of oppression. Jacquelyn Grant declares, "White Women tend much more to see him as a Christ, or master, while Black Women base their understanding of humanity upon the idea of Jesus – the co-sufferer and liberator. Black Women have been able to experience a Jesus of history who also challenges them to move toward liberation from the social and political structures of domination" (Giddings, 1990, p. 52). For me as a Black Woman, it is liberating to know that Jesus suffered and is the son of God. If he can suffer and endure, then I know that I can survive oppression based on gender, race, or class. Understanding that Jesus was oppressed and suffered for me allows me to know that he also endured pain and oppression, but gave the ultimate sacrifice for Marketa: his life. God truly does honor and love me just as I am.

Living in the South as a Black Female leads me to a lonely place. I have lived in the South all of my life, yet there are times that I feel unwelcome and not at home in the South. There are times when I feel as if I am in a place of exile. For example, white people in the neighborhood where I currently reside are fleeing as more people of color move into the neighborhood. Re-segregation is occurring in schools based on housing patterns. I don't feel like a member of the Southern family. As a Southern Black Woman, it is as if I am a weird distant cousin no one wants to sit next to at dinner. I don't feel as if I belong here, in the South. If I don't belong here at home then where do I belong? hooks (2009) contemplates how it is difficult to be an African American in the South and still feel like an outsider. hooks(2009) explains, " Like many... Southerners ...who live in a state of mental exile, the condition of feeling split was damaging, caused a breaking down of the spirit"(p.15). To feel like an outsider at home causes destruction

of identity and spirit. I don't feel as if I am truly acknowledged as a citizen of the South, yet I don't feel at home anywhere else.

I grew up in a neighborhood where the kids did not look like me. We were the only Black family in our neighborhood. My school looked very similar to my neighborhood. Although a few Black kids were bussed in, the majority of the students were white. As a child of the 80's and 90's, I still felt the residue of racism that the Jim Crow South left behind. Occasionally, the kids in the neighborhood came over to play. We were rarely included in the personal and private world of my neighborhood friends. I recall having a slumber party and only church friends (African American children) showed up, not the kids I went to school with or my neighbors. My feelings were deeply hurt. I pondered why it was okay to play outside, but we were not included in the extra activities with the other kids in the neighborhood. It was at this point in my life that I began to look at why things were still so segregated in the early '90's in Alabama. Then I began to seek my own truth, and I found that through exploring history. Unfortunately, the schools that I attended never taught African-American history, so my parents taught me at home. Before I went to school, I knew about Malcolm X, Fannie Lou Hammer, and Marcus Garvey. I always challenged my history teachers and questioned why I never saw Black people in my history books. Due to my cultural views, I was labeled a militant Black girl in high school. I was angry and pissed off that I wasn't taught my own history in school. It angered me that we only learned about white American Anglo Saxon history with a paragraph or two about Indians (as Native Americans were called in our text books). I was determined to study my own history that was meaningful to me. I felt like my voice was always silenced. The rules of democracy state "the majority rules" and



clearly I was in the minority. I began to ask myself questions like, “Why wasn’t what I wanted important? Is the majority always right? Just because more people agree or believe in an idea does that make it right?” I was a student that the administration felt was always being unruly. I was tired of feeling invisible, yet the color of my skin made me very visible in my school. Mathews (1997) exclaims, “As African-American Women, particularly those of us who live and work in circles where our heritage is not the norm, the efforts to live in a non-African American space is like trying to walk on the moon without a moon suit. You will float away or die of lack of oxygen unless you equip yourself properly” (p. 35). I quickly learned to be quiet and keep my opinions to myself.

As one of very few minorities in school throughout my life, I began to believe that going to a Black school would be a utopia. I created a world in my head where Black history would be taught each and every day. It would be a place where I would be seen as an equal and everyone got along harmoniously. When I went to college and started my student teaching, I volunteered to go to a school that was African American. I was elated at the opportunity to teach Black students in an environment in which they were the majority and who would also be honored because they were recognized and taught by teachers that looked like them. I was beleaguered by a situation where I was part of the majority. I saw some of the same issues or worse. The administrators were *laissez faire* and did not care to go the extra mile to teach Black history. The faculty treated the parents like criminals. Hyde Park Elementary was an inner city school that was 98% African-American. I was astonished by the education that these students were receiving. It was overwhelming to teach in an environment that lacked adequate resources such as: books, parental support, and administrative leadership. Student teaching caused my

utopia to fade away. I learned that even my own could oppress students of color.

Oppression knows no race, creed, or spirituality. It does not discriminate!

When I was studying desegregation of schools, I was baffled by the stories that I learned about Ruby Bridges and the Little Rock Nine. My mother informed me that I didn't have to go looking for stories about desegregation. She knew Women who had desegregated a local rural high school. I decided to call one of these Women and hear her story. I could tell in her voice these were painful memories. In listening to her describe how she felt, I realized that she also felt the multiple consciousnesses when she integrated the high school. She felt that she had to prove that she was smart enough to go to school with white children. I was appalled to hear how she was spat on, or had to partner up to go the restroom, so she would not be assaulted in the bathroom. All this lead me to look at these untold stories of desegregation.

This dissertation consists of a prologue, five chapters, and an epilogue. Each chapter begins with a verse from a gospel song to set the tone for the chapter. During testimony services in the Black church many times the service will begin with a song to usher in the spirit. Once the spirit is present people begin to testify. Testifying is an African American tradition of storytelling related to epistemological development. In each chapter the gospel songs prepare you for the stories that are presented in Chapter 4. These stories breathe life into this research and provide a foundation for the theoretical examination of the data/information gathered as a result of the research project.

During the Prologue, I introduce the river and bridge metaphor that runs through each chapter throughout my dissertation. Furthermore, in the prologue the reader is introduced to the study, the relevance of the stories, and purpose of the inquiry.

Chapter 1 will provide background information that tells how the waters have become troubled. I explain how I became interested in exploring this inquiry. In this chapter I begin to question how to cross the bridge over troubled waters.

Chapter 2 explores the way the troubled waters flow and the different currents of the flow. A variety of literature is reviewed in order to understand why the waters are troubled. Womanism is the theoretical lens we will look through to observe the troubled waters. Reviewing the literature on Womanism will help to understand the struggles of Black Females and how spirituality is integral to this study. Education of Blacks in the South is the rocky bed of the river on which troubled waters flow. It is explored in order to understand the historical underpinnings.

Chapter 3 is about the methodologies I used to collect my stories. Listening to the voice of the water is essential to understand the water. Oral history provides the foundation but fiction is the methodology used to listen to the troubled waters.

Chapter 4 explores the story of how the girls crossed the bridge over troubled waters. The introduction provides information about the town, school, and characters in the story. A framework for the characters is established. These are stories of pain, hurt, victory and triumph. I will provide the reader with stories about the climate of Queensburg Senior High School and the surrounding community. Each set of stories begins with a prelude that connects the metaphor of troubled waters and the bridge to the stories. In the postlude that follows, each set of stories, I will explore and examine the spirituality that was crucial for these Women to cross the bridge.

Chapter 5 takes a deeper look into the river and bridge metaphor. I have a fictional conversation with the fictional composite character, Mary. This conversation

gives life to Mary's desegregation story as a "living testimony". I question the inequality in education today. I discuss the flow of the educational currents in 2013 schools.

Ultimately, I explore how we can begin to build a bridge of equality in education for all students.

Epilogue consists of a poem that I wrote, *How I Got Over*. This poem reflects my examination of how my fictional characters felt as they navigate their bridges after their experience desegregating Queensburg Senior High School.

This dissertation has provided me the opportunity to cross the bridge. The journey is long and painful. The waters are course, rough, and uncomfortable at times. Painful realities of my own educational debacle meet me as I approach the bridge. Yet, I have enjoyed my journey as I still continue my quest for knowledge and truth. I search for truth of identity, gender, knowledge, education, hope, life, and spirituality. I invite you, the reader on this journey with me. I invite you to read with an open heart and mind and allow Truth to guide your conscious. Although the waters are troubled, I believe undoubtedly the bridge will help on the journey across to the other side. Welcome on this journey to the BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATERS.

## CHAPTER 1

### TROUBLED WATERS: INTRODUCTION TO THE WATERS

#### *Trouble in My Way*

“Trouble in my way. (Trouble in my way)  
I have to cry sometimes. (I have to cry sometimes.)  
Trouble in my way. (Trouble in my way)  
I have to cry sometimes. (I have to cry sometimes.)  
I laid awake at night (I lay awake at night)  
But that’s alright (That’s alright)  
Jesus (Jesus he will fix it)  
After while (After while)

This dissertation was birthed from the oral history of three Black Women who experienced desegregation in a small rural town in the South. These Women have stories to tell which demonstrate their ability to overcome adversity. The title of this dissertation, *A Bridge over Troubled Water*, is used as a metaphor throughout the paper. The water symbolizes the divide and struggle that the Women endured because of segregation. The bridge is the path that connects both banks of the river. It symbolizes connection and the resolve to overcome struggle. This metaphorical symbolism is used throughout the paper to illustrate the profundity of desegregation. Each chapter begins with a Negro spiritual that sets the tone for the reader. Because music is food to the soul, the spirituals give the reader background knowledge on the essential nature of spirit in this dissertation. Spirituality and music have always been connected for me and help me to propel forward with the energy to create. For the purpose of this paper, the musical spirituals help to delineate these Women’s sacrifices for their community, families, the future, and themselves. Chapter 4 encompasses the stories that reveal a path to the bridge. Every living soul has a vital story to tell. Stories connect our souls to others and allow us to be

listeners and sympathize with other human experiences. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) reveal that narrative inquiry requires one “to articulate a relationship between one’s personal interests and sense of significance and larger social concerns expressed in the works and lives of others” (p. 122). The stories that are told in this dissertation are fictional accounts that are based in truth. Why use fiction? In the small rural town of Queensburg, Alabama people do not talk about the injustices that occurred during desegregation. Several of the students who attended Queensburg High School and terrorized these Women are now involved in state politics, are business owners, and local educators. Because race is so taboo in this small town, using oral histories with some fictionalizing is the most powerful way to express their stories. After my interview with the ladies and thinking about my own educational journey, I realized that each one of us have a bridge to cross. We have to experience the curriculum of life and begin the journey to cross our own individual bridge.

Historically, Black Women’s stories have rarely been heard. Black Women’s experiences in the United States include oppression, triumph, and tenacity. As Black Women we have survived a history of slavery, Black codes, Jim Crow laws, civil rights violations, and covert racism; yet, we still have the resolve to thrive in this society. Derrick Bell (1992) protests, “We must see this country’s history of slavery, not as an inseparable racial barrier to Black, but as a legacy of enlightenment from our enslaved forebears reminding us that if they survived the ultimate form of racism... without underestimating its critical importance and likely permanent status in this country”(p. 12). Rich legacy and fortitude define Black Womanism. It is time to reveal uncomfortable truths that have been silenced for too long and make a space for unheard,

marginalized voices. American history books have not been gracious to the African American Woman, and the only way our stories will be heard is if we tell them. Alice Walker (1983) declares, “Historians are generally enemies of Women, certainly of Blacks...but it is a great time to be a Woman ... from day to day our lives are touched with new possibilities...they give us hope, they have proved the splendor of our past, which should free us to lay just claim to the fullness of the future” (p.36-37). The time has come to lift back the veil that has hidden the rich, meaningful, authentic stories of African American Women and ultimately American history. While reading this paper, you will encounter stories of agony, struggle, triumph, and courage. This story is about three girls: Mary, Louise, and Barbara Ann, that attempted to cross a bridge over troubled waters.

Testimonies are powerful spiritual encounters that influence those who have the heart to listen. In the African-American community they can be traced back to the days of slavery. Testimonies allow others to hear of the work that God has done in their life. Declaring God’s goodness and mercy in your life is like therapy both to the person testifying and the person hearing the testimony. Testifying is the sharing of lived experiences and the defining one’s of own epistemology. This dissertation offers the testimonies of three Southern, African-American Women. Their testimonies are composed of various themes such as struggles with gender, place, race, and community. Moreover, their testimonies provide hope for the future of education and the community at large.

“Personal, passionate, and participatory inquiry” (He & Phillion, 2008) is meaningful in the field of curriculum. This work is life changing for the field of education, the researcher, and society as a whole. He and Phillion (2008) proclaim:

Epistemological curiosity in inquiry and life to foster crucial consciousness to comprehend and act upon the often contradictory and contested real life world. These researchers thrive on passionate involvement and commitment, advocated for disenfranchise, underrepresented, and invisible groups and individuals and unite with allies to build communities of researchers and practitioners with shared concerns to foster social justice for educational and social change. (p.3)

Gone are the days when curriculum does not address the social aspects of our society. As I began thinking about my dissertation inquiry, I realized that for me it would have to incorporate “personal, passionate, and participatory inquiry”. I realized that I needed to research something that was meaningful to me, while also having the potential to reveal truth to others. I use music lyrics to help provide a mirror into experiences that have defined my life. I believe that many of the old Negro spirituals reveal the truth of the Black American experience. African Americans have always used music to help cleanse the soul. Negro Spirituals began as way for slaves to give voice to their oppression. Additionally, I added a story at the beginning of each chapter to remind the reader of the context. My epistemological belief in the power of lived experiences and the truth of song lead me to the untold tale *A Bridge over Troubled Waters: Testimonies of Desegregation Stories on How the Spirit Saw Us Through*.

My lived experience and the experiences that I have been told through my family’s oral history brought me to the troubled waters that birthed this dissertation. I



realize that my research had to be meaningful and have purpose. Although I am a full observer in the research it, feels very personal because these stories have been shared with me. “Narrative inquiry and personal~passionate~participatory inquiry, approaches that focus on experience, humanize research” (He & Phillion, 2008, p.15). Using lived experience as research in order to seek justice is essential in the quest to build a bridge that provides equal education for all. This research is about looking for a path in which to cross troubled waters. If a path is not visible many times you have to build your own bridge.

### **Tapping the Waters: Context of Study**

Troubled waters are disturbing and complicated. When crossing troubled waters, there is not a clear path to the other side. Even though the waters may be still, they can be dangerous and deep because of strong undercurrents. As you start to look at how to cross the water, you must tap the waters to see the complexities. Many times you never know what is lurking in the water. Tapping the waters brings many ripples, but it allows you to test the water so that you can cross the bridge. Troubled waters are complex and turn and shift in many different ways, but the water leads to different destinations. Moreover, troubled waters can be unpredictable, but ultimately the rough waters tend to unveil new discoveries. Therefore, many times a bridge needs to be built in order to cross the waters. Building a bridge can be difficult, tiresome, soul-stirring work. Once a bridge is built to cross the troubled waters there is no turning back. In order to cross the bridge, it is emotionally and physically exhausting, but getting to the destination on the other side of the bridge is worth the long awaited sacrifice.

The inequality in education is a rocky path on which the troubled waters flow. It is imperative to listen, watch, examine, and study the troubled water in order to obtain understanding about desegregation. Because troubled waters can be loud and overbearing, many students' voices were marginalized and not heard. The narrative approach used in this inquiry allows the readers to listen to the voice of the water and magnifies the authority of lived experience. Moreover, the three unheard students who experienced school desegregation will actually be given a chance to testify and give their view on what troubled the waters in Queensburg in 1970. This approach will provide the opportunity to look critically at the bridge that was crossed and the steps taken during the crossing. In order to deepen the discussion, this critical examination provides a window into why segregation has reoccurred in many communities. Thus, this inquiry provides more insight into why the waters of education still remain troubled today. The experiences and identities of these Women are important in order to fully appreciate their stories. Therefore, understanding their identities as American, Black, Female, and Southern is central to the examination of their lived experience. Furthermore, looking closely at their experiences and identities helps add new depth to the troubled waters. These stories can give clarity and understanding to our current system of education and how the American education system has found itself back in the midst of troubled waters.

The bridge of desegregation was crossed by students in the American South during the early 1970's. These students sacrificed their comfort, security, and acceptance to cross the troubled waters. The voices of the students who had the colossal task of integrating segregated schools were unheard. Yet, they refused to go along with the status quo, segregation. For some citizens in the community, segregation provided a sense of

ownership and belonging. However, the three students connected to this study stood firmly on their principles that they would not let it be. Nevertheless, they continued to march forward towards unlocking the still waters of segregation that had been untouched for decades. Although the still waters of segregation ran deep with pain, fury, and inequality, these students understood at the other end of the bridge was a chance at equal access to education for generations to come. Therefore, their sacrifice was not only for themselves but for their country, community, gender, race, and all of humankind. This sacrifice must have been stressful and devastating for the girls. They had a heavy burden to carry, and these girls realized that because of their identity they had to perform at exemplary levels to show everyone that they could succeed in their new school environment.

The media portrayed the National Guard helping little Black children integrate schools. But, what were those young students feeling at the time? What was their story? How did they feel knowing that their local government was determined to prevent them from attending the “white” school? Why did it take so long for schools to be integrated? These students did not understand the complications of their demands for equal rights and how it would be a model for protest and social justice for years to come. They didn’t understand how their personal experience of desegregation was political and would shape the rest of their lives. Yet, the brave students who crossed the bridge sacrificed their lives, so that others would have access to the bridge. Despite the bravery and sacrifice of these students, the bridge is currently unavailable for many underprivileged, minority students in our educational system. Disturbingly, there are still troubled waters. They continue to be murky and unclear. In order to get an understanding of why the waters are still

troubled, we must take a closer look at Queensland, Alabama and look further at our entire educational system. Why are a few students in certain areas not privy to a quality education? Cashin proclaims (2004), “Black and Latino school children are bearing the heaviest cost. They tend to be regulated to high poverty, overwhelmingly minority public schools that are characterized by poorer test scores, less-experienced teachers, and fewer resources than the public schools most white children attend. Everyone in America ... intrinsically understands ... it is an unspoken truth that we do not own up to: America’s schools are separate and unequal” (p.202). This situation is an injustice to poor, minority students who do not have the money, power, and influence to speak up for themselves. Consequently, they continue to receive the least the educational system has to offer. Whose responsibility is it to make sure that these students have access to the bridge? Dr. King (1963) stated, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere” (p.174). Each one of us is responsible to help build a bridge for those who are oppressed. We have a responsibility to question the flow of trouble waters and helped the oppressed understand how to gain access to the bridge. If we continue to sit on the banks of the river and watch the troubled waters swallow the oppressed, we are just as guilty as the oppressors of the Jim Crow South. The United States public education system continues to provide the majority of poor minority students a separate and unequal education (Kozol, 1991, 2005).

Many people in the South act as if they don’t notice the wrathful and angry troubled waters. If you don’t acknowledge the rough flow of the water, then you will never be able to cross. As a native Southerner, I look at how the South has a rich flow of history that is constantly celebrated. However, I see that Black Southerners don’t see or hear themselves clearly in this rich flow of history. The stories of Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. and the Civil Rights movement are told and stories of slavery are mentioned here and there, but what about the heroes and heroines? African American Southern history consists not only of painful stories but also rich triumphant stories that need to be heard. The South continues to celebrate many racist ideals that are agonizing for the Southern, African American community. The South acts as if it has a dirty little secret, racism, and nobody wants to talk about it! But it is time to acknowledge the past so that we can continue to build a bridge. Moreover, I believe that the untold stories of desegregation create a flow that will pave the way for a bridge that will help educators to look at our current educational system and figure out why America desegregated to become segregated once again.

Seldom do we hear about the Black, Female, Southern experience. Black Females stories have historically been underrepresented and unpublicized. Southern Black Women's voices are heard infrequently as the river flows down the path of history. The underlying currents of race, class, and gender have kept many Women of color marginalized. I contend that Southern Black Women also have to include place as a part of their identity and experience. The South is unlike any other part of our country. Many historians have listened to the troubled waters and revealed murky painful stories of Black Southern Women. Although the Black Southern Woman has endured horrific pain, she has always been resilient.

Her ...image has been maliciously maligned; she has been sexually molested and abused by the white colonizer; she has suffered the worst kind of economic exploitation, having been forced to serve as the white Woman's maid...It is the

depth of degradation to be socially manipulated, physically raped, used to undermine your own household, and to be powerless. (Beale, 1995, p.148)

Black Women in the South have endured oppression due to racism, sexism, and classism. Further, Southern Black Women have their own epistemologies and flow. Therefore, we deserve to have our voices heard. This study will provide an opportunity to hear Black Southern Women's perspectives of school desegregation through their own voices.

In the small towns like rural Queensburg, Alabama the schools appear to be re-segregated based on race and class even in 2013. Troubled waters still exist. Many of the more affluent, white students attend a private school and poorer African American students attend public schools. The people don't talk about racism or desegregation. They just allow troubled waters to flow. Many of the Black and white citizens of this town who attended schools when desegregation occurred choose to forget the painful memories of the past. Therefore, it is very important to listen to the voice of the water through the fictional composite characters of Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise who desegregated this small fictional high school in Alabama. I will explore how these students used their spirituality, determination, and identity consciousness to help them. Oral history is the vehicle that allows the authentic voices of the students to be heard and shared. These students' thoughts, words, emotions, and lives are fictionalized. The undercurrent is reality. Fictionalizing will help to minimize the pain and shame of the past atrocities associated with the desegregation of Queensburg High School. Using fiction also helps to emphasize situations that were unspoken or silenced. These Women had an inner struggle where they carried the pride and hope of their community on their shoulders while also

trying to assert their identity among students and faculty who did not initially accept them. It is important to examine these histories and remember why desegregation was so imperative to this town.

As citizens we cannot stand by and allow troubled water to flow and re-segregation to exist today. We who see the injustice must speak out and help to reclaim the soul of education. “Educational work that is not connected deeply to a powerful understanding of ... realities is in danger of losing its soul” (Apple, 2004, p. 322). Reality is that many schools today remain separate and unequal based on race and class, and it is time to listen to what history is telling us and build a bridge.

### **Still Waters Running Deep: Key Research Issues**

Approaching still water can seem like an easy task. When looking at the water it seems as if the water is very shallow and straightforward, but it is smart to proceed with caution. Still waters can run deep and can be a lot of trouble once you decide to step in.

Silence... Silence... Silence... is the culture that has developed in Queensburg, Alabama when race is discussed. Citizens of this small town act as if the civil rights movement never existed. Yet, slowly and quietly the current schools went back to the segregation of the 1950's. Exploring the oral histories of three young Women who helped to integrate Queensburg High School will help break this silence. If people hear the stories and struggles of these Women, perhaps they will see the strength and inadequacy of school desegregation. Desegregation provided opportunities for all children to receive an education. Desegregation was a step towards equality and justice for all. Various efforts were made to help push forward and allow all students opportunities and equal access to education. Students of different races broke down racial barriers caused by

segregation and developed friendships and meaningful relationships. Desegregation made the idea of equal citizenship a reality for students. “Desegregation educates White and Negro students equally in the fundamentals of racial tolerance and understanding... learning to live interracially is a vital component in every student’s experience... There should be no separate school. It is not enough that all should be taught alike; they must all be taught together” (McCord, 1969, p. 47). However, desegregation took Black students out of the comfort of their own communities and put their education in the hands of the dominant society. Black communities felt they were robbed of their input, jobs in education, and the ability to control the schools that educated students in their community. Desegregation was a painful reality for those who were the first to begin the process. Desegregation is one of the most powerful and painful transitions the American education system has had to make.

During my inquiry, I continue to ponder several questions: These Women were very determined and focused during this experience. They were humiliated and abused by the students and teachers at Queensburg High School, so how were these women able to navigate troubled waters? What made them so resilient? Did these Women have a voice in their desegregation journey? What role did their gender, race, or class have in their experience of desegregation?

Segregation is still prevalent in many small towns like Queensburg, Alabama. The majority of white students attend private school, and African American students attend public school. Many times looking at how issues are resolved in the past helps to examine the present and plan for the future. “Sankofa is a West African word, which



means we must go back and reclaim our past, so we understand why and how we came to be who we are today”(Webb-Johnson, 2006, p.31). My final research question utilizes this West African term: How can using a Sankofian philosophy to examine desegregation aid educators today?

### **Wading in the Water: Continuing the flow**

After the decision is made to approach troubled waters you must wade in the water and endure the rough course of the water. The water may push, pull, and tug at your balance, but you must stand strong and tall in order to endure the flow of the waters. Setting your feet firm on the ground and remembering who you are and what you stand for allows you to wade in the water.

Many currents that are in troubled waters have not been acknowledged, but allowing these currents to rise up from the past and providing a space for those who have been traditionally silenced have given me new insight into the past, present, and will help amplify the desegregation struggle of Southern American schools. It is essential that we listen to the voices that will guide us through these trouble waters and provide a place to build a bridge to the other side.

## CHAPTER 2

### MARCHIN' THROUGH THE WATER: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

*Ain't gonna let nobody*

Ain't gonna let nobody, Lordy, turn me round,  
Turn me round, turn me round,  
Ain't gonna let nobody, Lordy, turn me round,  
I'm gonna keep on a-walkin', Lord, keep on a-talkin', Lord,  
Marching up to freedom land

Raging waters can be difficult to navigate. It is tedious and harsh process. Often individuals with the greatest amount of tenacity can be turned around when marching through troubled waters. Yet, those who are determined refuse to be turned around and march forward into troubled waters.

The spiritual *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round* describes the resolve that Black Women have to achieve and define their place in the world. Black Women's issues have traditionally been understated and our voices have been stifled. Nevertheless, Black Women continue to travel a rocky path of racism and sexism, but we have not been stopped. Faith and spirituality keep us flowing in order to march forward towards the bridge.

Three questions need to be answered when analyzing this study: How and why did these Women endure this experience of desegregating the local high school? What has lead the town of Queensburg back to segregation? How is using these Women's stories helpful in investigating school desegregation in 2013? Several bodies of literature must be explored in order to continue marching through troubled waters.

Womansim defines the rhythm of the river and provides a place to listen to the flow of the troubled waters, thereby making space for these Women's stories to be heard. It creates ripples in the water that allow Black Women to honor ourselves, our stories, and our own Truth. "The womainst ... appreciates herself, her culture, her Womanly attitudes and emotions unconditionally" (Tally, 1984, p219). Womanist theology provides African American Women with a spiritual home that we can call our own. Several pioneers that paved the path of womanist theology include Katie Canon (1988), Renita Weems (1988/2005, 1993, 1999, 2004, 2005), and Jacquelyn Grant (1989, 1995). Spirituality and faith is essential to understanding how to navigate troubled waters.

Looking closely at the literature related to the education of Blacks in the South will provide me with a foundation to continue to press forward through troubled waters. Segregation rocks on the bottom of the river bed provide a rough path for marching, but the education of Blacks in the South is a map telling you where the rocks were in the past and how to avoid stumbling in troubled waters. This literature will help put this research into a historical context and reveal the incidents and stories connected to desegregation. The river gets unstable when looking at Southern history and pondering the education of Blacks in the South. Blacks traditionally have been mis-educated and underserved by the South. William Watkins declares, "Education can be used both to oppress and to liberate...when you can control a person's thinking you can control that person" (Watkins, 2001, p.1). The American South has sought to control African Americans by mis-educating them.

Re-segregation research will help read the rhythm of troubled waters so that I can navigate troubled waters and understand the waters at my present state of being. Re-

segregation literature provides me a lens of Sankafu philosophy to interpret the current barriers in troubled waters. Understanding the flow of the past troubled waters may help the waters clear in the present. Schools were desegregated after the 1970's but they are trending back to the same separate and unequal race and class boundaries that were present prior to *Brown versus the Board of Education* (Patterson, 2001).

Contemporary metropolitan educational inequalities are dramatically demonstrated in comparisons of achievement test scores, dropout rates, course offerings, and teacher preparedness. Metropolitan areas are characterized by two-tiered educational systems: one tier serving the mostly white and suburban children of affluent and middle-class families, and the other for the mostly minority and urban students from low-income families and communities.

(Orfield, 1996, p. 64)

Re-segregation research will help me examine the waters that are currently flowing.

Ultimately, these bodies of literature lead to clarity and provide a viable path in the river towards the bridge and eventually to the other side of the riverbank. This research allows me to further evaluate the desegregation of Queensburg High School in 1970 and why this small town decided to desegregate to again segregate years later.

### **Stompin' in the Water: Womanism**

When walking through water sometimes you have to stomp to make sure that your feet are firmly planted on the bed of the river. One has to know who they are and their destination so they will not be carried away by the current of the river. Black Women have to find our own theoretical voice that supports our Truth, lived experiences, and ways of knowing.

The ladies whose stories influenced my study have identified themselves as African American, Female, and Southern. These dimensions of their identities are essential in understanding their stories and the oppression they experienced. Furthermore, looking closely at their spirituality gives a clear perspective of why they were able to endure the exigent task of school desegregation. Ultimately, liberation is experienced epistemologically by Black Women when telling about our experiences. The literature will reveal that this study is needed and more research is needed about the Southern African American Female experience.

**Womanism versus Black Feminism: Which way does the water flow?** When marching through water, you have to understand which way the water flows so that you can navigate the safest quickest way. Figuring out the flow helps you get closer to the bridge.

Why are many scholars who seek self-definition and a common agenda of the African American Woman so concerned about labels? Which label is the most powerful for the Southern, Black Women? The Southern, Black Woman has an additional complex oppression that is encapsulated in the culture of place. The South and Black Women have a deep history that intertwines pain, faith, hate, love, despair, and hope. All of these emotions cause the Southern Black Woman to search for a way to tell her story which will reveal her truth and allow her to define who she is. Furthermore, understanding that both Black feminism and Womanism are, “both concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by Black Women who are themselves part of the Black community’s efforts to achieve equality and liberty” (Hill Collins, 2001, p. 10). Does the Southern Black Woman need a label or is her way of understanding more fluid and complex?

In Alice Walker's book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* she states, "womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (1983, p.xii). Walker makes this statement suggesting Womanism and feminism are not the same, but they are very similar. Also in offering her definition Walker implies that a Womanist agenda is unique and offers something different from a feminist agenda. A traditional feminist view provides a struggle with sexism; whereas, womanism is deeply rooted in racial and gender oppression. Womanism entails the idea of wanting to be grown up, act responsibly, and seeing things through mature eyes. Ultimately, giving birth to the idea, "Womanish as the opposite of the frivolous, irresponsible, not serious, girlish" (Hill Collins, 2001, p.10). I concur with Walker who argues that traditional feminism does not have the same maturity as Womanism, because of its need for Women of color to assimilate to a white Female agenda. Womanism in turn seeks not to be "a closed fixed system of ideas but one that continually evolves through its rejection of all forms of oppression and commitment to social justice" (Hill Collins, 2001, p.10). Hence, the inclusive nature of Womanism makes it seem more grown up than feminism for some Women of color. Womanism also attempts to honor stronger, healthier relationships with Black men. Women of color have allies that understand different facets of oppression both their white sisters and their African-American brothers. White Women understand the struggle of being unheard by their male counter parts because of their gender. The struggle of sexism is felt by all Women because of our patriarchal society. Furthermore, Women of color can address gender issues without being labeled a lesbian or attacking the Black man. Does Womanism provide the African American Women in the South the best refuge in which her voice can be honored and heard?

Feminism is a philosophy that seeks to empower Women politically, socially, intellectually, sexually, spiritually, and economically. Many times both the Black community and white community view feminism as “the cultural property of white Women” (Hill Collins, 2001, p.13). Many Black Women are uncomfortable with the word feminist because of the association with white Women. Furthermore, “the problematic relationships between Black and white feminist realities along dimensions such as race, class, sexuality, nationality, and so forth account for the many theoretical and practical tensions” (Henry, 2005, p.90). Hence, Black feminism allows Black Women to explore their own specific oppression and epistemologies. “Using the term Black feminism positions African American Women to examine how the particular constellation of issues affecting Black Women in the United States are part of issues of Women’s emancipation struggles globally”(Hill Collins, 2001, p13). The adjective Black in front of the word feminism clearly states that feminism is not a white Female ideology, but a philosophy that is inclusive of Black Women. Moreover, it uncovers the reality that Black Women are very concerned with gender oppression, but also want to deal with racial oppression. “The term Black feminist both highlights the contradictions underlying the assumed whiteness of feminism and serves to remind white Women that they comprise neither the only nor the normative feminist” (Hill Collins, 2001, p 13). Many Women that identify themselves as Black feminist feel that they don’t need another term such as Womanism to define their ways of knowing, but they want to be recognized within feminist philosophy as a part of the movement not a separate theory. Black feminism provides the Black Woman a specific place for her voice to be heard alongside

all her other sisters in the feminist movement. Is this the most powerful philosophy for the African American Woman in the South?

I assert for the purposes of my dissertation inquiry that Womanism will provide the best philosophy for my theoretical framework. Womanism provides liberation and self-definition to give its subjects voice. Black Women's multiple consciousness continues to empower us to press forward and not be turned around by injustice. Alice Walker (1983) defined Womanist in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* as,

From Womanish. A Black feminist or feminist of color. From the Black folk expression of Mothers to Female children, "You acting Womanish," i.e., like a Woman ... Wanting to Know more and in greater depth than is considered good for one... A Woman who loves other Women... Appreciates and prefers Women's culture, Women's emotional flexibility, and Women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men... Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people both male and Female. Not a separatist... Loves the Spirit. Loves love. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless... Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender. (p. xi- xii)

Womanism is a celebratory theory that is about Women of color loving ourselves and honoring our place in this world. Womanism also reveals that traditional feminism does not fully explore the perspectives of Black Women. Womanism does not include the word "Black" but is inclusive to all Women of color including Black Women. Walker proclaims, "An advantage of using Womanist is that, because it is from my own culture, I needn't preface it with the word Black (an awkward necessity and a problem I have with the word feminist) since Blackness is implicit in the term; just as for white Women there



is apparently no felt need to preface feminist with the word white since the word feminist is accepted as coming out of white Women's culture" (Tally, 1984, p.215). Womanism provides Women of color with a brand of feminism that clearly offers us a philosophical home. Womanism serves as a comprehensive theory that points toward liberation for the Southern Black Women. Audre Lorde and Alice Walker debated about which philosophy is most powerful for the African American Woman. Walker (1997) states, "She [Lorde] had questioned my use of the word Womanist in lieu of Black feminist saying that it appeared to be an attempt to disclaim being feminist...I pointed out to her that it is a necessary act of liberation to name oneself with words that fit... more reflective of Black Women's culture, especially Southern culture" (p.80). Womanism provides the Southern, African American Women with the freedom to name our own experiences. While Black feminism forces us to find our place in an already defined view point. Southern Black Women have always had to fit into the mold that someone else has created for us. Publications like the Moynihan report created a negative view of Black Women. "Moynihan wrote his infamous report...in which he postulated the idea of the Black matriarchy and made the Black Women responsible for her man's defeat in American society- the myth of the castrating bitch"(Tally, 1983, p. 208). For many in society, Black Women are seen as the asexual mammy, the over sexualized whore, or the overbearing bitch. We as Black Women cannot wait on other groups to define us and tell us who we are and how we affect the community. Hence, defining our own theories provides us with a rich experience that is liberating and celebratory.

**Who am I, Lost in Troubled Waters: Black Women and Identity.** African American Women have always had a different way of navigating unknown waters. Lorde

(2007), Walker (1997), Guy-Sheftall (1995), and Hill Collins (1991) all argue that Black Women have a different truth and only Black Women can explain and define their own path through troubled waters. Author of *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins (2004) declares, “The existence of a self-defined Black Woman’s standpoint using an Afro centric feminist epistemology calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at the truth” (p. 299). Black Women’s truth is different from that of other Women. Four hundred years of slavery, and one hundred years of Jim Crow have caused the African American Woman’s experience to be different. Morrison (2008) proclaims, “Black Women are different from white Women because they view themselves differently and lead a different kind of life...I maintain that Black Women are already OK. OK with our short necks OK with our used hands OK with our tired feet” (p. 22-23). Many Black Women don’t know anything other than hard work, oppression, and troubled waters. Many times they have not had the opportunity to deal with their own identities. The inability to understand your own identity can make it difficult to navigate troubled waters and discover the bridge. Lorde (2007) declares, “In this country, Black Women traditionally have compassion for everybody else except ourselves. We have cared for whites because we had to pay for survival; we have cared for our children and our fathers and our brothers and our lovers....We need to learn to have care and compassion for ourselves” (p. 62). In the African-American community Black Women have always had to work and provide for our families. Sojourner Truth (1995) asked the pivotal question, “And a'n't I am Woman? Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could hear me! And a'n't I a Woman” (p.36)? African American Women struggle with

oppression because historically they have not been treated with the same care and fragility as white Women. Many ideologies have been established about Black Women's identities. Toxic studies like the Moynihan report described Black Women as overbearing irresponsible whores, who were directly at fault of the demise of the Black community. Additionally, "Robert Staples in 1976 notes the valuable commitment Black Women have made to the movement, breeders, feeders, and follow-the-leaders" (Tally, 1984, p.208). These ideologies that try to define the Black Women's identity are unfounded. Therefore Moynihan, a white man, cannot define what it is to be a Black Female, nor can Robert Staples, a Black man. Only Black Women can clarify and define our own identity.

Black Women's epistemologies create a different consciousness—a place where gender, race, and oppression meet. King (1995) declares,

Black Women's well-documented facility to encompass seemingly contradictory role expectations of worker, homemaker, and mother that has contributed to the confusion in understanding Black Womanhood. These competing demands (each requiring its own set of resistances to multiple forms of oppression) are primary influence on the Black Woman's definition of her Womanhood, and her relationships to the people around her. To reduce this complex of negotiations in an addition problem 'racism + sexism = Black Woman's experience' (p. 298).

Audre Lorde (2007) calls for feminists to acknowledge that the intersection of race and gender is an important issue should be included in traditional feminism. Not only is it those dominant in society, who do not experience multiple consciousness, to acknowledge the complexities, but it is also paramount that Black Women and others with intersecting identities tell their own stories. "Multiple consciousness, which hold

that most of us experience the world in different ways on different occasions because of who we are. The hope is that if we pay attention to multiplicity of social life, perhaps our institutions and arrangement will better address the problems that plague us” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p.56). I assert that Black Women in the South have a multiple jeopardy that reveals itself through different lenses which are being Black, Female, Southern and spiritual. King (1995) explains, “Given the inability of any single agenda to address the intricate complex system of racism, sexism and classism in Black Women’s lives, Black Women must develop a political ideology capable of interpreting and resisting that multiple jeopardy” (p. 310). Multiple jeopardy helps reveal the identities of the three Black Women in my research and gives depth to their plight as students of desegregation.

Looking into the identities of my fictional composite characters is important to help understand the liberation of the Queensburg Southside community. This exploration will provide and create understanding, thereby, allowing others to hear the stories of students who were oppressed by a separate and unequal education. Studying experiences of the past is essential to helping develop a meaningful future. Toni Morrison (2008) declares, “My single solitary and individual life is like the lives of the tribe; it differs in these specific ways, but it is a balanced life because it is both solitary and representative” (p.57). Womanism gives a more complete voice to the multifaceted identities of the subjects in my study. Giving voice to the oppressed is essential to the struggle of the Womanist scholar. Brown (1997) reveals, “(It is) our need to transform the silent spaces into action and for each person to establish her own voice; and of our individual responsibility to help ourselves and each other” (p. 74). African American Women have a collective responsibility to acknowledge oppression and allow those who have

traditionally been silenced to be heard. African American Women can no longer allow others to speak for us or fight our fights. Lorde (2007) proclaims,

The development of self-defined Black Women, ready to explore and pursue our power and interest within our communities, is a vital component in the war for Black liberation...When Black Women in this country come together to examine our sources of strength and support, and to recognize our common social, cultural, and emotional, and political interest it is a development which can only contribute to the power of the Black community as a whole. It can certainly never diminish it. (p. 46)

Standing up for justice and equality for yourself helps you to level the playing field for all. Through Black Women speaking about their oppression and lived experienced liberation for all may be achieved.

### **Navigating Through Troubled Waters: Classism + Racism+ Sexism**

**=Oppression.** It is crucial that you understand what path you need to take when you are marching through troubled waters. However, sometimes each way you turn, you realize that there is no clear easy path. You just have to deal with the way the water is flowing and begin to navigate towards the bridge. Your path is not clear because no one has provided you with a route to the bridge. You need to plant your feet and keep marching.

Classism, racism, and sexism are all currents that hinder navigation towards the bridge. Oppression becomes political when it is looked at carefully and the question is asked, "Who benefits and why?" bell hooks (1995) declares that, "Being oppressed means the absence of choices. It is the primary point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor" (p. 273). Oppression becomes important based on who is being

oppressed. Traditionally, feminism presented the oppression of middle class white Women in a white male patriarchal society. Those who were dominant in society were more sympathetic to the oppression of traditional feminist and offer more choices to white middle class Women to alleviate some of their oppression. “Middle-class white Women were able to make their interest the primary focus of the feminist movement and employ rhetoric of commonality that made their condition synonymous with oppression” (hooks, 1995, p. 274). Society looked at this oppression of these Women and decided that this particular group of Women spoke for all Women and were defining oppression as the need to work and not be a housewife. These Women defined feminist oppression using their lives and experiences. “White Women who dominate feminist discourse, who for the most part make and articulate feminist theory, have little or no understanding of the white supremacy as a racial politic, of the psychological impact or class of their political status within a racist, sexist, capitalist state” (hooks, 1995, p. 272). Nevertheless, poor Women and Women of color had to work and did not have the luxury of being a housewife, and their race- and/or class-based oppression was not recognized. The oppression of these Women was political because the dominant members of society did not understand the lived experiences and oppression of these Women (Riggs, 1994, 1997). “Had middle class Black Women begun a movement in which they had labeled themselves oppressed, no one would have taken them seriously” (hooks, 1995, p. 274). Black Women didn’t have a voice at the beginning of the feminist movement. Their oppression was unheard and unspoken because politically they were invisible. Although traditional feminism excluded certain groups of Women from feminist discourse and praxis, Women of color decided to speak for themselves and define their own realities in

their voices. Contemporary Feminism helps recognize different types of oppression of marginalized Women by opening itself to more inclusive and heterogeneous points of view. Theories such as Womanism, Black feminist thought, multicultural feminism, critical race feminism, and Chicana feminism have offered different perspectives of oppression. Moreover, our society is more inclusive and honors the voices of different cultural groups.

With the development of a more inclusive feminist discourse, politically one group of Women continues to be oppressed. Women with low social economic status continue to be marginalized. “The womanist/ Black feminist debate occurs primarily among relatively privileged Black Women... that does not simultaneously address issues of power leaves out masses of Black Women doing the dry cleaning, cooking the fast food, and dusting the computer of the sister who has just written the theoretical treatise on Black Women” (Hill Collins, 2001, p 16). Their voices are not heard in academia; therefore, their struggle is not deemed political. Some suggest that their voices are silenced, but I argue they are loud. The dominant society is just not listening. The angry mother who curses out the nurse at the free clinic is seen as belligerent. Society doesn't know that she is cursing because she is a frustrated single mother of five with a sick child and no healthcare. The same frustrations may be found in the rude McDonalds' worker that rolls her eyes at you in the drive through. She just got evicted from her apartment and didn't get to work on time due to her out of commission car. These Women have an untold story. Middle class Women of all ethnicities try to speak for their sisters with fewer financial resources, but to put words into someone's mouth to tell their story that makes you the oppressor. Freire (2007) declares, “The oppressed instead of striving for

liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or sub-oppressors. The very structure of their thought has been condition by the contradictions of the concrete existential situation by which they were shaped” (p. 45). Middle class Women of color essentially become oppressors when they try to tell the stories of those with fewer resources. It is essential that those who define themselves as Womanist are inclusive of all groups and listen.

Overt stories of oppression and struggle should be told, but we have to look deeper than the surface. We must look into the eyes and souls of each individual and feel their oppression. With understanding, those who experience the currents of racism, classism, and sexism can navigate through troubled waters to the steps of the bridge.

**Marching with Spirit: Black Women and spirituality.** Marching through troubled waters is a difficult task that can seem impossible. Navigating the path of the water and standing up without the current knocking you over is difficult. It is comforting to know that you never travel troubled waters alone. God is always present and within your reach.

Spirituality was a central theme that continued to reoccur as I interviewed the Women who desegregated Queensburg High School. History has proven that African Americans have relied on their spirit to carry them through difficult times such as: The middle passage, slavery, Black codes, Jim Crow, and the civil rights movement. Saints have cried out to God to help them deal with the woes of racism, sexism, and classism. Black Women name “God” in different ways, but realize that our strength is found in a power that is greater than us. Baker-Fletcher (1997) declares that



Womanist theology asks, Who has God been in the lives of Black Women historically and today? God has many names. Yet God is unnamable. That which we traditionally call God in Black Western culture is not limited to churches, but has to do with everyday belief and practice in today life situations...God is not something one finds in church, it is something people bring with them...Faith must emerge from something deeper and more ancient than denominational churches...One must be grounded in the source that the churches claim to represent, the divine ground of all creation, of all that is an all that will be-God Godself. (p. 122-123)

It is my belief that one cannot put God into a box or define who or what God is. God is unexplainable and all knowing. As a Christian I believe that God, Jesus, and the Spirit are one in the same. Karen Baker-Fletcher (1997) contends, “Historically for Black Christian Women, the embodiment of God as Spirit is evident in the saving, liberating, and healing activity of Jesus Christ in the lives of Black Women...Jesus embodies God, who is Spirit” (p.133). The tenacity of many Black Women to survive and endure complex issues of racism and sexism is based in faith. Faith is trusting God and allowing Its will in your life.

Reading Womanist theology leads me to new understandings about God.

Throughout my life, my image of God has been male. I always use pronouns such as “he or him” or nouns such as the “the Father or Son”. After pondering my own spirituality I feel that God cannot be tied to a specific gender. To make God male is to confine God and put God into a specific box. Karen Baker-Fletcher (1997) states,

We are not accustomed to thinking of ourselves as being created in God's image really, which means we have difficulty imaging God as Female...If God does not identify with Black Women, what kind of God is that...If we, male and Female are created in God's image, then it is possible to imagine God as male and Female. In fact this often happens in certain prayers and songs in traditional Black worship where God is my mother, my father, my brother, my sister. (p. 125-126)

As a Black Woman when I think of males in my church and community, they don't fully understand who I am as a Woman or the sexism that I face on a daily basis. In the Black community many Black Women are more aware of oppression connected to the race. They ignore the gender oppression by their own brothers, sons, and fathers. Lorde (2007) proclaims, "The Black male consciousness must be raised to the realization that sexism and Woman-hating are critically dysfunctional to his liberation as a Black man...this continued blindness between us can only serve oppressive system within which we live" (p.64). Is God so narrow that It can only be a man.? Black theology has challenged the idea of white Jesus. I contend the idea of a male God needs to be explored more. Can God not be the Goddess? No one has ever seen God so how do we know the gender or race of God? God is so unexplainable we cannot begin to wrap our small minds around who God is. Who has decided that God is a man?—the men that wrote the Bible, Koran, or Torah!?! "Women have little voice in the Bible, and what voice they do have is given them only to illustrate the deviousness, silliness, untrustworthiness, and general insignificance of their sex" (Walker, 1997, p. 23). In order to get a clearer interpretation of who God is through the bible we have to look at who wrote it and who benefits. Hence, I believe that whatever gender, color, race, or nationality is most comforting for

an individual to visualize as God then that who God is to them. Alice Walker (1997) explains, “Everyone deserves a God who adores our freedom...One begins to see the world from one’s own point of view; to interact with it out of one’s own conscience and heart... We begin to see that we must be loved very much by whatever Creation is, to find ourselves” (p. 26). God is personal and unique to each individual. Each person has to define their own identity and relationship with God. The holy trinity is defined as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baker- Fletcher (1997) adds, “God is Spirit. Jesus is Spirit and human. The Spirit is the all-encompassing, inclusive force in which God/Creator, Jesus, and all of creation are inextricably enwombed...the nature of God is most fundamentally is Spirit” (p. 124). It is foreign to me to find comfort in a white, male God. It is interesting that the dominant group in society has found a way to oppress others by making God into a physical form that reflects them. As a Black Female, the God that is represented in many pictures is the exact opposite of who I am. Thinking of God as a white male is unauthentic to me. I find comfort in the philosophy that God is an ever knowing Spirit that loves me without a specific gender but is love. God IS LOVE. Love just IS. Love is acceptance, freedom, justice, equality, unique, and understanding. All of these things fit my identity of God.

Understanding and knowing God provides a sense of comfort and well-being. Alice Walker (1997) asserts, “I believe that God is everything...Everything that is or ever was ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you’ve found It” (p. 8). The Women in this study were able to continue their journey to desegregate the school because of their knowing and trusting in God. Their axiology that had been

instilled in them at an early age helped them remain steadfast to cross the bridge over troubled waters.

The Black church has been a place of liberation for the Black community. Saints believe God will liberate them from racism and inequality. In the Black community many churches are headed by men and exclude Women from roles of leadership. Black men in the church adopt a theology that supports liberation based on race, but continue to oppress Black Women in the church. “Where racism is rejected, sexism has been embraced. Where classism is called into question, racism and sexism have been tolerated. And where sexism is repudiated, racism and classism are often ignored” (Grant, 1995, p. 320). The Black church as a whole cannot be liberated until sexism in the church is recognized, acknowledged, and corrected. Many ministers point out places in the Bible where Women are seen as evil and destructive. This is detrimental to the self-image of the Women in the church. Alice Walker (1997) discusses how the minister from her childhood oppressed Women using the Bible. She states,

[The] reason that my mother and other Women were not permitted to speak in church was that the Bible forbade it. And it is forbidden in the Bible because, in the Bible men alone are sanctioned to own property...And Women herself is property, along with asses, the oxen, and the sheep. I can imagine some latter-day Jezebel in our community having the nerve to speak up about being silenced. And the smugness with which our uninspiring and indifferently trained minister, Reverend Whisby, might have directed her to a passage from the New Testament that is attributed to Saint Paul: Let Women keep silence in the churches...she would read it and feel thoroughly put down. (p15).

Male ministers and those in power in the Black church should not use their power to oppress Women and make them feel less. Church should be about uplifting and liberating others. Alice Walker's minister used the Bible to justify the oppression and silence of Women in the church.

Black men in church must see their oppression as connected to the oppression of Black Women based on both race and class. Grant (1995) asserts,

There are oppressive realities in the Black community that are related to but independent of, the fact of racism. Sexism is one such reality. Black men seek to liberate themselves from racial stereotypes and the conditions of oppression without giving due attention to the stereotypes and oppressions against Women which parallel those against Blacks...Racism and sexism are interrelated just as all forms of oppression are interrelated. Sexism, however, has a reality and significance of its own because it represents that peculiar form of oppression suffered by Black Women at the hand of Black men...If the church does not share in the liberation struggle of Black Women, its liberation struggle is not authentic. If Women are oppressed, the church cannot possibly be a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality. (p. 324-325)

The love of God liberates. How can the Black church liberate Blacks from racism, but not liberate the Black Women from sexism? Is the Black church interpreting the word of God accurately? Grant (1995) explains, "If its liberation is not human enough to include the liberation of Women, it will not be liberation...the liberation of Black men and Women is inseparable, then a radical split cannot be made between racism and sexism. Black Women are oppressed by racism and sexism. It is therefore necessary that Black men and

Women be actively involved in combating both evils” (p.331-332). Liberation of the entire community will come when oppression of all types is acknowledged. In many Black churches today, Women are seen behind the scenes working. The majority of the Black church is Female, yet a Black Woman doesn't hold the majority of the leadership roles in church. Grant (1995) asserts, “It is often said that Women are the backbone of the church. On the surface this may appear to be a compliment, especially when one considers the function of the backbone in the human anatomy ...The telling portion of the word backbone is back... What they really mean is that Women are in the background and should be kept there” (p. 325). Women in the church many times are not given the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process in the church (Tatum, 1997). Yet, they are needed to support the decisions of the men in church. Hence, in my research Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise were told by the men of the NAACP that they were going to integrate the new high school. Three Females were going to integrate the high school, but where were the Women in the decision making process. Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise didn't have anyone who represented their gender to help make a decision about their educational future. The decisions were made by the men in the community to send three girls to desegregate the high school. Women were not consulted nor were their opinions voiced. Did these men have any experience as a teenage girl to know how this experience would affect the girls mentally? These questions about the effect of their identity as Black Females needed to be answered.

The Black Female in the church must figure out how to address her oppression. It is critical to the exposure of the sexism that occurs in the church. Grant (1995) declares, “The elimination of both racism and sexism is so crucial for the liberation of Black

persons that we cannot shrink from facing them together... Black Women have to keep the issue of sexism going in the Black community, in the Black church, and in Black theology until it has been eliminated” (p. 333). It is crucial that Black Women acknowledge their differences with Black men and name their oppression. Oppression will continue until it is recognized and defined. We have to look at our differences and honor them. Studying the relationship between oppression, differences, and power are central to the discussion about Black Women in the church. Lorde (2007) asserts, “The oppressed must recognize the masters’ difference in order to survive...the future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all Women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference” (p. 123). Black people in the church should all have the same goal to worship God (West, 2008). In order to achieve the goal, we must all (men, Women, Black, white, other) know our own worth in order to love ourselves and therefore love the God that loves us. “African American Women need to design and build a theology that allows us to power up our souls... We need a theology that helps us to value and empower ourselves, not a theology that is destructive. By protecting our souls, we can then do what is most creative...We can begin to let our souls heal, rest, and come into their own” (Mathews, 1997, p. 35-36). Developing philosophies that empower Black Women creates liberation. This allows the African American Women to value who she is and her spirituality.

**Stompin' Forward.** Womanism and womanist theology is the foundation for the creation of my fictional composite characters. My theoretical framework also points to usage of Sankofa philosophy. Womanism in conjunction with a Sonkofa philosophy allows me to look at the experiences of Mary, Barabara Anne, and Louise and help create

new understandings about schooling today. Womanism gives a more complete view to the multifaceted identities of the Women in my research.

### **Navigating Murky Waters: Black Americans in the South and Mis-education**

When looking at troubled waters, they are sometimes cloudy and filled with debris. Murky water can be deceiving and doesn't give a clear view of reality. These waters can lead to an unknown path and cause the current to halt its flow. Looking into the inquiry of Blacks in the South can help navigate the murky waters and reveal a path toward the bridge.

On the surface, the history of the education of Blacks in the South looks very simple. Deep examination provides a hazy complex perspective. Truth is revealed through individual examination and accurate knowledge that shows voluminous perspectives. As an individual, I have had to look at the research and navigate further into troubled waters when reviewing research about the education of Blacks in the South. Two essential questions help me navigate through the murky waters. Why do schools today reflect the segregation of the late 1960's and early 1970's? The education of African Americans in the United States has been an unclear path that seems to serve the interest of African American, but does it really?

**Nebulous Stagnant Waters: Oppression, power, and control.** Many times when people are trying to force water to go one way, they build a dam. People see a dam as a positive way to keep the water under control. Water has its own flow and needs the freedom to choose its own current. Building the dam can cause the flow to cease and the water to become stagnant. Stagnant water doesn't move. This water starts to become



dirty, cloudy, and nebulous. It becomes difficult to navigate through nebulous waters. The power and control of the dam has killed the spirit of the water.

Controlling education is the way to continue the cycle of oppression. Oppression is perpetuated through a lack of education. When a person is kept uninformed and unaware of the potential they have for success, they are a victim of oppression. Knowledge becomes stagnant when it is controlled. Understanding and knowledge create a pathway to opportunity. The history of the African American has been one of profound hardships, persecution, and pain. The African American can overcome this through knowledge and education—the gateway to success. The dominate society realized that the Black community could produce a powerful current if access to knowledge flowed. Many historical figures in dominant society took interest in the education of Blacks. Controlling the education of the Black community was unequivocally akin to controlling the knowledge and power of the people. Control is a powerful concept that is entrenched in power. Ultimately, power and control perpetuate oppression and seek to continue the unfair practice of separate and unequal opportunity. The philosophy of equality and justice for all people is just a myth. Woodson (2011) confirms,

This so-called modern education, with all its defects, however, does others so much more good than it does the Negro, because it has been worked out in conformity to the needs of those who have enslaved and oppressed weaker peoples... The philosophy and ethics resulting from our educational system have justified slavery, peonage, segregation, and lynching. The oppressor has the right to exploit, to handicap, and to kill the oppressed. Negroes daily educated in the

tenets of such a religion of the strong have accepted the status of weak as divinely ordained...The Negro's mind has been brought under control of his oppressor...

(p.24)

When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions.

The education of Blacks was used as a method to control the actions of the Black community. Power and control are at the root of the mis-education of the Southern, Black American. Therefore, those who seek control continue to enforce the idea that "ideology is not left to chance...ideology becomes the currency of those dominating the culture...organized education, much like organized religion, has long been influenced by the forces of the power structure, the state, and those with a an ideological agenda" (Watkins, 2001, p. 10). The ideology of segregation sustained a great hold on education that was taught to the Black community. It continued to perpetuate a separate, unequal, inferior, education, for African Americans. Segregation is essentially one of the largest factors that contribute to the mis-education of the African American. It is alleged that desegregation solved the issue of separate and unequal schooling for African American students in the United States. This ideology has been supported by the media and our government to mask the unequal educational opportunity that is provided to the Southern, Black student. Literature reveals that Southern, African American students have been mis-educated throughout history and continue are still mis-educated in the present day. The African American Women in my research are victims of the mis-education of the Southern, African-American student. Education in the United States, more specifically in the South, is separate and unequal. Furthermore, the dominant society has sought to gain

power by controlling knowledge, and education, therefore contributing to the mis-education of Black Americans.

Looking into the waters of mis-education of the African-American is perplexing and unclear. The Black community sought to find freedom through knowledge and education. When knowledge is controlled by others, they have the power. Knowledge is power and power equals control. How do African-Americans obtain power to take control of their own education?

**Sifting Through the Murky Waters: The historical background.** Murky waters are unclean and hard to see through. Many times you have to begin moving in the water in order to see what is really there. The history of the water tells the story of how the water flows, moves, and exists within the riverbed.

During the days of slavery, education was not accessible to African Americans. Blacks were kept illiterate and uneducated. “Most of the Southern states enacted legislation making it a crime to teach enslaved children to read or write” (Anderson, 1988, p.2). Slave owners feared that education would encourage slaves to seek liberation. White slave owners in society decided that they would not provide Blacks with education and knowledge. Southern whites who owned slaves thought that Black people were biologically inferior and education was a waste on inferior beings. They felt education was only for privileged whites. This slave mentality of education only being for privileged whites has continued to be perpetuated in the South. The mis-education of the Southern, African-American was initiated by the Southern slave owner who believed that educated Blacks were delinquent. Ultimately, education of Blacks in the South has been a problem historically. In my opinion slavery, racism, and power, are the root of the issue.

Several white abolitionists believed education was a human right and all people should be afforded the opportunity to be educated. An abolitionist declared, “Slavery, therefore, must be abolished because it infringes upon the natural right of men to be enlightened” (Woodson, 2011, p.35). Northern clergymen and Quakers believed that they had a religious duty to enlighten Blacks and only educated men could be enlightened. They felt Blacks in America should be educated so that they could become civil, enlightened men. Many times whites feel that they have to save the Southern Black and become the “Great White Hope” thus providing an education for the poor, ignorant, savage Blacks. “A Quaker minister influenced by the philosophy of John Locke, began to preach that liberty is the right of all men, and that slaves being the fellow-creatures of their masters had a natural right to be elevated” (Woodson, 2011, p. 42). These whites felt that all children of God deserve basic rights and education. Additionally, whites with political power believed that Blacks needed to be educated and sent back to Africa. “Jefferson, a member of a committee appointed in 1779 by the General Assembly of the commonwealth to revise its laws, reported a plan providing for the instruction of its slaves in agriculture and handicrafts to prepare them for liberation and colonization under the supervision of the home government until they could take care of themselves”(Woodson, 2011, p. 21). In Jefferson’s opinion Africa was seen as the proper place for educated Blacks. White slave owners like him did not want educated Blacks to remain in American coexisting with them, but they felt Blacks with education needed to be in a place where they could develop their own society with the power and knowledge that education would provide them. Slaves realized that education was the key to opportunity and that their owners wanted them to remain uneducated as a form of control.

Many former slaves felt that they were robbed because they weren't afforded the opportunity to get an education. Therefore, "the foundation of the freedmen's education movement was their self-reliance and deep-seated desire to control and sustain schools for themselves and their children" (Anderson, 1988, p. 5). Education of Blacks in the South became a problem for America. Watkins (2001) refers to the education of Blacks in America as the Negro question. After the slaves were freed, America had to figure out what to do about educating new freed people; therefore, the "Negro question" was established and continues to be asked today. What was the answer to the "Negro question"? How would newly free slaves be educated? Those that believed that Blacks should be educated saw a need to provide some educational opportunity.

Some whites felt that people of African descent were inherently ignorant and needed to be taught how to live. They felt through enslavement they were teaching Black people how to live civilly. "It is true that it (slavery) taught a savage race subordination and obedience" (Warner, 2011, p.19). Education provided to Blacks was based on a belief that Blacks were inferior to whites and therefore should be kept underclass. Scientific racism provided a foundation for the education of the Southern American Black.

Scientific racism...cannot be separated from the historical dynamics of power and oppression...What was clear was that slavery and racism had demonstrated the benefits of social and economic privilege...scientific racism justified the hierarchical order of races as historically evolved, divinely ordained, and socially expeditious...Scientific racism was fundamental a precept in the architecture of Black education. It was felt that the naturally inferior Black must always occupy

socially subservient position. Industrial education, therefore, was right for the Blacks...After all, wasn't it a step up from slavery? It could be marketed as democracy and a way to increase Black participation in the society and economic community. (Watkins, 2001, p. 39-40)

Writers such as Charles Dudley Warner believed that Blacks needed some type of education; however, because the Black race was inferior, Black people did not deserve the same knowledge and education as other races. Warner (2011) stated, "It is impossible to escape the profound impression that we have made a mistake in our estimate of his evolution as a race, in attempting to apply to him the same treatment for the development of character that we would apply to a race more highly organized" (p.17). This ideology that Black people did not have the same intelligence as a white person contributed to the mis-education of the Southern Black. Many of the people who established education for the newly freed slaves thought they were scientifically inferior. I believe this is how the subpar separate and unequal system that exists in the United States was instigated. It is my opinion that the dominant in society used education as a way to make African Americans a permanent underclass. Furthermore, I argue, how can you provide an adequate education for people that you don't believe are capable of learning? It is my firm belief that the combination of the slave owners theory of educating slaves and scientific racism is what established the foundation of the mis-education of the Southern, Black.

During the Reconstruction era the Southern Black community took it upon themselves to establish schools for their children. Newly free slaves realized that education would help them become informed, educated, and empowered citizens.

“Throughout the entire South... an effort is being made by the colored people to educate themselves. In the absence of other teaching they are determined to be self-taught... This educational movement among the freedmen has in it a self-sustaining element. This self-sustaining activity was rooted firmly in the slave experience and began to surface before the war’s end” (Anderson, 1988, p.6-7). Former slaves understood that they had to educate themselves in order to progress as a community. A debate about the type of education that would empower the Black community ensued. Therefore, as white Southerners struggled to answer the “Negro question”, leaders in the Black community debated about what type of education the Black community needed. The argument of how to educate the Southern Black newly freed slave continued to beleaguer the South.

The South still needed laborers after slavery ended. Whites decided that they needed to control education in order to control the Black community. The dominant in society are always looking for ways to remain in control. Hence, whites controlling the education of the newly freed slave resulted in retaining power and control over the community. Many whites felt that Blacks needed an industrial education. “The only visible solution is for the negro to become an integral and intelligent part of the industrial community... His worst enemy is the demagogue who flatters him with the delusion that all he needs for his elevation is freedom and certain privileges that were denied him in slavery... Only by such rudimentary and industrial training can the mass of the negro race in the United States be expected to improve in character and position” (Warner, 2011, p.30). The South had an economy that thrived on agriculture. They realized that they had an economy that depended on slave labor. Many people felt that if the newly freed slaves

had an industrial education they could contribute to the Southern economy. Industrial education sparked a complicated discussion among the African American community.

Educational scholars such as Booker T. Washington supported the idea of industrial education for African Americans. The foundation of Washington's theories about the education of Blacks in the South included industrial education because he believed that after slavery Blacks needed to learn basic survival skills. Washington (2013) declares, "I insist that it is necessary to emphasize the matter of industrial education as a means of giving the Black man the foundation of civilization upon which he will grow and prosper"(p. 7). Washington felt that African Americans had been enslaved for 400 years and had not learned how to care for their families. They were dependent on the master for their well-being. Washington (2013) proclaims, "In the life of the Negro, because of having his freedom...found him unprepared in clothing, in shelter and in knowledge of how to care for his body. During slavery the slave mother had little control of her own children, and did not therefore have the practice and experience of rearing children in a suitable manner" (p.10). Black leaders like Washington who believed in industrial education would help African Americans to learn how to take care of their basic needs and survive in the reconstructed South.

W.E.B. Du Bois differed with Mr. Washington. He believed that Blacks needed a higher education in order to be successful in society. Du Bois stated that a talented tenth needed to be educated and lead the race. These men and Women were a part of the community and wanted their race to thrive. Du Bois (2005) proclaims, "The problem of education, then, among Negroes must first of all deal with the Talented Tenth; it is the problem of developing the Best of this race that they may guide the Mass away from the



contamination and the death of the Worst” (p. 99). He also felt that not enough universities were prepared and ready to teach Black men and Women. Du Bois (2005) argues, “No such educational system ever has rested or can rest on any other basis than that of the well- equipped college and university, and they insist that there is a demand for a few such institution throughout the South to train the best of the Negro youth as teachers, professional men, and leaders” (p. 76). Du Bois did not support the theories of Washington and others who supported industrial education as the solution for education of Blacks in the South. He alluded to the fact that they were trying to make Black freedmen assimilate and submit to the dominant white society. Du Bois (2005) declares,

Booker T. Washington arose as essentially the leader of not one race but two- a compromiser between the South, the North, and the Negro. Naturally the Negroes resented, at first bitterly, signs of compromise which surrendered their civil and political rights, even development...Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission... Mr. Washington’s program practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races...Mr. Washington distinctly asks that Black people give up at least for the present three things – First, political power, Second, insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of Negro youth, and concentrate all their energies on industrial education. (p. 73-74)

Du Bois felt that industrial education was not the solution for the African American. He was known for being critical of those who supported industrial education.

The history of education of Blacks in the South reveals that African American education was a barrier to the flow of knowledge in the Black community. Whites

questioned whether Blacks should be educated and if Black people had the cognitive capacity to be educated. Many white people saw education of Blacks in the South as another method to control the Black community. Black people debated about what was the best type of education for the Southern Black. Which theory would have been the best for the Southern Black? It is murky and unclear. Each theory reveals that Blacks in the South have been mis-educated. Ultimately, historical education of Blacks in the South has been obstructed by ideologies, theoretical debates, and racism.

**Navigating Murky Waters: Substandard progress.** Mis-education of Blacks in the South is a complicated issue. Oppression continues to give power and control to the dominant white society. Education creates a flow of knowledge. Without education knowledge is substandard and does not progress. I contend that the state of schooling today in Queensburg, Alabama is substandard because of the mis-education of the Black community. African Americans are constantly trying to navigate troubled waters to receive an equal opportunity through education. Examination of the desegregation of schools can provide an outline of how to arrive at the riverbank of equality. Should we continue to navigate through troubled waters or is it time that we listen to the water?

### **Regulatory Water Becomes Troubled Again: The Re-segregation of Schools**

Troubled Waters cannot always rage, but occasionally they submit to a calm soothing rhythm. This regulation of the water continues for a brief moment time until the waters break loose and become troubled once more.

Many brave students crossed the bridge and sacrificed their lives to desegregate schools in the South. In our current system of education, the bridge is unavailable for many underprivileged, minority students. Separate and unequal schooling has become

the reality in schools today. The waters continue to be murky and unclear. How did schools become re-segregated? In order to get an understanding of why re-segregation has occurred we must look deeply at our entire educational system. Historically only certain students are provided a quality education. “The intense segregation of minority and low-income students in urban schools is a critical factor in analyzing educational opportunity because it is systematically connected to patterns of low achievement” (Orfield, 1996, p. 65). Re-segregation has reoccurred and still creates two different systems of education: those that have and those that have not.

**Getting out of the water: White Flight.** White flight occurred when white citizens left urban communities to move to the suburbs, so their children could attend predominately white schools. Bell (2004) declares,

White flight may be attributed to a number of factors quite separate from busing, such as urban crime and overcrowding...whites running from the blacks in inner cities have hidden in the suburbs behind an impressive array of economic, social, and legal barriers....Racial isolation in housing has both created single-raced schools and insulated these schools from court challenges. Eventually, school boards were able to explain away single-race schools as the result of natural separation rather than official discrimination, and through such arguments were able to avoid desegregation decrees. (p. 110-111)

Small rural towns like Queensburg, Alabama opened all white private schools a few years after schools were forced to be integrated. “High-income and middle-class white parents have moved in droves to suburban school districts that are outside the reach of city ones, thereby using the housing market to buy a better education for their children. Other

affluent families have quit the public system entirely, and use private schools instead” (Still Separate After All These Years, 2004). Currently in many Southern states minority public school districts have some of the lowest test scores. Countless Southern school boards have created policies that continue to propel white flight. The work of many of these Southern boards of education undermines the legislation of *Brown versus the Board of Education*. The regulation of forced desegregation helped desegregate schools for a brief moment, but eventually separate and unequal quickly became the norm again. Boger (2003) contends,

Without good faith commitment by southern school boards to continue to seek educational diversity, alternative student assignment policies threaten to re-create, in many urban and some rural southern school districts, levels of racial and socioeconomic isolation not experienced by students in the South since the mid-1960s. This tendency may be by a movement among many exacerbated school boards to adopt student-assignment plans based on neighborhood schools, parental choice, or other mechanisms that maximize parents’ options for their children at the potential cost of re-segregating schools. (p.47)

Only a few whites attend these primarily minority public schools. “Across the country, 43 percent of Latinos and 38 percent of blacks attend schools where fewer than 10 percent of their classmates are white” (Rich, 2012, A16). The quality of the education has declined since the white students left to attend the private school. Bell (1980) asserts, “Today, most black children attend public schools that are both racially isolated and inferior. Demographic patterns, white flight and the inability of the courts to effect the necessary degree of social reform render further progress in implementing Brown impossible”

(p.91). White flight helped schools to re-segregate and create the separate and unequal system of schooling that currently exists.

**The illusion of peaceful waters: Desegregation attacked.** Desegregation was helpful in providing diversity in Southern schools, equity in government finance per student, and more resources for minority students.

Research has mainly been about effects of desegregation on minority students, with a central focus on the way it works or fails to work to open doors into the mainstream of the society and the economy. This might have been a reasonable model when there was a vast white majority in the country, but there are now growing regions where whites need a path to success in a multiracial community with a white minority. (Orfield ,1996, 345)

Although many different stakeholders in the desegregation process seem as though they were supportive of the process, the forced desegregation of schools in the 1970's was an illusion of equality.

Many teachers, parents, and students in the African American community felt that desegregation took them out of their own communities and the ethics of care was lost in desegregated schools. They had to leave their schools to get bused across town where they felt unwanted and unwelcome. Furthermore, many African-Americans felt when schools desegregated, they lost the support of the neighborhood community. Various members of the community concluded that winning the battle over desegregation came with a loss in the sense of community and control over the neighborhood school. The power to control their schools was taken. The ethics of care (Noddings, 2005) reflects the ideas of care and compassion. In segregated African-American schools, teachers were

connected in the community and the residents. Educators felt a duty to help the students achieve success. “Teachers enjoyed close relationships with their pupils based on empathy with the individual child and an intimate knowledge of the black community, enabling them to motivate their charges” (Fairclough, 2004, p. 44). Teachers, students, and parents formed a sense of community and treated school as a collective responsibility. The entire community supported the efforts of the school and the school was a valued institution in the African American community. The environmental setting of school and personal commitment to education provided the African American community a sense of hope for the future. Many African-Americans who favored segregation felt that desegregation took the school, a vital institution in the community, and forced Blacks into the mainstream.

Many African American communities fought against desegregation. In the book *Along Freedom Road* (Cecelski, 1994), the African American community of Hyde County, North Carolina fought hard to keep their neighborhood schools. These citizens felt that their neighborhood schools were the cornerstone of their community. Cecelski (1994) exclaims,

Instead of reconciling black and white schools on equal terms, white leaders made school desegregation a one way street. Black communities repeatedly had to sacrifice their leadership traditions, school cultures, and educational heritage for the other benefits of desegregation. While historians have justifiably focused on the struggles for racial desegregation, they have neglected to explore the black school closings or their far-reaching consequences. (p. 8-9)

School desegregation caused many black educators to become unemployed. The spirit and identity of the black community school was lost. “Blacks lost important symbols of their educational heritage in this process. When black schools closed, their names, mascots, mottos, holidays, and traditions were sacrificed with them” (Cecelski, 1994, p.8). Hyde County is the example of a Black community which fought to keep their neighborhood schools which fostered community pride.

Many whites were also opposed to desegregation. Some Whites in the South only knew Jim Crow as a way of life and did not want the schools desegregated. They felt blacks were inferior to whites based on biological and scientific evidence. “Scientist argued that Blacks represented an inferior species not just a lesser-developed people” (Watkins, 2001, p. 30). From this perspective these people felt that they were being forced to send their children to school with people that they felt were inferior. They had grown up with this view of African Americans and truly believed that their views were correct. Other white citizens believed that the government was wrong to come into their communities and force them to desegregate schools. They felt that they had a right to maintain their community school without outsiders coming in. Consequently, many whites in the South took their students out of public schools and placed them in private schools because of desegregation. With both black and white citizens supporting segregation, it has led to the re-segregation that has occurred in schools today. Was desegregation in vain?

**Calling the river by name: Desegregation versus integration.** When looking at re-segregation we need to look at the words and definitions of both integration and desegregation. Throughout this dissertation I have referred to the process of Black

students attending white schools as desegregation. Desegregation is about legislating that students of diverse back grounds attend school together.

To desegregate is to break down separation of the races and to promote greater equality of opportunity. To integrate is to reach further: to bring together people of different colors and ethnic backgrounds so they associate not only on an equal basis but also make a real effort to respect the autonomy of other people and to appreciate the virtues of cultural diversity. (Patterson, 2001, p. 205)

The hope for many was not of desegregation but of true integration where students of different races would break down racial barriers caused by segregation and develop friendships and meaningful relationships. Integration made the idea of equal citizenship and reality for all students. McCord (1969) declares,

Integration educates White and Negro students equally in the fundamentals of racial tolerance and understanding... learning to live interracially is a vital component in every student's experience... There should be no separate school. It is not enough that all should be taught alike; they must all be taught together. (p. 47)

African Americans and whites who supported integration perceived integration as the means for their children to be successful in our capitalist society. If their children were given an equal education and worked harder than everyone else they could achieve success in society, ultimately make money. Many organizations and scholars supported the end to segregated schools. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a strong supporter of integration, and he believed that segregation was toxic for the American society as a whole. Dr. King stated "Segregation substitutes an I-it relationship for the I-thou



relationship, and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. So segregation is not only politically, economically, and sociologically unsound, but it is morally wrong and sinful...Sin is separation” (King, 2004, p. 177). Dr. King and other civil rights leaders supported school integration because they felt true integration would rid the country of the toxic, racist Jim Crow legislation that had polluted American society.

**Controlled water unleashed: Why?** It is evident that education has reverted back to the separate and unequal practices prior to *Brown versus the Board of Education*. White flight and the attack of desegregation have helped to continue wrath and rage of troubled waters. Troubled waters cannot be controlled or regulated. Past history shows us that the troubled waters of segregation continue to flow although they can be deterred briefly. It is best to unleash the troubled waters so there is no illusion of calm water. You understand exactly what you are working with. Why did re-segregation occur? There is no one specific reason. Equality is a right of every student. Can this be achieved in separate schools? We desegregated, but will we ever achieve true integration.

### CHAPTER 3

#### LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE WATER: METHODOLOGY

##### *Let the Church Say Amen*

Can I get a witness...LET THE CHURCH SAY AMEN  
To what his plans is...LET THE CHURCH SAY AMEN  
To what his words say...LET THE CHURCH SAY AMEN  
GOD HAS SPOKEN  
Let the church LET THE CHURCH SAY AMEN

The methods in which I will collect the data for my research are oral history and fictionalized storytelling. Oral history provides a safe place for an undercurrent of truth to begin to make ripples. The art of storytelling is cleansing and can lead to a clear view of self. “Because history is an act of our minds, historical knowledge can lead to self-knowledge” (Hoopes, 1979, p. 3). I believe listening to the stories of the desegregation of Queensburg High School with an open heart will allow truth to prevail and flow. Finally leading this community to heal and acknowledgment of the past. “Telling stories illuminates previously inadequate understanding. Stories also constitute reminders of what is known” (Short, 1991, p.78). Revealing the truth may allow the murky waters to clear and reveal what has lead schools in Queensburg back to segregation. The oral histories that I am going to collect for my research will help to give a different perspective of the truth. Thompson exclaims (1988), “Oral history certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself, and open up new areas of inquiry; it can break down barriers” (p.26). Black Women’s stories continue to be lost in the shadows of history (Hine, 1989, 1990). Fiction reveals truth. Using fiction will allow my imagination to get at the truth of racism and desegregation in Queensburg, Alabama. Toni Morrison (2008)

proclaims, “What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image on the remains in addition to recollection to yield up a kind of a truth” (p.71). Fiction will provide a route to the truth that doesn’t name or condemn any group or individual, but speaks clarity. The water is clearer when you stare at another person’s reflection first. After you see the other reflection you can begin to examine your own and see through your own troubled waters. Fiction helps to clear the path so our own lives can be examined by looking at the lives of fictionalized characters. The goal of my research is to use a Sankofain philosophy to help reflect on the past and inform the present state of schooling today in towns like Queensburg .

The gospel song *Let the Church Say Amen* reveals how through listening to the voice of God speak and other’s stories we can be guided through faith. It is important to understand that honoring what you hear takes an open mind and is not an easy task. Many times we have our own experiences that muffle what we hear. Troubled waters rip and roar and have a very distinct sound. Hence, each body of water has a unique voice. By listening closely, you can hear the stories that the water is trying to tell. If you are not listening closely or carefully, you can’t hear the water’s story. Vigilant listening skills allow the water to disclose its story. Troubled waters have a voice that should be acknowledged. Once the waters have been heard, we have a choice if we will say “Amen” to the truth of the water.

### **Listening to the Water: Oral History**

Oral history is the act of gathering memories and stories from participants in order to gather meaning and understanding. Oral history gives a human voice, a personal testimony, and allows history to be interpreted differently depending on perspective.

“Oral history is based on documents that are spoken... songs, speeches, interviews, and formal and informal conversation are all oral documents useful for history” (Hoopes, 1979, p. 6). Since the beginning of time, history has been passed down through oral stories that become history.

Many cultures use oral history to preserve their stories and record the past. In the United States many African American and Native American stories have been preserved through oral history. “Research in oral tradition may be useful in dealing with particular or local cultures, such as those of native and Black Americans, who may not be literate or may have been denied a written history because of political oppression” (Hoopes, 1979, p. 6). Stories that are unwritten can finally be recorded through oral history. Without passing the stories down orally, many cultures would lose important historical, cultural facts. In African cultures oral histories have been passed down through folk tales, griots, and village historians. Stokes Brown (1988) explains,

In western Africa certain tribes had their own trained historians called griots who stored the history of the entire community in their memories...But in the Western tradition, oral histories have been superseded by accounts written for the tiny elite group that could read and write...The masses of people were not really considered part of history; it was something that happened to them. (p.3)

One of the many fallacies is that oral history is not accurate because it is passed on personal story and perspective. Short (1994) reveals, “Interpretation offered with a told story certainly may not be interpretation accepted by the hearer/reader. Nonetheless, without interpretation, an asserted history fails. Interpretive themes not only aid in the telling of the story, they provide a structure for meaning illuminated by the story” (p.79).

Ultimately, history is interpretation and all perspectives and stories deserved to be heard so that an individual can come to his or her own conclusion.

It is important to realize that if Black Women don't tell our own stories then our stories will not be heard. Therefore troubled waters will continue to flow and a marginalized perspective of history will continue to be exposed. Fulton (2006) states it is possible to "show that oral histories are not merely anecdotal tales, but are frames through which Black Women develop identities and understand the world" (p. 16). Through oral histories Black Women can describe their multiple consciousnesses and explore the complexities of their identities and differences. Oral history is like looking at a beautiful piece of abstract art. Each person has a different lens and perspective, with everyone having their own truth. Cynthia Stokes Brown (1988) suggests, "Every human event can be seen from a different points of view, and every point of view is true in its limited way" (p. 5). Telling oral history gives Black Women the authority to name our own realities. Wynnetta Scott Simmons proclaims (2008), "If our stories are our history and our theory, we will tell our stories and leave each as chosen interpretation, chosen possibility, and chosen site for the establishment of existence, knowledge, and education"(p. 86). It is important for Black Women to tell our own stories and for others to gather their interpretations. We have a duty to provide our daughters, nieces, and sisters with our stories so that they have something to identify with.

**Exemplary oral history research.** As I began collecting desegregation stories I decided to use several texts to help guide my research. One of the most useful texts was *Like it Was: A complete guide to writing oral history* (Brown, 1988). This book helped me navigate and listen to the voice of the water. In the book, *Like It Was*, Stokes Brown

provides guidance on: conducting the interview, writing short pieces from interview notes, writing a full length biography, and writing from multiple narratives. Stokes Brown's direction in conducting an interview was the most informative. She discusses how to decide who to interview and how to question yourself on why you need to collect a specific individual's oral history.

I decided to interview women who had important stories of desegregation. Interviewing can be a complex and complicated task. Moreover, when interviewing different races, classes, and genders you have to listen beyond just the words, so that you can hear what is unspoken. Perks and Thomson (1998) advocate,

In uncovering Women's perspectives' the interviewer needs to shift from information gathering to interaction, moving beyond facts to subjective feelings, by listening more carefully not only to what is said but what is meant. When interviewing Women we need to learn to listen in stereo, they argue to both Women's dominant and muted channels of thought. Although as interviewers we are active participants in the process, we need to set aside preconceived structures and interpretations of our own. We must be vigilant to discrepancies between what is said through the conventions of ordinary social conversations and the meanings that lie beneath. Listening for meta-statements or reflections, for silence and for internal inconsistency, becomes vital. (p. 116)

I can identify with the Women that I interviewed because I am a Black Female who attended predominantly white schools. During my interviews, I will listen beyond the words. I will allow myself to read the silence, pauses, tone of voice, facial gestures, and body language. Furthermore, I will allow my heart and spirit to guide the interview. My

ears are open, my eyes are wide, and my heart is receptive so I can hear the voices that rise from troubled waters.

Spirituality has been central in my success as a Black Woman. I needed to listen to the soul of troubled waters and explore the current in order to hear the richness of the water's voice. An important text that delivered that element is *Witnessing & Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Ross, 2003). This book gives narratives on the lives of Black Women who influenced the civil rights movement. Spirituality is the core of these Women's lives. Ross (2003) decrees,

The core of the book focuses on the lives of seven Black religious Women who were civil rights activists- Ella Baker, Septima Clark, Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria DeBattery Park, Clara Muhammad, Diane Nash, and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson. Six were Christian and one was Muslim. Although they came from different life circumstances and contributed in different ways, these Women had several things in common. They were all deeply influenced by some elder or elders and by traditions of faith in their early lives. They all maintained deep connections to their communities through community work motivated by religious traditions. Each of these Women sought to make our society better...It may be that the accounts included here will remind us of, encourage, an even inspire responsible moral practice for the common good and based in faith. (p. xiv)

This book celebrates the tradition of testimony services in the Black church where people tell their stories of how God has helped them to survive and make it through. Witnessing is about telling an individual your story how God brought you through trials and tribulations. This book is a powerful piece of literature that helps reveal Black Women's

connection between activism and our spiritual lives. Looking at the lives of others and listening to the past helps to create a path through turbulent troubled waters.

Stories such as *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (Haley, 2004) would not be possible without the tradition of oral history. I, like many African Americans, don't have access to my own family's roots that extend back to slavery and the middle passage. Alex Haley's book provided many people with a tangible example that the majority of Black people in America can identify with. For many years American history books were absent of an African American perspective of American history. "Alex Haley's grandmother taught him both the name of his great-great-great-great-grandfather, who first came to America as a slave, and also the name of the slave ancestor's first master. It is a powerful testimony also to the accuracy of oral tradition" (Hoopes, 1979, p. 6-7). *Roots* has become an American story that provides a path of truth and reveals the undercurrents of a once unspoken past. Haley (1998) explains how stories that his grandmother and great aunts told on the porch changed his life. "It was bits and pieces and patches of what I later would learn was a long narrative history of the family which had been passed down literally across generations" (p. 14). *Roots* helped begin the flow of knowledge based on an African American perspective. Oral history can provide an authentic point of view and tell the untold stories not recorded in written history.

The *Black Slave Narratives* (Bayliss, 1970) are some of the most influential oral histories collected in African American culture. Many slaves were unable to read and write. Only a few former slaves told their stories in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, America was not interested in the slave's perspective of history until the 1940's when the United States Library of Congress began collecting slave narratives. This slave narrative



project was launched nearly eighty years after the civil war ended. “In the slave narratives, however, Blacks were able to participate in the national discussion on slavery for the first time and present slavery from the perspective of the enslaved man and Women. A brilliant and often unforgiving light illuminates the horror of slavery in these accounts” (Young, 1995, p. 11). The study of the Black slave narratives is complex and complicated. “One of the more perplexing aspects in approaching the narratives is how to set about the actual story. The material is not only vast but capable of multiple treatments. It lends itself to historical interpretation to social psychological, folkloric, and literary considerations. The reader must decide on his focus” (Bayliss, 1970, p. 12). Slave narratives have provided historians with the slave’s perspective. Their perspective was very narrow and almost silenced until Black slave narratives were collected in the 1940’s. Using the slave’s perspective brought a new flow and colorful rhythms that American historians had not studied in depth. Bayliss (1970) purports, “The slave narratives are the Blues in prose. They are the honest records of slave experiences written by those who suffered under the system” (p. 9). The Black Slave Narratives are essential stories in American historical literature that were collected through oral histories. Furthermore, I believe that Black slave narratives exposes the background and source of troubled waters. All rivers begin with a source of water that cuts deeply into the earth and continues to flow.

The book *All My Trials Lord: Selections from Women’s Slave Narratives* (Young, 1995) gives the unique perspective of slavery from the lens of a Female. Young (1995) corroborates,

Narratives of slave Women compose less than twelve percent of the more than six thousand narratives in existence; yet this in no way precludes their equal importance. Although the inhumanity of enslavement was common to the experiences of both men and Women, there was a difference particular to Women's suffering – the sexual exploitation of the Female slave...Portrayals of the exploitation of the Female slaves by the white slave owner and the heartbreaking disruption of families was a unique contribution of the Women's slave narratives. (p.12)

Black Women have our own stories that are unique to our existence and understanding. Our troubled waters are masked in multiple consciousness and oppression that Black males and white Women can identify with, but not fully understand. Furthermore, the comparison of male slave narratives and Female slave narratives reveals the complexity of the oppression of the African American Female slave. These slave narratives tell how Women felt when their children and husbands were sold away. Slave Women were unable to choose their own husbands. Young (1995) describes the first marriage of a slave Woman Aunt Sally, "What you think of a system which gives such unlimited, control not only over the time and labor of men and Women, but over their most sacred affections? Sally had never seen, him and knew nothing about the matter, till one day, when she was in the house, her mistress said- Well, Sally you're thirteen years old, and I want you to be married" (p. 48). Black Female slaves endured oppression both with their masters and at home with their husbands. The book title *All My Trials Lord* is derived from a spiritual that illustrated leaving a life of slavery and dying would lead to a beautiful eternity with Jesus. Faith and spirituality continue to be a vital undercurrent that

is forever flowing throughout the troubled waters where Black Women continue to plant their feet and begin the journey towards the bridge.

In the book *There Is a River* Harding (1981), speaks about the importance of historical narrative and oral histories. Without seeking out our truth and past as African Americans, we will continue to be lost in the thrusting troubled waters. Harding (1981) reveals,

Persistent probes toward meaning are absolutely necessary, not primarily as a source of psychic comfort or as diversionary, apolitical spiritualizing but because there is no truly human history without them. For just as each one of us at one time or another is fiercely driven to seek coherence and purpose in the deciphering of our own personal stories, so it is in this collective venture toward wholeness. A sense of meaning –which we surely create out of our particular responses to the facts of experience-, is crucial if we are to join ourselves to the past and the future to commune with the ancestors as well as the coming children. Without it we lose touch with ourselves, our fellow human... Without the search for meaning the quest for vision there can be no authentic movement toward liberation, no true identity or radical desegregation for an individual or a people. Above all, where there is not vision we lose the sense of our great power to transcend history and create a new future for ourselves with others, and we perish utterly in hopelessness, mutual terror, and despair. Therefore the quest is not a luxury life itself demands it of us. (p.xii-xiii)

We have to look at the stories of the past to provide a vision for the future. In Queensburg, Alabama very few desegregation stories have been told. The past lingers

like fog in a swamp hovering over troubled waters. Looking back at what has caused the waters to remain troubled is necessary in order to begin the journey towards the bridge. Stories that have been silenced need to be acknowledged, heard, and respected in order to move beyond the cycle of oppression and silence that currently exists in Queensburg today.

### **Hearing Imaginary Voices: Fiction**

Injustices, pain, oppression, and inequality of the troubled past are not subjects that are discussed openly in Queensburg, Alabama. People feel they are polite and politically correct by watching raging troubled waters continue to destroy the education system of the town. I have decided to use fiction when writing the narratives of the ladies in my study because of the silence that has occurred in the small town when it relates to race. Several of the white students who attend Queensburg High School and terrorized these Women are now involved in state politics, are business owners, and local educators. Because race is so taboo in this small town, using oral histories with some fictionalizing is the most powerful way to express these stories. Using fiction will help reveal untold truths.

Fiction is a genre that allows the imagination and real life experiences to reveal uncomfortable subjects that need to be divulged. Fiction frees up the writer to be able to uncover social injustice without pointing the finger at any one specific person, but society can look at it self through the eyes of fiction and see inequality. LeGuin (1991) declares,

If fiction is to be truthful about what human beings really are and do, we have to define knowledge as a goal of the imagination...I'm not learning through experience, but through the imagination: I read, and re-create the reality in my

mind till I know it. That's what writing, fact or fiction, is for. What I "know" comes to me maybe from experience, maybe from hearsay, maybe from books or other arts. What matters is what I make of it--what I do with it...Let's say that there is something you know, an experience, a fact: So the fact becomes a nucleus of a story. Maybe it's a small event in the story, maybe it's the climax. That's the imagination using knowledge to create deeper knowledge. The story is how you arrive at and tell the new understanding. (p. 20)

Using oral history to anchor the story will allow me to use my imagination in order to fictionalize and not allow the current of troubled waters to keep truth as an undercurrent that never rises to the top to be seen.

Fiction allows us to see ourselves through the imaginary characters. Their lives, struggle, oppression, joys, realities, and journey can help us see ourselves. Hence, as we observe the trouble waters of a fictional character, we can look down and see our own truth staring us in the face. Fictional representations can reflect our thoughts, ideas, and identities. Ultimately, revealing how we feel about ourselves. Gomez (1991) explains,

While critics have often neglected to scrutinize fantasy or science fiction or place it within the context of literacy and social constructs, the genre-like any other popular art form-is very intimately related to the sensibilities of the broad-based populace. It can be a barometer of our secret fear, and secret dreams: dreams of solidarity, strength or heroism. And we, as a people, should be acutely aware of just how powerful dreams can be. (p. 152)

Dreams start as a fictional, and we help them to become reality. Dreams are powerful pieces of fiction that help to bring forth and empower us as humans to work harder

towards our successes. My research is about my dream of creating a bridge that leads to equality, hope, and love. This bridge provides equal access to education for all. I contend that providing oral histories and fictionalized historical accounts to help others see reality will help provide access to the bridge over troubled waters.

Many academics question whether or not fiction should be a method of research. Many researchers support the idea that fiction can provide a truthful perspective to an uncomfortable, yet critical conversation (Park, 1982; Pihalainen, 1998; Mikkonen, 2006; Glenn, 2000; Dillard, 1982; Clough, 2002; Bunch, 2000). The question becomes if research reveals new truths then how we can realize new truths based on fiction. Banks (1998) states, “Fiction threatens the whole research enterprise. Research no matter how qualitative or interpretive rest on fundamental beliefs in reliability, validity, and objectivity in reporting” (p. 17). Fiction is seen as imaginative literature that is not factual therefore has no place in research. Banks challenges the idea that fiction is research and continues to struggle with the idea that fiction can be used in conjunction with traditional research to explore new understandings. Banks (1998) ponders,

Educational stories can be found in writer’s imaginations and personal experiences. In field observations and interviews, in the analyses of social scientific research, or a sensitive blending of all these sources. The point of such storytelling is to reach audiences at a personal level with an experiential sort of learning. My interest right now is to bring the two areas of questioning and doubt – factual reporting and fictional storytelling – into alignment, to see how my own streams of writing can be made to flow together. (p.12)

Traditionally, we think of fiction as false—the opposite of truth. For the purposes of my research I would like to think of fiction as imagination with strong currents of truth pulsating throughout. When I think about truth, I ask myself what truth is and whose truth. Looking closely at the idea of truth allows me to realize that each individual creates their own truth and understanding about what they believe is true. With that understanding, how can we define what is fiction or false? Fiction is about imagination bringing forth new truths that stand behind the stories that are written. Toni Morrison (2008) elucidates,

What makes it fiction is the nature of the imaginative act: my reliance on the image-on the remains-in addition to recollection, to yield up a kind of truth...Fiction, by definition, is distinct from fact. Presumably it's the product of imagination-invention-and it claims the freedom to dispense with what really happened or where it really happened or when it really happened, and nothing in it needs to be publicly verifiable, although much in it can be verified. (p. 71-72)

It is my desire to merge oral history and fiction together to help realize unspoken truths that have yet to be revealed extensively. Alice Walker (1997) informs, “Every one of these writings represents my struggle not simply to survive the past and remained nurtured by it but to embrace the present and fight for the future” (p. 67). My hope is that this combination of methodologies will allow others to search their own hearts about the truth of the present state of schooling in Queensburg and build a bridge for the future. Fiction delivers an opportunity for truth to flow into troubled waters through a different current.

Fiction creates a safe place for the counter narrative and it does not request the approval of the society. It prepares a place for reality and all of the rage, hurt, pain, laughter, love, faith, or any other emotion/feeling that reveals itself in truth. “Fiction provides a way to test the validity of a theory. It is an alternative way to ask whether a theory suggests a set of ... behaviors that are convincing. Attempting to dramatize a particular theoretical position injects a measure of realism” (Phillips, 1995, p. 641). It is essential that stories tell the truth and reality of the past and present. This reality brings forth great knowledge that has not been publicized. “The Black Woman ... must garner wholeness from the bits and pieces of the past and recreate them in their own image... Then use the often unheralded heritage of black women, the creative sparks as well as the history of restrictions, as the foundation of her artistic vision” (Christian, 1993, p. 51-52). Fiction allows truth to rise from voices of the past and create a story that mirrors the uncomfortable politics that are only seen and not heard. Fiction can unmask the identity of individuals whom continue to take advantage of the voiceless. Through fiction the unheard are heard; the weak are powerful; the rich can be poor; the oppressed can be in control; and the oppressor cannot dictate the story. Fiction does not ask permission, it demands to tell the story. Fiction plows through doors that are closed, opens mouths that are silenced, and tells unpublicized stories. Fiction is a powerful genre that allows the counter-narrative to be heard without the permission of those in power.

**Exemplary fiction research.** Fiction covers the surface of troubled waters but if you look beyond the surface the rigid and rough river bed can hurt your feet as you are marching. Fiction allowed you to feel safe enough to step in the water. As a reader I have always enjoyed fiction and the truths that imagination has allowed me to find within



myself. Several outstanding novelists have helped me contemplate how to divulge the stories of three women who desegregated a high school in Alabama.

*The Color Purple* (Walker, 1982) is a classic book that is narrated by a fictional character Ms. Celie during the 1920's. In this book Ms. Celie struggles with her identity and self-worth. The entire book is written through letters. Ms. Celie expresses her feelings although the only people that care about her feelings are her sister, Nettie, and her friend/lover Shug. By the end of the book, Ms. Celie learns her value and finds true love which is self-love. Throughout the forty year span of the book, Ms. Celie's voice changes from a young scared girl to that of a confident mature Woman. The book exposes many concepts that are taboo in the Black community such as: incest, domestic violence, infidelity, homosexuality, teen pregnancy, and spirituality.

*The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1998) also helps to expose painful truths that are rarely spoken of in the Black community. The setting of the book takes place in the 1940's. Pecola Breedlove is the main character in the book. She believes that whiteness, having blond hair and blue eyes is beautiful. In Pecola's mind beauty will save her from the ugliness of her world. Her father rapes her, her mother beats her, and the kids in the neighborhood treat her like an outcast. Pecola believes that her world would be different if only she had the bluest eyes to look through. This book raises questions that allow the reader to ponder race, class, and the image of beauty. Furthermore, Morrison provides a place for questioning the hidden truths of the Black community.

The character Precious in the novel *Push* (Sapphire, 1996) has a similar struggle. Precious is an overweight abused teenager who was raped and has two children by her father. Her father also gives her HIV. At the beginning of the book Precious is an

invisible being in a system of subpar schooling and social services. She is unheard and unnoticed although her physical stance is very noticeable. Yet, Precious is triumphant and seeks to empower herself beyond her circumstance. She realizes that she needs to learn how to read so that she can make a better life for herself and her children. She finds a mentor and friend in her teacher Ms. Rain. Ms. Rain symbolizes the hope and possibility for Precious. Sapphire said the fictional character Precious was a combination of several students that she encountered as a teacher in New York City schools.

*The Help* (Stockett, 2009) gives the perspective of several Black Women in Mississippi in the 1960's. This book is written from the perspective of Skeeter, a privileged white Woman. She comes back home to Mississippi from college to find the Black maid that raised her was fired. She is determined to find, Constantine, the maid who raised her. In her quest she realizes that the maids that work in the homes of the privileged whites have their own perspectives that deserve to be heard. She provides Women that sacrifice their own families and take care of white families the opportunity to be heard.

*The Twelve Tribes of Hattie* (Mathis, 2012) is a dynamic story about a Black Woman who migrates from Georgia to Philadelphia during the Great Migration. Hattie's family struggles in the urban city like many families did during this period. The book gives the perspective of Hattie a housewife who has several children, but never showed a nurturing spirit towards her children. Hattie struggles to find her own identity while she has several identities as a mother, sister, wife, mistress, and friend. This book elevates the struggles, suffering, triumphs, and legacy of the Great Migration.

## **Hearing the Voices**

For the purpose of this research I will collect the stories of three Women. My role is a full observer in the research. I have a standard set of questions, but my intention is to allow them to testify about their memories of desegregation. The testimonies that I collect will be examined and fictionalized. Fictionalizing the stories will allow me to be more candid as I tell the stories. Through this research it is my goal to reveal truths about the desegregation of schools like Queensburg High School. Moreover, I hope to begin to question why segregation has reoccurred in towns like Queensburg.

## CHAPTER 4

### ORDER MY STEPS: TESTIMONIES REVEALING THE PATH TO THE BRIDGE

#### *Order My Steps*

Order my steps in Your word dear Lord,  
lead me, guide me every day,  
send Your anointing, Father I pray;  
order my steps in Your word,  
please, order my steps in Your word.

#### **Stepping in the Water: Prelude**

After listening to troubled waters, you realize that you can't walk, march, or stomp through the rough current. Troubled waters are so murky you can't find a path to navigate through all of the dirt, silt, and grime. You realize that you have to trust God to guide you to the other side of the river.

**Introduction of Queensburg.** Queensburg, Alabama is a small rural town near the coast. The Black River ran through the center of town. The town's main source of capital was textiles and farming. This quiet and cozy town had a bridge that connected the North and South sides of town. People who came to visit admired the quiet traditional Southern town. But a deeper closer look revealed many ugly untruths that have been hidden since the days of slavery. The waters in Queensburg were troubled.

On the north side of Queensburg, large oak trees with Spanish moss lined the downtown historic district. The town square had big beautiful plantation houses and memorials to confederate soldiers. They loved their rebel flags and singing Dixie. On this side of town, the people were friendly with each other and loved their community and their three schools. The people who lived on the north side were good hard working

honest people who didn't take kindly to change. Everything was alright as it is in their minds.

The South side of Queensburg had two churches and three schools. The community was close knit and supported each other. It was very common for neighbors to plow and pick each other's fields during harvest time or baby-sit each other's children when needed. The two churches in the community were connected by one organization that empowered the African American community to seek equality and civil rights. This organization still functions today: the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). These churches were the ROCK in this small community. Whatever decisions were made by church members were deemed as law. These citizens realized that their schools weren't as nice as the schools on the North side and that they didn't have the same budget, materials, and resources. Didn't their children deserve the same education as the children on the other side of Queensburg?

The river divided the North from the South and the bridge tied the two together. Young Black girls knew that when they went across the bridge over to the other side they were no longer addressed as "young lady" as they were on the South side but called "gal" by the man at the counter at the grocery store. The bridge defined where you were from and who you were. It determined where you could go to school, live, and go to church. Yet, the bridge connected two very similar communities that were keen on Southern hospitality. Although, one distinct attribute separated the North from the South side of town: RACE! White people lived on the North side and Black people lived on the South side. This had been the custom since the war of Dixie had come and gone and no one dare try to change the way things had always been. In 1970 when Alabama state

government announced that because of the legislation of *Brown versus the Board of Education* schools would be forced to integrate: ALL HELL BROKE LOOSE! People from different sides of the bridge who had known each other for a lifetime quickly became enemies. The Black River had a past of Black people “accidentally” drowning at the hands of hooded men who wore sheets to conceal their identities and only their blue eyes shined in the moonlight. This same river became troubled waters once again.

**Trouble in my way: Mary’s story.** Mary was a hard working girl with seven sisters and one brother. They were known as the McKnight family. The entire community both Black and white knew her daddy, Charlie McKnight, was the president of the local NAACP. Mr. McKnight was a farmer who had a reputation of being a stern, but fair businessman. He was a pillar of the community. His wife Ruby was a quiet Woman with strong morals. She made sure that the children were clean and well fed. She taught her children to stand for something, or they would fall for anything. The McKnight’s were known for being smart kids who worked hard, and weren’t allowed to do anything but work in the fields and go to church. Mary hated that her parents were so strict. Many of her friends could court and have boys over after church on Sundays. Mary and her family were at church all day on Sunday and with seven girls Mr. McKnight wasn’t having any boys around his house. Mr. McKnight believed strongly in education and was determined that all eight of his children were going to get the education that he was never privy to. Ruby had an eighth grade education and Charlie had a sixth grade education. Because of lower educational levels, they stressed that education meant opportunity to their eight children. Charlie promised his seven daughters and one son that, “They could go to college anywhere that they desired in these here United States if they got them some

good grades.” College and education meant opportunity to the McKnight family.

Everyone who had been to the local college, Alabama A & M College, was a teacher, principal, or nurse. These people were highly respected in the community. Education meant power, and Mary was determined to get good grades so that she could make her family, church, and the community proud of her.

One Saturday evening Mary knew that there must have been an emergency. All of the important men of the South side (her daddy, Mr. Barr, Rev. Johnson, Rev. Brown, and Mr. McFadden) all had a meetin'. Her daddy didn't come home for a long time. She knew it had something to do with the NAACP. The NAACP always was tryin' to help Black people. Mary knew that her daddy did importin' business with the NAACP. Before Dr. King was murdered he had visited their small town. She also had seen the news and remembered how those colored children in Little Rock desegregated that high school. The NAACP helped them to get the attention of the President when that racist governor wouldn't let them in the school. Federal marshals had to escort the Little Rock Nine into the school.

Mary's daddy finally got home. She knew that somethin' was wrong because he came in changed his clothes and talked to her Mama in the bedroom for about an hour. Mary's mama and daddy were talking and she heard her mother start to cry. As her mother came out crying, her daddy called her in the room. “Mary, I need to see you baby”. Mary knew by the tone of her daddy's voice somethin' was serious. A feelin' in the pit of her stomach made her feel uneasy. Mr. McKnight gently nudged Mary closer and said, “You know I am very proud of you and how you get your work done at school. I want you to know that I knows you work hard, and you are a really good girl”.

“Yessir, Daddy”, said Mary.

“Me and them men down there at the NAACP done decided that it is time to integrate Queensburg Senior High School. You, Barbara Anne, and Louise are going to be some of the first colored children to help integrate the high school,” proclaimed her daddy. Barbara Anne and Louise were her best friends they did everything together. She felt a sense of excitement about her new journey, but then a sense of anxiety overcame her. Mary’s heart sunk in her chest and fear engulfed her. She knew that crossing the bridge to go to Queensburg Senior High would be no easy task. She saw how those children in Little Rock were spat at and had federal marshals to escort them into the building each day. She knew with all certainty there would be trouble in her way. Finally, she knew this was something she was going to have to pray about. Her Sunday school teacher always told her don’t worry about a problem. Pray about a problem. She believed in prayer and knew she needed prayer if she had to cross the bridge to integrate the high school. She surely knew it would not be an easy task and that there would definitely be trouble in her way.

**Black bitch: Barbara Anne’s story.** “BLACK BITCH,” this is what Barbara Anne heard in her head every time she closed her eyes at night. Her grandma came into her room and held her to comfort her when she awoke from her night terrors. Barbara Anne was an excellent student who loved to play basketball and got good grades, but she felt she still wasn’t good enough. She was being raised by her great aunt who she called grandma. Barbara Anne’s grandma took good care of her and provided her with love and all the basic necessities of life. “BLACK BITCH,” this is what people called her mother. In the community everyone knew that her mother was a whore. She slept around



and never kept a job. Barbara was a product of her mama sleeping with her aunt's (her mother's sister) husband. Barbara's daddy was also her uncle. Her mother moved to Norfolk, Virginia without her so that she could get away from the small town gossip and live the single life. Barbara never was acknowledged by her maternal nor paternal families. She was the product of an affair, and no one wanted the reminder of the infidelity that had occurred. Her maternal grandmother's sister, now Barbara Anne's grandma, was the only one who wanted her. Grandma always said, "It's they problem baby, you ain't had nothin' to do with them sins. It ain't your fault". Yet, the phrase "BLACK BITCH" continued to be a theme that plagued Barbara Anne's life.

Barbara Anne was a star basketball player at Battery Park High School. She had a chance to go to college at Alabama A & M on a full scholarship if she kept up her grades and her basketball playin' skills. Barbara Anne's ball handlin' skills as a point guard had taken Battery Park to the state championship for the public school colored league. She was known throughout eastern Alabama for being a great basketball player and excellent student. However, she continued to hear "BLACK BITCH" ring in her ears. No matter how good she was on the basketball court or how good her grades were, her ears still rung with the phrase, "BLACK BITCH". The kids at Battery Park saw Barbara Anne as a leader at school. She always had her homework and never got into any serious trouble. Anytime trouble was brewing Barbara Anne went the opposite way. Some of the teenagers around town thought that she was a scaredy cat. Some of the basketball players and other students would go behind the gym and drink moonshine and smoke cigarettes on Friday nights after the basketball game. Barbara Anne never went. She wanted to make grandma proud, and she felt the scrutiny that her mother's loose life had caused.

Barbara was determined to be a success. With all of her efforts to be a good girl and overcome her mother's reputation and legacy, she still heard over and over in her head "BLACK BITCH."

One afternoon after basketball practice, Mr. Cooper, the girls' basketball coach at Battery Park, told Barbara Anne to stay after practice. Mr. Cooper said, "Barbara Anne I got some news for you. The NAACP has chosen three of y'all to go integrate Queensburg High School and you were one of the girls who they picked". Barbara Anne's head began to throb immediately. She heard ringing in her ears. "BLACK BITCH" is what she heard in her head as Mr. Cooper revealed that she would be going to Queensburg High.

Barbara Anne quickly replied, "I am good. I can stay right here Mr. Cooper and go to Battery Park. I just want to get my scholarship, go to Alabama A & M, and help my grandma. I don't have nothin' to prove."

"Barbara Anne you a good girl, and you should take this opportunity to play for Queensburg High. You got the potential to be a great player. You could really go far if you get the right exposure. Queensburg High can give you more than Battery Park ever could". Barbara Anne felt a sense of sadness well up from deep inside her chest. Mr. Cooper was like a father figure to her. She and grandma lived down the road from his family. He was the reason that Barbara Anne learned how to play basketball. Barbara Anne would go to the Cooper's house to play with Venus, Mr. Cooper's daughter. Both Venus and Barbara Anne would practice shooting baskets for hours on the makeshift basketball court right in front of the Cooper's tobacco field. What could Queensburg High School give her that Battery Park or Mr. Copper hadn't? Her South side community supported her and she was a known basketball "superstar". How would the Battery Park

High Community see her? Would she continue to hear those two words that continued to dominate her mind, ring in her ears, and trouble her heart? All Barbara Anne could think about was will they think that I am a “BLACK BITCH” when I enter the doors of Queensburg Senior High in the fall.

**I am number one: Louise’s story.** Louise always felt good about herself. She had a sassy mouth and fists that would hit hard. The whole neighborhood knew she wasn’t afraid to defend herself. Louise was popular at Battery Park; she knew everyone. Last year she was Battery Park’s ninth grade social butterfly. Coincidentally, she knew that she was the smartest student at Battery Park. If she continued at the pace she was going, she would be the valedictorian at Battery Park and get a full scholarship to the prestigious Spellman College in Atlanta. Louise knew that she was the best that Battery Park High School had to offer the world. Only Louise was now slated to help integrate Queensburg Senior High in the fall. Louise had a dream of becoming a nurse and with her smarts she realized that her dream was obtainable. Louise lived with her mother, father, and two older brothers. Louise’s brothers, Cesar and Edward, were both hardworking smart young men. Smarts didn’t put food on the table or crops in the field. Louise’s oldest brother, Cesar, was a senior and wanted to go to college, but he knew that he could “go up the road” (move to New York) or help his daddy on the farm. Louise was the child that was expected to go to college. Louise had learned how to fight after dealing with two brothers all her life. She was a little spoiled being the only girl in the house. Her family life was decent beside the fact that her parents got into the occasional fights. It wasn’t that big of a deal because most people’s parents fight. The fights scared Louise when they turned physical. Louise got her sassy mouth from her mother. When her mother would push the

envelope too far with her father, her Mamma always ended up hurt. That's not to say her Mamma didn't fight back. Her mother would always fight back despite the broken teeth, bruised ribs, busted lips, and Black eyes that she received. Louise and her brothers had seen their parents fight all of their lives, and it was a part of their family life. It always made her brothers mad when they saw their mother get hurt, but they always held it in because they knew their father would whoop ass for gettin into grown folks business.

Louise found out that she was going to Queensburg High School from her mother. Her mamma had been down at the church getting the sanctuary cleaned and ready for the men on Sunday, and Rev. Brown needed to speak to her. Louise's Mamma found out that Louise was one of the three girls that the NAACP wanted to send to desegregate Queensburg High School. She told Louise as soon as she made it home. "Baby, I need to talk to you. Rev. Brown and the men down at the NAACP done decided that you going to go to the high school in the fall," said Louise's mamma.

"What?... I'm supposed to be in the tenth grade homecoming court next year. I am one of the most popular girls at Battery Park. How do those men that I hardly know get to make a decision for me?" Louise exclaimed.

"Calm down chile. What you going to have to learn is to keep your big mouth closed. You do what you are told and make the best of it. Don't ask too many questions; it gets you in trouble. When men make a decision for you... do your best just to go along with it. I have learned the hard way" she said as she rubbed her swollen upper lip. Louise was upset that she had to go to a school where she wouldn't be the most popular, and the other students might not like her. She was furious that the decision to go to Queensburg High School had been made for her without her consent. Louise made a decision that day

that she did not want go to Queensburg High School, and she would go back to Battery Park by any means necessary.

### **Stepping in the Water: Interlude**

Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise knew that desegregating the high school in their small, rural town would be difficult. They saw how the Little Rock Nine were hit, pushed, pulled, and spat on. The girls sensed that the men of the town were trying to change education of African Americans in Queensburg. Each girl was told that she was going to desegregate Queensburg High. The girls were not asked or given the opportunity to decline. The decisions were made by the men of the NAACP, the church, and the community. Mary and Barbara Anne were both told that they were chosen to desegregate Queensburg High by men that they trusted. Mary was told by her father and Louise was told by her basketball coach, Mr. Cooper. These girls trusted and respected these men and their judgment. Louise was told her fate of desegregating Queensburg High by her mother. Her mother overheard the conversation while she was cleaning the sanctuary of the church. These girls were not able to voice their opinions about going to Queensburg High School. The men of the community made this important decision without consulting the girls.

In this sequence of stories the voice of the adult Women in the community are represented by Louise's mother. This battered Woman tells her child to do as she is told, or she will learn the hard way. Physical abuse is very taboo subject in the Black community. The Women voices in this community are silenced just as they are in the Black church/community. Oppression of Black Women by Black men is seen, but rarely heard. Wood (1996) proclaims,

“Within the African-American church the silence about the realities of Women’s experience and how it differs from men’s experience has taken the proportions of a version of the ‘big lie,’ and is a deadly yoke. This yoke consists of silencing, degrading, ignoring or dismissing Women’s experience, especially those experiences that reveal the nature and extent of oppression perpetrated against them within the community” (p. 39).

Although we did not hear the Women’s voices overtly, many times Black Women influence our husbands, fathers, and brothers behind closed doors. Black men may reference the opinion of Black Women, but that is rarely seen publicly in a small rural town like Queensburg.

South side residents had a strong sense of family, morals, community, and spirituality. Although they were anxious about attending Queensburg High, the three girls unequivocally knew that they could endure whatever was in their future because they had the support of the community. Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise had been taught by the Women of the community a sense of pride and strength. Black Women have had this tenacity to endure since the times of slavery. Ross (2003) declares, “Black Women have regarded survival against tyrannical systems of oppression as a true sphere of moral life... the result of Black Women’s historical efforts is the cultivation of three virtues – invisible dignity, quiet grace, and unshouted courage...(these) characterize activities through which Black Women determine the means to survive” (p. 7). Hence, the girls conceded that they had to be audacious, yet graceful when they stepped in the doors of Queensburg High School. The future was unknown, but they knew that they had to proceed forward towards the goal of desegregating Queensburg High School.

Barbara Anne and Louise were focused on the fact that they had to leave Battery Park. They both were very successful at Battery Park and realized that their popularity would be very different at Queensburg High. People at Queensburg would not be focused on the fact that Barbara Anne could play basketball or that Louise was smart. The first thing that the population at Queensburg Senior High would notice was that they were Black. Mary was fearful, yet she was reassured by her father that everything would be alright. Mary also revealed that she was relying on God to help her with the task of desegregating Queensburg High School. Therefore, she realized that faith and spirituality were the only things that could conquer her fear. "One's soul, the spiritual and unique self that is part of each of us is crucial in maintaining health and hope. The difficulty that many (but not all) African American Women face in caretaking of the soul can be seen in the way we live in the world. We must protect ourselves and exercise caution, yet balance that with adventure and risk. It is exhausting at times" (Mathews, 1997, p.32). Each girl realized that desegregating Queensburg High School was a risk, but they were willing to try because their community was depending on them.

### **Rough Currents: Prelude**

Troubled waters flow and the current rarely changes, but when the current does change usually a natural disaster has occurred. Earthquakes, flooding, and obstruction cause the currents of troubled waters to turn very rough. These rough currents cause instability and confusion. When rough currents occur, no one is safe in troubled waters.

**Summertime in Queensburg.** Summertime in Queensburg was always beautiful. The crops were growing and the fields were green. The air smelled like honeysuckles and you could hear the laughter of children that were out of school for summer vacation on

the North and South sides of town. Mary was having a great summer even though she knew that she would have the challenge of a new school in the fall.

One day as they were coming home from weeding the fields Mary, her four sisters, her daddy, and her brother, Bubba, noticed a car up the lane to their house. Her daddy said, "Wonder who that is in that nice Cadillac." Mary's mother and two little sisters were at home getting dinner ready while her daddy and the other children were working all day.

As they approached the screen door, they heard Mary's mother say, "Sir you need to come back later and talk to my husband. I don't want no parts of what you sellin'."

Then they heard a male voice saying, "Gal, you sho are stupid not buyin' this new sewing machine I'm tryin' to give you. Hell, I givin' you a good price. But you and your husband are uppity Negroes anyway. Do you actually think that gal of yours is gonna go to that good white school across the bridge?"

Before Mary's mother could answer her father open the screen door. "Excuse me, but what did you need sir?" Charlie McKnight's voice boomed through the walls of the house.

The white man stated, "All I was try'n to do was sell your wife a sewing machine. And she is too stupid to buy one."

"Well, sir if my wife said she don't want one of your machines then she don't have to buy one," Mary's daddy exclaimed.

"Y'all niggers don't even know your place. I don't take to kindly to you and your dumb wife talking to me any kind of way. You think that you're as good as me don't 'cha, nigger. You think your little Black wench over there can go to school with my



children. HELL WILL FREEZZZZZZZZZZZZZE OVER,” the man declared!!! Mary was so scared she could hear her heart beating in her ears.

Charlie McKnight walked over and pulled the door up, so that his shot gun was visible, and said in a steady, calm voice, “Mr. you are no longer welcomed at my house. You have disrespected my wife and family. I bid you a good day and do not return to my house. We do not wish to purchase a sewing machine. Thank you.” The glint in Charlie McKnight’s eyes let the man know that he meant business, and he better get on up out of there. But the man would let the community on the north side know that Charlie McKnight was an “honoree nigger who didn’t know his place.”

About two weeks had passed since the sewing machine salesman had visited the house. One night when the house was quiet and all eight children were sleeping in bed, they heard the hens in the hen house making a lot of noise. Mary heard her daddy get out of bed and go into the front room and get his shot gun. It was probably a fox or some other animal trying to eat the chickens in the coop. Mr. McKnight walked outside to find his rear cotton field and his smoke house on fire. He got into the truck and woke up the neighbor. He and the other neighborhood men worked together diligently for one hour getting the fire under control so that the fire would not reach the house or the surrounding fields. The fire was put out, but not without enormous damage. When the family woke up the next day, the burnt stench filled the air. They went out into the field to find the cause of the fire, a cross standing in the center of the rear cotton field. Mary had heard of the Klan and about the terrible things that had happened in nearby counties but here in Queensburg things like this didn’t happen. The reality of how the people on the north side were feeling was staring her in the face. That summer Mr. McKnight had to plow those

fields, and he repaired the smoke house. He lost a great deal of money, but he was a proud father. His daughter was picked to desegregate the high school, and he continued doing his work with the NAACP. He told Mary he still wanted her to go to the school on the north side in the fall. Mary was scared and didn't want her family to be in jeopardy because of her attendance at a new school. She asked her daddy did he want her to stay at Battery Park and not go to the new school. In a soothing voice he said, "Baby, if you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything. I want you to pray. You are going to that school next year with the help of the Lawd." Mary knew that at the end of this turbulent summertime she would have to cross the bridge over troubled waters.

**Faith to say "AMEN".** Mary was devastated after seeing the cross that was burned in the field behind her house. Her father was very concerned, but he was keeping a tough persona. Mary knew that her daddy was not only concerned about the hateful, symbolic gesture of the cross being burned in the field, but the whole South field of tobacco was ruined. This would put him at a real deficit when he went to the market to sell his crops. She couldn't understand why the people on the north side of town hated them so much. What had they done to deserve such cruel treatment? Mary began to think about crossing the bridge to Queenburg High in the fall. She and her friends were unwelcome at Queensburg High School. With trouble in her way, Mary was very anxious about attending the all-white school on the North side of town. Mary had read the stories about how other kids had been beaten and terrorized while trying to integrate white schools. She had seen how that little girl, Ruby Bridges, was spat on. This was a concern for Mary, but she still had her faith.

Since it was summer many of the children worked all day in the field with their parents. The only time that they got to see their peers was at church. Church was a time for the teenagers to socialize and catch up with each other, after Sunday school of course. Mary saw her friends Louise and Barbara Anne at church. Mary said, “Y’all heard that we all going to the school on the other side of the bridge.”

“Yeah, I done heard,” said Barbara Ann in a somber voice. Mary knew that Barbara Anne was afraid of her own shadow, but that girl could sure play some basketball.

“I wonder what it will be like to go to school with white kids. They supposed to be real smart,” exclaimed Louise. Everybody knew that Louise was always one of the smartest kids at Battery Park. She had a big mouth too. Louise never let nobody talk junk to her, or she would sockem.

“I’m scared” exclaimed Barbara Ann.

“I ain’t scared” said Louise. “I just need them to know that I am just as smart as the white kids,” she exclaimed.

With confidence Mary declared, “My daddy said that every thang is gonna be alright. I believe him y’all”. Mary had unwavering faith in her daddy. He was the strongest man she knew. She had seen him lift one hundred pounds of cotton like it was as light as a feather. Mary’s daddy had always protected her, and she knew without a shadow of a doubt that he would protect her under all circumstances. If her daddy wanted her to go to the new school, she had faith that everything would be OK.

Mary also knew that her heavenly father, God would always protect her and keep her when she would have to attend the new school next year. At Mary’s church, St. John

Baptist, they always talked about how God will protect you if you have faith. Mary was not sure about many things, but she knew that prayer changes things. Mary knew that she and her friends needed faith to go into this new, petrifying experience. Something inside Mary lead her to believe that everything would be all right. Mary had faith in her heavenly father and her earthly father, and she knew that because of her faith her steps would be ordered by God. She felt confident that between her daddy and God she would be protected. Mary said “Amen” to God’s will for her life.

**Battery Park Boll Weevils.** Go Black, Go Gold, Go Battery Park Boll Weevils! Every pep rally, basketball game, football game, baseball game, track meet, and student assembly this was the chant that reflected the school pride that they had for Battery Park High School. Mary, Louise, and Barbara Anne were sad to leave Battery Park High School. Battery Park High School was the pride of the entire community on the South side. Battery Park provided this small rural community with knowledge and opportunity that wouldn’t have been available otherwise. Education was a privilege on the Southside of Queensburg.

The girls knew they would miss their teachers. Many of teachers at Battery Park attend the same churches and were members of the community. You bet not get out of line, or the teacher would paddle you at school. Then she would come to your house and tell your mamma, and you would surely get a whoopin’. The principal of Battery Park, Mr. McFadden, was a member of the NAACP. He was vital in choosing the children that would integrate Queensburg High School. Mr. McFadden was highly respected. He was one of the few men in the community that had a college degree. Mary and the girls did not realize that the stern discipline and genuine care that they had gotten from the

teachers and administrators at Battery Park would be different from the faculty at Queensburg High School.

The summer pep rally that started off the year was a big deal at Battery Park. The entire senior class got to march in and everyone celebrated the upcoming success they would have the ensuing year. Many parents and important members of the Southside community were in attendance. Mr. McFadden stepped to the microphone and said, “We have one more announcement before we conclude our pep rally this afternoon. Would Barbara Anne Brown, Mary McKnight, and Louise Barr please come to the stage?” The girls were flabbergasted and amazed that their names were called. As the girls got to the stage Mr. McFadden continued, “I want these girls to know that we are very proud of them. They are leaving us this year and will be attending Queensburg High School.” The room filled with thunderous applause, screaming, and yelling. The girls looked around and saw tears in the eyes of their parents and teachers. “We want these girls to know that the road may not be easy, but they have the support of everyone here at Battery Park. We love them, and we know that they are going to the other side of the bridge and will represent us well,” proclaimed Mr. McFadden. It was at this very moment that Mary, Louie, and Barbara Anne realized how important desegregating Queensburg Senior High really was. At this distinct moment in time they knew that they carried the weight of their families, community, and church on their shoulders. They knew that they would begin the journey of desegregation in just a few days. Ultimately, they knew their steps would be ordered by God.

## **Rough Currents: Interlude**

The story, *Summertime in Queensburg*, further illustrates how Mary's family has the tenacity to continue to send their daughter to desegregate an all-white school. The story also demonstrates the disrespect that the dominant society has for Black Women and how we have to speak our truths to honor ourselves. Mary's mother was disrespected in her own home. The sewing machine salesman called her dumb and insulted her intelligence. Would this man have entered one of his white counterpart's homes and questioned their wives about not purchasing his product? Charlie McKnight took an authoritative tone with the salesman and urged him to leave his home. Charlie McKnight lost money with his burnt crop, but he was empowered because he stood up for his family. He was proud of his daughter and family. Did Mr. McKnight give his wife a chance to respond or defend herself? Should he have given her that opportunity? The salesman also felt that he was better than the McKnight's just because he was white. This sense of privilege seems to be connected to how he feels about Black people. The salesman continues to reveal racism by mentioning that Mary will never go to school with his white children. How is the history of the education of Blacks in the South linked to desegregation? I believe that whites such as the sewing machine salesman who believed in segregated "separate but equal" education for the Black community never had the intention of their white children going to school with Black children. Black people were okay in their own part of town at their own schools, and it was defiantly okay to sell sewing machines to them and take their money. Yet, it was not okay for a Black girl to go to school with his white children. Therefore, I believe the "white architects" (Watkins, 2001) that developed Black education purposely developed an inferior system of

education that masked itself as separate but equal. Sociologists such as Franklin Giddings believed, “The educational system must attempt to socialize these groups towards conformity, acceptance, and consensus...Giddings believed that the white race must guarantee its integrity and continued existence through the vehicle of education” (Watkins, 2001, p. 79). Desegregation sought to derail the work of the ideologist who developed theories for Black education.

Mary’s faith was connected to her belief in her heavenly and earthly fathers. It seems as if Louise and Barbara Anne are not as confident as Mary. How do their relationships with males in their lives play a part in their overall confidence in the decisions that the men of the community have made for them? Mary felt that with God/Spirit and her daddy she could do anything. “Historically for Black Christian Women, the embodiment of God as Spirit is evident in the saving, liberating, and healing activity of Jesus Christ in the lives of Black Women, men, and children. Jesus embodies God, who is Spirit and who provides empowerment” (Baker-Fletcher, 1997, p.133). Mary’s spiritual tenacity is essential to her confidence that she has the spirit and will to begin her journey into troubled waters.

The Southside community and Battery Park play a supportive role in sending the girls to Queensburg High School. It seems as if the girls are representing the entire community. The teachers and principal of Battery Park are a part of the community and culture of the Southside. Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise are comforted by the support of their community and knowing that the God/Spirit would accompany them to Queensburg High School.

## **Stepping Out on Faith: Prelude**

When the path of the river is unknown, it can be scary to step out into the water. You don't know where the rocks are, how the current flows, or when to just cease walking because the path is too rough. For Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise it took faith to help them navigate the unknown waters of Queensburg High.

**Hear our prayer: Mary.** Today would be the first day they crossed the bridge to go to Queensburg Senior High School. Mary felt as if the whole world was on her shoulders. She felt her stomach churn. The first day of tenth grade was not supposed to be like this. She should be going back to Battery Park to be with her friends who she had grown up with all of her life. It was the first day. Mr. Singletary who owned the funeral home said he would pick up the girls and their parents in his cars and take them to the bridge. When they arrived at the bridge, they realized that the entire community had assembled on the South side of the bridge. Rev. Brown held his hand up and silence filled the crowd. *“Hear our prayer O’ Lord incline thine ear to us and grant us thy peace. Amen”*, the entire crowd sang the prayer. The girls had many questions in their minds as they finished the chant and looked to the other side of the bridge. What would happen today? Would someone hit them or spit on them today? Would they have to turn and run like the Little Rock Nine? Would the police help them enter the building or hinder them? All they knew was that everyone in their world at the other end of the bridge was counting on them. They had to show the entire community that three Black girls could go to school and compete with the white children at Queensburg Senior High. They knew that they had to prove themselves because they were Black, Female, and from the other side of the bridge. One thing they did know is that God answers prayer and that prayer



changes things. They held their heads high and walked across the bridge knowing that they had already prayed. Whatever was waiting for them on the other side wasn't their battle, but the Lord's. They kissed their parents goodbye and with blessings of the South side community they walked across the bridge chanting, "*Hear our prayer O' Lord incline thine ear to us and grant us thy peace. Amen.*" They left the bridge and headed up the quiet town square towards the school. A few of the men from the NAACP including Mary's daddy, Mr. McKnight, walked with them.

As they turned the corner, they heard and saw the protesters. They yelled, "Stupid, niggers ain't gonna go to school here. They ain't 'bout to ruin our schools."

Another protester exclaimed, "I don't care what the law says. This is Queensburg and here the law says, HELL NO!" When Mary looked up she realized that the protester was correct.

The police who should have been there to protect them were standing in front of the school. The policeman in the front approached Mr. Lewis who was from the state NAACP and said, "I know y'all are trying to get in here today, but we can't let ya. With all this here commotion on the outside of this building y'all need to go home today and try this again another day." Then out in the crowd they heard gun shots. The crowd scattered. The children and the NAACP members quickly took cover under a nearby tree and decided that it would be safer if they went home today. They knew they would be back every day until they were permitted to enter the school.

They tried for three days straight and were not allowed into the school. Thursday was the day they finally entered the school. They chanted their prayer and crossed the bridge, but today was different. The crowd was still mad and irate. But, when they got

close to the school they decided to sing a spiritual. Mr. Lewis started with, “Ain’t gonna let nobody turn me round, turn me round, turn me round.” As they approached, they noticed the police were not blocking the front doors of the school. The crowd quieted and the three girls knew they could not turn around—their steps were ordered by God. They represented themselves, their families, the South side community and their entire race.

**Invisible, visible me: Barbara Anne.** IRRRRRRK, went the hinge on the front door of Queensburg High School. Barbara Anne saw three policemen who had blocked them from entering the previous days open the front door of the school. She heard one of them whisper under his breath, “Damn niggers want to take over everything. We being forced to allow them in here. If they hadn’t threatened to send Alabama State Troopers they still be on the other side of that damn door.” Barbara Anne felt the palms of her hands getting moist and heard ringing in her ears. Fear was beginning to take over her body. She wished that her Grandma would be here to hold her sweaty hand. Only Rev. Brown and Ms. Lewis were permitted in the front doors with the girls. The three girls and the men were met with nervous fearful eyes as they walked into the front office.

The principal stated, “We don’t want any problems. Here’s your schedule. I can show you to your lockers in a minute.”

All of a sudden Barbara Anne noticed that this pale white man was staring at her. She started to feel uneasy. He said, “You’re the one that they promised me is going to take our girls’ team to victory. Ain’t you good at basketball?”

“Yessir”, said Barbara Anne in her scared voice. She realized that her purpose for being at Queensburg High was more than desegregating the school.

After getting their schedules, lockers, and books Barbara Anne and the girls said goodbye to Ms. Lewis and Rev. Brown. Rev. Brown reminded them, “When things get tough remember that you are never alone. Call on the name of Jesus, and he will be right here with you.” His words gave Barbara Anne comfort for a brief moment. Barbara Anne was always the scared one, but today she saw fear in Louise’s eyes. Louise was always brave. Seeing fear in Louise’s eyes scared Barbara Anne even more. She left her friends and went down the hallway alone to her first class. As she walked down the long hallway, the white students noticed she was there but did their best to jump out of her way or ignore her. They acted as if she had some incurable disease. The bell rang for class, and she was lost and could not find her way. She decided to ask a teacher who was in the hall where was Ms. Star’s biology class. The teacher heard her request, but totally ignored her. She walked slowly down the hallway and with her heart pounding she decided that she would have to figure it out herself. She finally found the classroom after ten minutes of walking around the hallways of Queensburg High School in a confused fog of fear. “You’re late. I do not tolerate late students in my class. Find a seat,” said Ms. Star in a rude condescending tone. Barbara Anne saw a vacant seat on the third row near the center. She carefully sat down and got out her books. As soon as she sat down, the white students jumped up. The students seated in the front, back, and on both sides of her quickly moved. Barbara Anne felt like she had a disease that no one wanted. The students and teacher reinforced Barbara Anne’s insecurities about herself. The words “Black bitch” began to ring in her ears. How was it that they obviously noticed her, but they did their best to ignore her and make sure that she felt insignificant? Why did she always go back to hearing those words, “Black Bitch”?

**Boys, books, and bubble gum: Louise.** After a week at Queensburg High School Louise desperately wanted to go back to Battery Park. She and her popular friends at Battery Park had a name for their crew. They were the BBB (Books, Boys, and Beauties). She missed her friends, teachers, and most of all her brother, Edward, being right there at school with her. She began to feel animosity towards her father and the men of the NAACP. They had made the decision that she was going to desegregate Queensburg High. They did not ask her opinion or allow her to object. They made her go, and she was so mad she could spit nails.

Louise hated how the white kids ignored her. The teachers were even worse. They were cold, rude, and deliberately ignored her. Each time that Louise was in class no one wanted to sit beside her, talk to her, or acknowledge her presence. Each day when Louise got back to her locker, it was covered with chewed bubble gum. She would have to remove the bubble gum to get into her locker. The white boys would stand back and watch her take the bubble gum off her locker and laugh as she cleaned off the gum. Louise was burning up inside, but she kept her composure. Today she was not in the mood. She went to her locker, and it was covered with chewed bubble gum. One of the boys yelled, “Stupid nigger what are you going to do. Cleaning is about the only thing a nigger like you is supposed to do?” Louise’s back was to the boys. She felt anger crawl up her spine and pulse in her temples. She was hot, but she said nothing.

Another boy said, “This ain’t your school, nor your country. Go back to Africa nigger”. Then he cleared his throat, HAWWWWWWK, and spat right in Louise’s face. She grabbed one of her books and threw it right at his face and hit him in the eye. Everyone stood paralyzed in shock. The boy looked stunned and then he glared at Louise

with hate in his eyes. She began to feel fearful. She was the only Black student on the hallway at this moment.

Louise prayed silently, “God give me strength. Cause if he hits me I am going to beat his ass.” The boys gathered in a circle and started to push Louise. She closed her eyes and began swinging on any and everything that moved. After what felt like two hours, but was really about 45 seconds, the assistant principal broke up the fight and escorted boys and Louise to the front office to see the principal. The principal talked to the boys together as a group. They walked out of his office and looked at Louise with disgust and smirks on their faces. The principal’s door slowly open, and she heard a voice demand from a distance, “Bring yourself in here and sit down”. Louise slowly got up and walked into the principal’s office and sat down in a chair. He stared at her without speaking for about thirty seconds. He finally said, “So you think you’re going to come here and instigate fights with my students. You should be glad that we are allowing you to come to this school. It’s a privilege for you people to come to our school. You need to act like it.” Louise was madder than a wet hen.

She explained with angry tears in her eyes, “Those boys plastered my locker with bubble gum and then one of them spat on me. What do you expect me to do? I am not used to anyone disrespecting me, and I ain’t going to start now, sir.”

The principal exclaimed, “You should have told someone. None of those boys hit you. You threw the first hit now I have to suspend you for two days.”

“What?” exclaimed Louise. “They don’t get any punishment for putting bubble gum on my locker, spitting on me, or pushing me,” said Louise.

“Their punishment is not your concern. You just remember that we are tolerating you all here and you need to stay in your place. Did you really think that you could fight all those boys?” Louise didn’t answer. She quickly gathered her things and went to the front of the school to ride the school bus home. She knew it would be a long ride home. She feared her father’s reaction to her suspension. She didn’t want to have to fight at school and come home and fight also. She felt that she was not at fault, and she knew that she could not continue at Queensburg High.

### **Stepping Out on Faith: Interlude**

From the outset of their endeavor of desegregating Queensburg High School these students were seen as a problem. Both Du Bois (1995) and Watkins (2001) talk about education of Blacks in the South being the ‘Negro’ problem that the South had to contend with since the days of slavery. Du Bois contends, the Black man “sought to examine the burden he bore upon his back, that dead-weight of social degradation partially masked behind a half-named Negro problem” (Du Bois, 1995, p. 19). Each girl’s story revealed how they felt their existence at Queensburg Senior High School was a problem. Each story reveals the “Negro” problem in the following ways: Mary’s story illustrated how the North side community protested and blocked their entrance into the school. Barbara Anne story revealed how the students and her teacher, Ms. Star, treated her like she had some terrible disease. Louise was told by the principal that she was being tolerated at his school. The testimonies in the section *Stepping Out on Faith* reveal that Barbara Anne, Mary, and Louise were seen as a problem to faculty, staff, and students of Queensburg High School.

Barbara Anne continues to struggle with her self-esteem. She continues to refer to herself as a “Black Bitch”. This is what she has heard people call her mother and what she imagines people call her. Wood (1996) discusses how Black Women’s negative images are not only linked to the dominant society but also to our own communities. Wood argues, “Labeling Women according to the Madonna/whore syndrome is not the sole province of white denominations...we must examine our collusion with these characterizations of Women and what these role assignments reveal about what we truly think of Women opposed to what we say we believe about Women” (p.42). These negative images of Black Females are also in Louise’s story when the white boy told her all she was good for was cleaning. These are the images that have been revealed in society about Black Women and how others define who we are and how we view ourselves.

Faith plays a massive role in these three stories. These girls stepped out on faith to aid in the process of desegregating Queensburg High. I contend that these Women need to have an unexamined faith. Williams (1997) states, “Unexamined faith leads a people to be unconscious instruments of their own oppression and the oppression of others” (p. 99). They had faith in their community, their parents, each other, the NAACP. What was their faith based on and how can they move to an examined faith and consciousness of their oppression? This faith continues to be a major thread that ties this entire set of stories together.

### **Difficult Situations: Prelude**

When one endures a journey across a river, you don’t know what you will meet as you travel. Many animals, currents, and rocks may delay progress during your journey,

but you have to endure the difficult situation and continue to navigate troubled waters. Each of the girls had difficult situations they endured during their first year of the desegregation of Queensburg High School. They had their own individual journeys that they had to endure.

**The long road home: Lilly Anne and the bus.** Lilly Anne Thurmond was her name. She was the sixteen year old student bus driver that drove the bus that Mary, Barbara Anne, and Louise rode home each day. Because they were the only students that lived on the South side, they were the last students on the bus. Lilly Anne was a prissy, sassy little thing. She was about five feet even and one hundred pounds soaking wet. Her family was one of the poorer working class white families in Queensburg. Many privileged white families felt they were better than the Thurmond's. Now these Black girls wanted to come to her school and think that they were equal to her...not happening. But the Thurmond's thought the one advantage that they had was that they were white. Lilly Anne's daddy was very protective and didn't like the fact that she had to take those "niggers" across the bridge every day. Whenever it would get later in the evening, he would cross the bridge in his pick- up truck and follow Lilly Anne's school bus.

Today was a typically trying day for Louise, Mary, and Barbara Anne. They waited outside the school in the bus lane for each other before they loaded the bus. They knew that they needed to get on the bus before everyone else. They sat down together on the very front seat. They were a little squished because all three girls sat together on the same seat. The other students got on the bus, and Lilly Anne got on and took her place in the driver's seat. She looked in the rear view mirror at the girls with a snarl on her face and yelled out, "All y'all need to know I ain't in the mood for no noise today. If you



make too much noise, I am gonna pull the bus over and we will sit until y'all are quiet.”

The bus pulled off down the road.

After all the other students were off the bus, the girls were quiet all the way down the road until Louise saw her brothers Cesar and Edward. Louise yelled “Hey, where y'all goin'. I am on the way home. Wait for me.”

“Shhhhhh, Ms. Lilly Anne don't like all that noise,” Barbara Anne whispered.

Lilly Anne peered at Louise and said, “You better shut you big mouth coon.”

Mary looked at Louise and saw that Louise was about to go off. Mary said, “Ms. Lilly Anne we will be quiet and won't cause no trouble if you just take us home.”

The bus jolted off to the side of the road. “I said shut the fuck up,” shouted Lilly Anne. All three girls were silent. Cesar and Edward stopped walking and looked back at the bus. The bus was still and quiet for about five minutes until Mr. Thurmond, Lilly Anne's father, pulled up behind the bus. Lilly Anne didn't say anything. She just pulled the bus back onto the road, and her father trailed behind the bus in his pick-up truck. Louise's lane was the first stop. The bus stopped abruptly at Louise's lane. The door to the bus plopped open. Louise stood and held onto the rail of the bus. Her brother's, Edward and Cesar, were in front of their house watching from the distance. Before Louise could exit the bus, Lilly darted out in front of her and got off the bus. Her father got out of his truck. Louise was unsure if she should exit, but she decided to get off the bus. Lilly Anne yelled to her daddy, “Daddy, this is the girl who makes me late every day. She was yelling and telling those boys over there that I want to kiss them. I am glad you're here cause I was afraid of what they would do when I let her off the bus.” Hearing the lies that Lilly Anne was telling her father made all three girls very nervous. Everyone

had heard about Emmitt Till many years ago and how he was killed for just whistling at a white Woman. Mr. Thurmond started to turn beet red. The thought of a nigger boy with his precious Lilly Anne made the hair stand up on the back of his neck.

He looked at Louise then started yelling towards her brothers, "I will kill you sons of bitches if you ever come near my daughter. This little bitch right here is going to get you killed," he said with his finger point directly at Louise. Edward was frozen and peering at Mr. Thurmond. Mr. Thurmond walked over to Edward and socked him right in the gut. Edward doubled over in pain. Cesar ran towards the house, and Louise ran towards Edward. Lilly Anne stood at the side of the bus frightened by all the commotion that she started. Barbara Anne and Mary sat paralyzed in their bus seats with tears in their eyes. Mr. Thurmond continued to beat and hit Edward until Cesar came back out of the house. Cesar returned with a rifle. He shot in the air three times POW, POW, POW. All eyes were on Cesar. He didn't say anything. But Mr. Thurmond quickly ran back to his truck and motioned for Lilly Anne to get back on the bus. Barbara Anne and Mary held hands all the way to Mary's lane. They both knew that they would get off together at Mary's bus stop. The bus halted to a slow stop. Tension filled the air, and they got off the bus in silence. They looked both ways and slowly crossed the street in front of the bus. As Mary was crossing in front of the bus, the bus rolled forward and hit her dress tail. If she had paused a second more, Lilly Anne would have hit her with the bus.

Relief engulfed both Mary and Barbara Anne. They ran into the house buzzing about how Cesar scared that old honky off with a gun. Charlie McKnight walked in the room after hearing all the chatter. He said with his voice cracking, "What are you all thinking? Cesar can get himself killed by firing a gun at a white man. You don't

understand how white folk's can hurt us. Do y'all remember that cross that was burned in our yard this summer?" Mr. McKnight broke down in tears. He said, "I just hope that they don't hurt that boy. I am a grown man and I can take what they dish out....but a young boy like that." Mary didn't understand her father's tears, but she understood that Louise's brother Cesar was in trouble.

**Runnin' for my life: Barbara Anne.** Three days ago Barbara Anne was walking home through the swamp from basketball practice. She was glad she didn't have to ride the bus that day and deal with Lilly Anne's redneck ass. Grandma always told her to use the road, but she loved to go through the swamp and see the trees with Spanish moss, hear the birds chirping, and enjoy the movement of the swamp. The swamp was the place where no one was judgmental. She felt the presence of God right in the swamp. Sometimes she would go to the swamp and lay down under the trees and look up at the Spanish moss swaying in the trees. Because of the gossip surrounding her mother, Barbara never felt like she belonged. But in the swamp she felt at home. She had a sense that when she was here everything was ok. It was at those moments it didn't matter how she was conceived or who she was, but she knew that she was important because she was a child of God.

This particular day she decided to lie down on her back and watch the Spanish moss when she heard shots ring out, Bang, Bang, Bang. The swamp was a popular place for hunters to look for game (coons, deer, and wild turkeys). She went back to her peaceful place in her head but she heard the shots again this time they were louder, Bang, Bang, Bang. She thought about it and realized that it wasn't huntin' season so no one should be trying to shoot game. Barbara Anne rose to her feet and began trying to look

through the thick brush in the swamp. Instead of staying in the swamp where a hunter may think she was game, she decided to go out to the lane. When she got out to the lane, she noticed two white men outside of their truck shooting at bottles facing the swamp. She tried to walk quietly back into the swamp so the men wouldn't see her. They were shooting, talking, and chatting. When they spotted Barbara, they stopped talking. They looked down the lane at her, and her heart stopped beating. She could hear her own breath. Sweat was now pouring down her back and under her arms. Now that they saw her she had to pass by them to get home. She kept walking up the lane towards the men. Grandma always said, "No need to hide when you ain't done nothin' wrong".

When she got up to them the one man said, "You the little nigger that goes to the high school?"

She said, "No sir".

He said, "Yeah it's you." Barbara's mouth got dry, and she could barely swallow. Her hands were sweaty and her feet felt like lead that was rooted to the ground like a hundred year old oak.

The other man yelled, "I thank she the one that is supposed to be so good at basketball. Is you that BLACK BITCH?"

She said, "No sir".

The man replied, "I seen't your picture in the paper for basketball, BITCH, and I heard you and those other two gals are going to Queensburg High School." Now Barbara was petrified. She knew she was in trouble.

The other man said, "I wanna see just how fast you can run nigger, since you can run up and down the court so fast".

Barbara heard a voice (It was the Lawd) saying, “Stay calm, but when you get to the swamp run”. She looked at her surroundings, saw an entrance to the swamp and just walked away without answering. The men jumped in the truck and started to chase her. They followed her the short distance to the path in the swamp.

She heard them calling out to her, “We gon get you, BLACK BITCH!” She started runnin' as fast as she could through the swamp. She was literally running for her life. Her heart pounded in her ears. All she could think was, “Lawd help me get home. Help me get home.” Thank God the swamp only has a walking path. She heard the truck turnaround towards the road, and she knew she had to haul ass the rest of the way home. She was as scared as she had ever been in all of her life. The place where she felt at peace and at home had saved her. The only place she felt safe was the swamp.

Barbara continued to relive the experience in her mind. She had run for her life, but a faithful God help guided her safely home through the swamp without harm. The experience in the swamp helped her to think about reality. Was she a BLACK BITCH? Every time things in her life got tough the phrase “BLACK BITCH” tormented her. She tried to be an excellent basketball player, a high achieving student, and a responsible grandniece, but was that enough? Why couldn't she shake the title of “BLACK BITCH”?

**Going up a yonder: Louise.** Honk, Honk, Honk, that was the noise of the horn in the car of Mr. Wilson, a deacon from the church. It was about 1:00 am. Mr. Wilson was going to take Cesar to the train station so that he could go live with his mother's brother Uncle Sonny and his wife in Brooklyn, New York. Cesar was in trouble for shooting a gun to scare a white man. Although Cesar did not shoot at Mr. Thurmond, it was unthinkable for a young Black boy in rural Alabama to wave a shot gun at a white man.

For the past four days, Cesar had not left the house. Louise heard her daddy and the other men in the Southside community talking about how Cesar had to leave Queensburg. She was both scared and excited for her brother. Uncle Sonny and his wife were doing well in New York. Many people in Queensburg had relatives that moved north. When the northern relatives returned to Queensburg, it seemed like they had the best of everything: clothes, cars, and jobs. Cesar was happy in Queensburg, but he knew that he had to go up the road with his uncle to keep himself and his family safe. Honk, Honk, Honk, went the horn as the sound traveled through the night air. Louise heard her heart beating in her chest. Cesar and Edward had always to protect her. She loved her big brothers. Now she didn't know when she would see Cesar again. The whole family went onto the screened-in front porch to see Cesar off. Louise's mother had her hands covering her face, and she was sobbing so hard her whole body shook with sadness. Edward stood stone face as if he had seen a ghost and was in disbelief. Louise father cleared his throat and said, "Aw, Um, Cesar, I know that you wanted to stay here and farm, but you gots to go up there and make an opportunity for yourself. Ain't nothing but trouble here for you. Sonny and dem gon take real good care of you and you do jus' what they tells you to do. I want to see you do good real good son".

Cesar quickly hugged everyone. With tears in his eyes he looked at his family and whispered, "I love y'all. I don't know when I will see you again, but I was just trying to protect my brother and little sister." Tears began to roll down Cesar's face. He picked up his bags and walked towards Mr. Wilson's truck. Their mother's sobs got louder, and as he close the truck door, their mamma fell to the ground her body filled with grief and

heartbreak for her first born child. As the truck went down the lane, Louise watched until the rear tail lights turned into small red glimmers that disappeared into the night fog.

### **Difficult Situations: Interlude**

Mary, Louise, and Barbara Anne had many difficult situations they endured during the desegregation of Queensburg High School. Troubled waters caused them to navigate through many difficult situations.

Lilly Anne, the bus driver, was a bully and treated the girls differently from the other students. Lilly Anne's father, Mr. Thurmond, felt he needed to protect his daughter. He did this by following the school bus when it got too late. He has some sense that his daughter was not safe on the Southside where the African Americans lived. Mr. Thurmond did not feel threatened until his daughter announced that Louise's brothers wanted to kiss her. Why does Ms. Thurmond feel threatened by these young Black boys? Mr. McKnight is scared for Cesar and the girls because he knows "what white people can do." What does this show about the relationship between Black and white people during this tense period of desegregation? "The fact of slavery refuses to fade, along with the deeply embedded personal attributes...the racism that made slavery feasible is far from dead ...the civil rights gains, so hard won, are being steadily eroded" (Bell, 1992, p.3).

Barbara Anne experienced this same kind of racism when the men approached her at the swamp. She felt the need to run for her life because she didn't know what the men would do to her. Barbara Anne's identity was damaged because of how she felt others viewed her mother. She felt she was a product of disgrace. "Black bitch" continued to plague her mind, but the swamp brought her serenity and closer to God. After Barbara Anne was chased through the swamp by the men, her feelings of serenity and peace

drifted away. She then remember her negative thoughts and the word Black bitch reenters her head. I contend that Barbara Anne was suffering from evil thoughts that plagued her mind. Copeland (1996) describes how evil and suffering coexist. “I understand suffering as the disturbance of our inner tranquility caused by physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual forces that we grasp jeopardizing our lives, our very existence” (Copeland, 1996, p. 109).

In the story *Goin' up Yonder*, Cesar was forced to leave Queensburg because of defending his sister and brother. He did not want to go to New York, but his father felt that better opportunities awaited him there. Many African Americans migrated to northern and western cites during this time period. “Over the course of six, decades some six million Black Southerners left the land of their forefathers and fanned out across the country for an existence in nearly every other corner of the United States. The Great Migration would become a turning point in history” (Wilkerson, 2010, p.9). Although Cesar was troubled in Queensburg, the family was going to miss him. His father felt he was sending him away to great possibilities in New York.

### **Finding the Path to the Bridge: Prelude**

Traveling across troubled waters is an excruciating task. It takes tenacity and determination to make it across troubled waters. Many who start the journey will not make it across. But with the spirit of God guiding your path, how can you fail? The path to the bridge is not straight and clear, but still has many intricate twists and turns. Once the path to the bridge is found, a new journey can begin as you cross the bridge.

**Basketball superstar: Barbara Anne.** Twenty seconds were left in the Pee Dee Regional championship, Queensburg Rebels 97 and Hillcrest Rams 99. Queensburg had



possession. Joise, a point guard was bringing the ball up the court. She brought the ball up to the key, and she looked to her right. No one was open. She looked to her left, and Barbara Anne was wide open for a three point shot. She passed the ball. All eyes were on Barbara Anne as she pulled up to shot the ball, and “whoosh” it was all net. The crowd went wild. “It was a sea of white folk cheering for her,” Barbara Anne thought to herself. She knew that her Southside community was listening to public radio, and many of them probably heard the game and were cheering in barber shops, beauty salons, their homes, and churches. Grandma was one of the few brown faces in the crowd, and her face beamed with pride. Louise and Mary had accompanied Barbara Anne’s Grandma to the game. This was only the second game that the girls had attended all year at Queensburg Senior High. The teams lined up to high five and say good game. As both teams walked past each other, not one girl from Hillcrest touched Barbara Anne’s hand or told her good game. The elation that she had just felt because she made the winning shot seeped out of her, and she remembered she was a Black girl from the Southside desegregating Queensburg Senior High.

Back in the locker room, the team was cheering and congratulating each other. Barbara Anne went to her lonely corner and sat down. She felt like there was no one that she could celebrate with. Josie and Sabrina left the crowd of players that were cheering, hooping, and hollering and came over to talk with Barbara Anne. “Hey Barbara, you really are a good basketball player. This whole season I was afraid to talk to you. Everyone told me to stay away from you. They told me about how y’all can be,” said Josie.

“Y’all who?” said Barbara Anne.

Josie explained, “Y’all, colored people are supposed to be mean, nasty, and ignorant. At least that’s what the other kids at school say. I really don’t know because I really never knew any one colored personally.”

“I have an uncle up in Philadelphia that is married to a Black lady. My Auntie Carol is really nice. I apologize for not being your friend Barbara Anne, but I knew that everyone would call me a nigger lover if I did,” Sabrina revealed. Josie and Sabrina vowed to be Barbara Anne’s friend and wanted to know if she could teach them some of her basketball moves.

Out of the shadows of the hallway they heard a voice say, “Barbara Anne Brown come to my office right now.” This was the voice of Coach Hanna. Coach Hanna was a girls’ basketball coaching legend in the Pee Dee. He had several regional and state championships. Many of the girls that played for his team got college scholarships and even had the opportunity to play basketball overseas. Barbara Anne walked slowly into the office, and Coach Hanna closed the door. “That shot that you made today is not in the plays that we ran in practice. Is it?” he said in a stern voice. Barbara Anne heard the words “Black Bitch” at the end of his sentence.

She said, “No sir, but I was open and I had the shot.” The room was silent, and you could hear the clock...tick, tock, tick, tock.

“Well, I have some news for you that you need to know,” Coach Hanna paused. Barbara Anne could imagine what news he had for her. She swallowed and felt her throat getting dry. “A few college scouts were in the audience tonight, and they are interested in recruiting you. Alabama A&M, Alabama State, and University of Alabama were all impressed with your ball handling skills”.

Both Alabama State and Alabama A & M were both HBCU's (historically Black college and universities) and had been looking at Barbara Anne basketball skills since the eighth grade. But the flagship, University of Alabama, "The Rolling Tide" were considering her. "Wow, what an honor", Barbara Anne thought.

"You got heart, Barbara. You're a hell of a basketball player and it looks like you are going to be here at Queensburg for both your junior and senior years. I am willing to do my best so that you can get to school on a basketball scholarship. I don't care nothin' about the fact you Black. I just want you to play ball," Coach Hanna declared. Barbara Anne's heart warmed, and she felt like a part of the team today. She realized that God granted her mercy and grace today. Who knew what she would endure tomorrow. Today she was a basketball hero at Queensburg High, and she began to believe that she a young Black Woman could be a basketball star not a "Black Bitch."

**Keep me, guide me, and show me the way: Louise.** It was all over the news and in the papers. A ten year old Black boy was beaten within an inch of his life. His mamma and daddy lived over there on Mr. Henry Eaddy's place, and they sharecropped. Mr. Eaddy owned all the gas stations in town and a big portion of the land in Queensburg. Plenty people still sharecropped in 1970. The boy was accused of stealing some penny bubble gum, and the gas station attendant decided to beat him near to death. When the boy's mamma found him bleeding in the street, she began to shout and plead for help. A few of the whites who were around began to beat her also. Louise was tired of the injustice that occurred when it came to Black people in Queensburg. It had been about 10 months since her brother Cesar had moved to New York. He was doing okay, but he

yearned to come home to Queensburg. Everyone knew that until race relations in Queensburg calmed down Cesar would need to continue to live up the road in New York.

Louise carried these burdens of racial injustice with her into Queensburg High School each morning. This morning her mind wandered to the little boy who was beaten. Louise had American history first period with Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith was a redneck with a suit on. During his lectures he always found a way to degrade and find fault with the Black race as a whole. Louise was not in the mood for it this particular morning. History class always started out with current events. The conversation started with discussion about the end of the war in Vietnam and the draft. "Every man that is over 18 and is drafted into military service has an obligation to serve his country. This is your American responsibility," Mr. Smith declared.

Louise needed to speak up. She was tired of holding her tongue. "I feel that Black people in the South have no responsibility to a country and a region that does not respect them as equals." The entire class hushed and all eyes were on Louise. "Look at how Mary, Barbara Anne, and I have been treated here at Queensburg High. Y'all act like we ain't even human."

Sara, a prissy white red head stated, "I don't care if y'all come here to school or not. I'm just afraid of ya. You seem mad all the time. Everyone is not out to get ya."

"Really, I don't have one white friend in this entire school. Do you speak to me during lunch, in the hallways, or in class," Louise exclaimed.

"I just want, y'all to go to your own schools and get out of ours", said John Patrick, a well-to-do white snobby asshole.

“Believe this I don’t want to go to this school. I would love to go back to Battery Park with the teachers, family, and friends who love me. I am supported by my community, and the majority of people have my best interest at heart. Just because my experience is different doesn’t make it wrong. But do realize that at Battery Park we don’t have microscopes in our biology labs or electric typewriters for students? When it rains, you cannot use the foyer in our school because it floods. I enjoy going to my school in my community, but I realized that here at Queensburg I have more up to date stuff. I am beginning to wonder if it’s worth it. Why can’t I be in my own school with the materials, books, and building that you all have here at Queensburg?” Louise stated. Her comments caught the entire class off guard. Many of them had not thought about how the Black students felt. All they had heard was that the Black kids wanted to invade their school.

Michael who just recently moved from California said, “Where I’m from Blacks desire to go to their own schools. The Black Panther party out in Oakland wants complete separation of the races. I think people should be comfortable. Attending segregated or integrated schools, it’s a personal choice. If you would like to go to school with all people who look just like you, no problem. I personally like diversity and I think I am a better person because Louise is in this class.” Michael smiled at Louise.

Mr. Smith said smartly, “Our discussion about current events is now over, and it is now time for my lecture.” Louise sat there and glanced over at Michael. He was still smiling at her. Louise looked at Michael and realized that there were some kind white people who were not prejudice. Louise had seen too much injustice in her short life. She missed her big brother and their close relationship. Louise felt that God could use her big

mouth for good. Maybe it was her destiny to speak out against injustice? Cesar and the little boy on Mr. Eaddy place needed people to speak up for them. Louise felt that maybe God was leading, guiding and showing her to her destiny.

**Standing on the promises of God: Mary.** This school year had been the most difficult of Mary's short life. It was the end of the school year and only two weeks were left in school. Mary's optimistic spirit was burdened with racial turmoil in Queensburg, tests, papers, and the negativity that plagued Queensburg High. She continued to pray that God see her through this difficult time. Her father was instrumental in helping to organize a boycott of the local gas stations. Charlie McKnight and the other members of the NAACP meant business. They were seeking equal treatment for all in the eyes of the law in Queensburg, Alabama.

Mary would often stay after school and study with her lone white friend Anne. She and Anne would stay in the school library until it closed at 7:00 pm. Mary's daddy would come pick her up in front of the Queensburg High like clockwork. It was hard going to Opelika to get gas once a week. He was determined not to get gas in Queensburg. Mary stood outside chatting with Anne until Anne's mother picked her up in their family car. Anne's mother looked at Mary and said, "Good evening, I hope your ride is on the way?"

"Yes, Ma'am my daddy is on the way to pick me up," said Mary. Mary knew that Anne and her family would be in a lot of trouble if they crossed the bridge and took her home. They were nice white people, but they didn't want to get caught up in the racial debacle in Queensburg. Mary waited, and waited, and waited for her father. This was very unlike him to be late. He didn't like her to be alone at the high school on the

Northside by herself. He was always there on time. Mary saw some of the white girls on the softball team coming her way. She could see them approach along with the sunset on the horizon behind them. Rachel Eaddy, one of the meanest, nastiest girls at Queensburg High was with them. Rachel was the niece of Mr. Eaddy who owned all the gas stations in town that were being boycotted. Rachel yelled out from the crowd of girls, "Is that Mary McKnight's Black ass? Her nigger daddy is telling people not to go to my uncle's gas stations. My family is rich...we don't need one red cent of money from no niggers", she bellowed. Mary remembered what she had been taught at the NAACP Alabama state youth council meeting. They said that when you are confronted during a racially charged altercation just keep your eyes forward and don't speak. Mary silence enticed Rachel more. "Your daddy and them NAACP niggers gon mess round and get theyselves killed by somebody if they don't stop runnin' they big mouths," Rachel blatantly stated. Mary was so mad that tears started streaming down her eyes. She kept her eyes forward and didn't respond to the nonsense that Rachel was speaking.

Rachel and her crowd of softball girls began to walk close to Mary. A big burly blond girl said, "Hey Rach, we should play softball with her big Black head". The crowd began to chuckle with laughter. The girls handed the bat to Rachel and all Mary remembered was the darkness.

Dark, cold, pulsating, screaming, pain rang through Mary's head when she finally opened her eyes in Queensburg General Hospital. Mary squinted and saw her mother and her father towards the end of her bed. Her throat was dry but she managed to say, "What happened? Where I am?"

Charlie McKnight looked at his daughter's broken and bruised body and stammered through his tears, "I was a few minutes late picking you up....I went to get gas. I found you unconscious outside of Queensburg High."

Mary's mother whispered, "Honey, you were beat up pretty badly, and you been unconscious overnight. But glory be to God you are awake". It was all starting to come back to Mary. She was beat up by Rachel Eaddy and the softball girls. Mary felt various aches and pains as she began to survey her body.

She was sadden by the thought that her daddy had not been there on time to protect her. "Daddy you said that everything would be alright. You promised I wouldn't be hurt. You told me to keep the faith, and I would be protected. You didn't keep your promise," exclaimed Mary!

Charlie McKnight looked at his daughter with tears in his eyes and said, "I am just a man baby. I can try my best to keep and protect you, but you should believe in God. Please know that I would never do anything to hurt you. I want the best for you, but I don't have any control over the mean and evil ways of some folk."

"They beat me because of you, the NAACP, and the decisions that you have made for me," Mary cried. Mary realized that her daddy was just a man. Her optimistic spirit had been broken her faith was plagued with doubt. Something within her spirit whispered, "When all else fails, you stand on the promises of GOD." With that advice and belief Mary realized she could go back to Queensburg Senior High School and continue on her journey because she found that she had access to the bridge.



### **Finding the Path to the Bridge: Interlude**

All three girls had their own troubled water to cross in the process of desegregating Queensburg Senior High school. Although the waters were ridged and rough, they learned how to navigate the waters. Both Louise and Barbara Anne met white people at Queensburg High who were supportive and willing to develop a relationship with them. Barbara Anne's basketball coach was willing to help her get a basketball scholarship, and he did not care about her race. He was focused on her ability as a basketball player. Barbara Anne also realized that other students were willing to be her friends, but they were just going along with the crowd. "Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection" (King, 2004, p. 178). Many times those who are silent against injustice are more lethal than those who are more verbal about their prejudice.

Louise was very verbal about the separate and unequal resources, materials, and building that she experienced at Battery Park. She realized although she was not being nurtured socially at Queensburg she felt she was being provided better resources. The question about whether or not African Americas were better off without desegregation arises. Students, educators, and parents were all a part of the community and looked out for each other. Many people in the African American community felt that they should form their own schools and educate their own children. "Blacks, not satisfied with the way their children were being educated...invoked Black Nationalist ideas in critiquing the white school system's failure to educate Black children" (Kharen & Hayes, 2005, p. 83). Louise wanted to be with at Battery Park where she felt supported and loved, but she

felt forced to attend Queensburg High because everyone told her she should go there, and she was going to get a “better” education. What constitutes a better education? More resources, materials, and funds? Isn’t it important for her to have a support system and teachers who care about her as an individual? Just because desegregation provided “so called” equal opportunity to by busing Black students to white areas, did that make education better for all students? Society needs to think more critically about how our educational system provides equal access to education for all. Desegregation has not provided the answer that was sought out by the civil rights warriors in the 1960’s.

Mary was beaten by Rachel Eaddy and the softball team girls. Mary was disappointed when she realized that all the faith that she had in her daddy, the NAACP, and her community did not save her from being beaten and put into the hospital. Mary realized that she needed faith in something more. She realized that her blind faith in people and organizations led her to being beaten. Mary needed to examine her faith and realize who was oppressing her and proceed cautiously against her oppressors. “An examined faith discards any religion and any God who commands Black people to sit idly contemplating love of their oppressors while they ( Black people) are threatened and destroyed by those who hate them. Peace alone is of no value. Peace and justice connect in an examined faith” (Williams, 1997, p. 99-100). At the end of the story Mary examined her faith and believed in something greater than herself or any other man. Through this examined, faith she gained access to the bridge.

Access to the bridge does not mean troubled waters still don’t flow, or one doesn’t meet barriers on the bridge. Through an examined faith, one knows how to access

the bridge over troubled waters. Once access is granted, a new journey over the bridge begins.

## CHAPTER 5

### I AM LIVING TESTIMONY: ACCESS TO THE BRIDGE

*I am a Living Testimony*

I am, a living testimony

I could have been dead and gone

but Lord you let me live on

I am, a living testimony

and I, I thank the Lord for keeping me alive

Troubled waters always have and always will continue to flow. Although troubled waters can disable the journey of some individuals, they can be a challenging and triumphant for others when they discover they can access the bridge to help them get to the other side. It is essential to understand that finding the bridge does not mean the journey has ended. Many trials and tribulations will meet you as you begin a new journey across the bridge. Many people can give directions and help you navigate through troubled waters, but each individual has to endure their own journey and access their own bridge. Once you realize you will never get rid of troubled waters, you begin the hard work of attempting to cross the bridge. While attempting to cross the bridge, you realize there are barriers that make the waters troubled and continue to block your access on the bridge. The question that will continue to meet you at each road block is ...How do I get over? Although that question still plagues your mind, you realize that you made it through troubled waters and you are “a living testimony”.

In this chapter I will further expand the metaphor of “A Bridge over Troubled Water” to help me theorize and examine my understandings of how to access the bridge.

Troubled waters are the same barriers that meet you on the bridge: oppression, classism, hurt, pain, racism, sexism, geography/environmental racism, and lack of knowledge. I see the bridge as a place where equality, peace, love, unity, and equal access can be explored. In order to get an alternative perspective, I created a fictional conversation between myself and Mary, a fictional character from my stories. I chose to have a conversation with Mary because in my final story, *Standing on the Promises of God*, she acquires new knowledge about herself and spirit in order to gain access to the bridge. I seek the knowledge that Mary obtained to help me theorize, examine, and synthesize chapter five. Although Mary is a fictional composite character her story is a living testimony. I believe that extensive knowledge can be gained from looking deeper at her testimony. Mary's testimony was created from an exchange of thoughts that evolved from multiple conversations, articles, books, movies, and research that I have encountered that includes Black Women I have consider my mentors. Through these discussions and research, the wisdom I found comforted me and continues to lead me as I navigate troubled waters to find my own bridge. Brown (1997) argues that if Black Women would rely on Mother Wit to help us in our journeys through life, we might navigate through a smoother course of troubled waters. She concludes that, "Mother Wit is commonsense advice, communal sayings, or proverbs. Mother Wit is belief based on experience and time-honored proof. It instills in the younger person survival strategies and community behavior guidelines. It teaches us how to live in the world and understand who we are and can be" (Brown, 1997, p. 85). I choose to include Mother Wit in my analysis of this inquiry. Synthesis and examination in academia have proven to be a challenging task for me. I find comfort in conversations and storytelling by other Black Women in the academy. Patrica Hill

Collins's (2004) Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology illuminates my struggle to use traditional methods, explain my new understandings from this research inquiry and supports the use of storytelling/conversations to help me, as a Black Woman, explain my exploration and new understandings that have transformed my thinking. "The experiences of African-American Women scholars illustrate how individuals who wish to re-articulate a Black Woman's standpoint through Black feminist thought can be suppressed by a white-male controlled validation process" (Hill-Collins, 2004, p. 293). I chose to use Mother Wit as a vehicle to help me in the examination of this dissertation. I revere the spirit of mothers and the knowledge, wisdom, and experience that they provide. In this chapter I am going to develop a research dialogue with my fictional composite character Mary.

From my discourse about this inquiry six central themes are glaring: (1) How can an individual access the bridge? (2) What are the barriers on the bridge, and how do they affect an individual's ability to cross the bridge? (3) What makes the Black Woman's journey so complex? (4) How does using fiction as a methodology to tell counter stories empower the oppressed? (5) How is the use of words/language powerful in articulating the struggles of the oppressed? (6) What implications does this research have for the future of schooling? These questions are not easily answered. However, I believe through Mother Wit conversations along with theoretical examination, new understandings can flourish. The following are fictionalized conversations between me, Marketa, and my composite fictional character, Mary.

## How Can an Individual Access the Bridge?

- Mary:** You have to know yourself and realize what your strengths/weaknesses are.... You have to first be honest with yourself.
- Marketa:** Know yourself... What does that mean?
- Mary:** Who you are as an individual? What does it mean to be who you are at your core? How hard you are willing to push? What are you made of? What causes you to work hard? What is your work ethic? Understanding and knowing your own spirit and what that means to you.
- Marketa:** Some people get caught up in religion versus spirituality. I see religion as something that has distinct parameters versus spirituality as something that is fluid and meaningful to each individual. For me spirituality is Christianity, but I respect others who name and define spirit differently than me. Alice Walker (1997) talks about a decolonization of spirit. "One begins to see the world from one's own point of view; to interact with it out of one's own conscience and heart... We begin to flow... into the Universe... And out of this flowing comes the natural activism of wanting to survive be happy, to enjoy one another and Life and to laugh... We begin to see that we must be loved very much by whatever Creation is" (p. 26). The decolonization of spirit is inclusive and invites everyone into knowing and understanding what embodies spirit for each individual. When I think about access to the bridge, I think about spirituality. For me my spirituality is embodied through Christ. Spirituality equals liberation.

Delores Williams (1993) has an entire chapter in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness* that discusses how God provides liberation to the oppressed throughout history. “How does God relate to the oppressed in history...God relates primarily to liberation efforts...God allows various communities of poor, oppressed Black Women and men to hear and see the doing of the good news in a way that is meaningful for their lives” (Williams, 1993, p.198-199). This liberation provides access to the bridge. Martin (1996) illustrates the intersection of spirituality and liberation in this quote.

The bible witnesses to a God who not only liberated disparate groups who were perceived to be ‘nobodies’...it also witnesses to God as one who maintains and works out creatively freedom and the formation of community for the alien and the alienated...Liberation from evil, and oppression was thus perceived to represent only the beginning of a journey wherein one acts with God to exemplify the realities of freedom and justice and community formation within the sociopolitical and religious institutions of a society. (p. 24)

There is freedom in understanding that something greater/bigger than you can help you navigate through troubled waters and deal with the barriers on the bridge. This liberation gives you power to believe the Spirit can conquer the barriers on the bridge. You can’t control the barriers of



oppression, racism, sexism, classism, and lack of knowledge. A person can only have faith that the Spirit in which they believe will aid them in continuing their journey to the bridge. In the desegregation of Queensburg, I felt that all of you ladies used your spirituality to help you navigate troubled waters. In the end I felt you, Mary, were liberated and gained access to the bridge through your faith in God. Faith is the major factor that provides one access to the bridge.

**Mary:** This is very true. I knew and understood that I had to believe in something greater than my earthly father, Charlie McKnight. I grew up being taught about Christianity and God. It wasn't until I was senselessly beaten by the Queensburg High softball team that my faith was truly tested. I always felt like my daddy would protect me from everything in the world. That particular day my daddy wasn't there to protect me. I now realize that God was with me the entire time, and he allowed me to have that experience so that I could put my faith in him versus a man. My entire experience at Queensburg tested my faith and what I believed was true. That first day when we met the mob I finally saw the anger and hatred those white people had for us. I couldn't wrap my mind around that type of anger. My human instinct wanted to retaliate against the hatred that was directed towards those of us who desegregated. My girl Louise constantly had to bite her tongue and put down her fists. Learning to love those who hate you is a true test of your spirit. I remember Dr. King and other civil rights leaders responding with non-violence, and I didn't understand until I made

the choice to respond to those who disliked me with love, not hate. In Dr. King's (2000) book *Why We Can't Wait*, he discusses how nonviolence played a major role in the civil rights movement. Here is a quote that gives evidence of the success of nonviolence. "Nonviolent resistance paralyzed and confused the power structures against which it was directed...The Negro was able to face his adversary, to concede to him a physical advantage and to defeat him because the superior force of the oppressor had become powerless" (King, 2000, p.26-27). I recall feeling empowered because although I was yelled at, spat on, and treated unjustly I did not respond with violence. We desegregated Queensburg High School. Knowing God and having faith has aided me as I have navigated through life. Without faith an individual does not have what they need to endure troubled waters. You know yourself better when you know God/Christ. He is all powerful and can do all things. When you go through troubled waters and trials in life it's not about you, but something much bigger. It's to develop you into the person you are destined and called to be. Troubled waters are not simple and clear. They are complicated and coarse.

**Marketa:** Spirituality was both liberation and oppression. You, Barbara Anne, and Louise were sent into a dubious situation at Queensburg High School. The entire community was supportive, yet they were willing to send three young black women into danger and watch from the sidelines. It's also apparent that you did not have a voice in your decision. Louise began to question how and why everyone was making the decision for her to attend

Queensburg High. Walker (1983) explains how Black Women's spirituality keeps us naive. "Black Women whose spirituality was so intense, so deep, so unconscious, that they were themselves unaware of the richness they held. They stumbled blindly through their lives: creatures so abused...that they considered themselves unworthy of even of hope" (Walker, 1983, p. 231-232). Why didn't you question the men of your community who made the decision for you to desegregate? Louise's mother advised her not to question the men, but passively accept her new fate of desegregating Queensburg High. Unwavering belief, trust in the community, and blind faith created a passive existence that allowed you to be pushed down. In this rural Black community why do Women become the foot soldiers, and the men make the decisions? You all became a bridge for the Southside community as you marched forward into troubled waters. Why were you all the chosen to travel troubled waters for the rest of the community? How could the community have taken a more active role versus you ladies crossing the bridge into desegregation all alone? I remember what Delores Williams (1997) states about faith. It has really made me think deeper about faith and how it connects to liberation and the oppression of black women.

An unexamined faith, like an unexamined life, is not worth living. Unexamined faith leads a people to be unconscious instruments of their own oppression and the oppression of others. An examined faith is a critical way of seeing that

shows those things in a belief system that are life-threatening and life-taking. An examined faith inspires people to discard beliefs, images, and symbols that have the potential to support scapegoating and destruction.

(Williams, 1997, p. 99)

I believe that the testimonies of you, Barbara Anne, and Louise started with an unexamined faith. You all were unconscious of the oppression you were walking into at Queensburg High School, but you had an unexamined blind faith in God, your families, and the community. Unexamined faith allowed you to remain blind to the fact that you were the sacrificial lambs chosen to take on the burden of the entire community. I believe that God gives us common sense to use an examined faith that lets us see reality and realize that barriers exist, and we have to figure out how to get around them or knock them down with his help. Williams (1997) goes on to talk about Black common sense and how the lack of the “Black common sense” is a barrier to liberation and faith. “Black commonsense is the collective wisdom and actions Black people used as they tried to survive, to develop a productive quality of life and to be liberated for oppressive social, political, economic, and legal systems” (Williams, 1997, p.103). Using “Black commonsense” with an examined faith will not allow you to turn a blind eye to troubled waters. It requires you to take a close look at the current which flows through trouble waters.

**Mary:** Essentially, examined faith requires you to be reflective. I am not blind to the fact that we were walking into a hot bed of segregation at Queensburg High. Neither do I discount the fact that we were told to desegregate. I had cousins who were smart Black males who could have crossed the bridge to desegregate. In my opinion three Black girls were chosen because we were seen as less of a threat. The dominant society would feel slightly more comfortable with us versus the stereotypical “angry Black man”. What makes me seem less of a threat? Am I less than because I am a Black Woman? Don’t I get angry and mad? What about the “angry Black Woman”? What makes her seem safer? Black Women are expected to be passive yet resilient. As I reflect on my journey of spirituality I realize that I have met many barriers of oppression as I think about the institution of the Black church. Most of the pastors/ministers, deacons, and decision makers are males. Yet women make up the majority of the tithing members. Wood (1996) explains, “With many congregations having 70 percent female membership, we must reflect on the extent to which internalized misogyny erodes the spiritual welfare of the church, denounce misogynistic practice as antithetical to Christian liberation...This malaise is not peculiar to Black churches, but it is a form of suffering in the community about which Black folk speak little if at all” (p. 48). Why do we as women sit back and allow the men of the church to make decisions with our money and justify it all with bible stories about how men are “suppose” to dominate/lead women? I question these oppressive practices

yet I continue to support a system that continues to label me a second class and oppress me because of my gender. I struggle with the idea of examined faith versus blind faith. I feel like I know and see the oppression that is linked to my spirituality, but I also know that am also liberated by my spirituality. This brings me back to the point of knowing who you are and what you stand for as an individual. That is how you gain access to the bridge. I feel conflicted about spirituality and I question how I can begin to knock down my barriers of oppression. You can't try to travel the bridge without looking back to how you navigated troubled waters and reflecting on the the realities that are looking you in the face

**Marketa:** Mary, how did you gain your access to the the bridge?

**Mary:** I truly believe that I can do all things because of God. Many times troubled waters were too deep. My problems were too big. I questioned my own thoughts, beliefs, and practices. But I always know that I have a friend in God. When no one else will stand with me, I know that all of my help comes from God. I am not blind to the barriers that stand before me, but I know that through my faith in God, I am always protected.

**What are the Barriers on the Bridge and How Do They  
Affect an Individual's Ability to Cross the Bridge?**

**Marketa:** I feel that the barriers on the bridge are unique to each individual's turmoil and struggle. I see the barriers as oppression, classism, hurt, pain, racism, sexism, geography/environmental racism, and lack of knowledge. As I begin to think deeper, I realize that these can be barriers for some that become permanent road blocks that make some journeys come to an abrupt halt.

**Mary:** When I think of the barriers, I realize that there is a difference between barriers on the bridge and troubled waters. Troubled waters are difficult and trying, but you can make your way through the difficult waters. Some barriers on a bridge cause you to detour, but you can go around them once they overcome the barriers on the bridge. Some barriers may slow down your travel, but eventually you can begin your journey again. Other barriers are permanent and may have an individual stuck for a lifetime. When an individual gets stuck on their bridge, they may have to travel a different course of trouble waters and build a different bridge.

**Marketa:** So Mary, as a Black Female born and educated in the South. What have been your troubled waters and the barriers on your bridge?

**Mary:** I really feel that desegregation was troubled waters for me. I don't feel that it hindered me, and I was still able to move past my mis-education. But I feel that my high school years were stolen from me, and I was unable be fully at ease at Queensburg High. I never truly got to be myself and let my hair down. I always felt like I had to monitor my behavior

because someone was always looking. In some ways, I wish I had stayed at Battery Park. The faculty not only taught me academic curriculum at Battery Park, but they were also invested enough in me as a student to teach me valuable lessons in the curriculum of life. I felt cheated when I left Battery Park. I know my parents felt that I was getting a better education at Queensburg High. Queensburg had a more modern facility, newer text books, and more resources, but I was missing the ethics of care. I read about the ethics of care. I really felt the faculty of Queensburg lacked this for Louise, Barbara Anne, and me. Here is quote from the reading I did on the ethics of care.

The ethics of care...understands responsibility within a context of relationship or connection. The image is that of a web which ultimately connects everyone. Responsibility is equated with the need to respond. Individuals need to respond when they recognize that others are counting on them and when they are in a position to help (Kroeger-Mappes, 2004, p.111).

I believe that my friends that stayed at Battery Park were healthier socially because they received that ethics of care from the faculty. I had to learn how to trust my professors, regain my comfort level, and confidence when I went to college. When I look at segregation, I question whether or not it would have been better if we stayed segregated. I realize “separate but equal” and desegregation are both myths that the American education system has told. I know that my entire life I have been mis-educated. The



best education I have received has been the education that life has offered me and the knowledge that I sought out myself though God.

**Marketa:** I read in James Anderson's book (1988) about how the curriculum of segregation created separate and unequal schooling. Anderson's book gives a clear illustration about Black education in the South. This quote is powerful in defining the curriculum of segregation. "This curriculum theory reflected a system of values and beliefs that subordinated the freedom and choices of Black children to the interest of an unequal and unjust Southern society" (Anderson, 1988, p. 223).

**Mary:** I see racism, segregation..... I guess sexism is a barrier too, but I have figured out how to continue my journey despite these barriers. I remember my childhood and how at my home church Women were not allowed to stand in the pulpit. I think about how the many Women of the NAACP were secretaries and cooked lunches and supported the men who made decisions. There were no Female preachers, deacons, or trustees at the little church where I grew up. These were barriers that I did not see as an issue until I became a mature adult. I always saw the barrier of race, but rarely saw the barrier of my gender hindering my access to the bridge. There are many barriers and troubled waters , but continuing a successful journey is about not allowing oppression to define who you are and your destiny.

**Marketa:** Oppression values one individual over another because of a specific characteristic. This creates barriers that create inequality. One individual is

seen as better than another. Mary, this quote provides a lens into the perspective of the oppressed.

From the perspective of the oppressed, it seems as though human beings are valued or devalued in our society not on the basis of their identity as children of God or individual merit and goodness, but on the basis of characteristics that inherited socially or biologically, that is, their national identity, race, gender, class... The rich are more valued than the poor. Men are more valued than Women. One's access to food, clothing, shelter, education, employment, and housing is conditioned by one's nationality, race, gender, and class. (Phelps, 1996, p.49)

This quote makes me think about who gets to decide what is valued. Why does being different become a burden of troubled waters and a barrier on the bridge? Ultimately, those who are dominant in society seek to control through oppression and decide who and what is valued and anything different is oppressed. So the question becomes, how do the oppressed navigate troubled waters and break through barriers of oppression on the bridge?

**Mary:** That leads back to faith. That examined faith that you talked about.

**Marketa:** Yes, Paulo Freire(2007) talks about “the oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and

Women... The struggle begins with men's recognition that they have been destroyed" (p. 68) I agree that you have to recognize the oppression and stand up against it. Just like you said you didn't realize your oppression based on gender, but always realized the racial oppression. I believe in the Black community that we as Black Women stick our heads in the sand when it comes to gender oppression within our community. Many times we turn a blind eye. Wood (1996) examines the role that gender oppression plays in the Black community.

The status quo... continues to be one in which Females are treated as inferior to males.. The dominant and submission mode of gender relations within the Black Christian community, as well as the dominant culture, meets criteria from moral evil: sustaining and reinforcing attitudes, beliefs, policies, and practices that deny certain individuals or groups the status of full discrimination against the oppressed group. One may argue that Black men are exempt from the role of oppressor in this definition of evil. However, it is important to bear in mind that despite the tediousness of gender privilege afforded them, the exercise of that privilege by Black men contributes to the oppression of Black Women. (Wood, 1996, p. 38)

I believe that through an examined faith you are more aware and conscious of your barriers. With an awareness of the barriers you can begin

to chart out a plan to knock them down or navigate around them. In your final testimony you realize that you have to look at your situation closely and have an examined faith in God. You finally gain access to the bridge through examined faith.

**Mary:** When I woke up in the hospital and realized that my earthly daddy couldn't protect me, I needed to have faith in something bigger. I realized that my community and family loved me, but they were not the ones who had to endure the turmoil of desegregation each day. I thought deeper about how God could allow me to be beaten. I realized that there were no perfect answers but I had to confront my uncomfortable realities and that is how I gained access to my bridge. The oppression of the whites at the high school is overt and easily seen, but the oppression of my community and family was a blind reality that took me a while to see, acknowledge, and accept. I do feel that barriers have met me as I travel along the bridge. I really see how access has been blocked for many people through blind faith.

**Marketa:** Classism is a huge barrier that is blocking access to the bridge for many people today. I see many poor who are marginalized and don't get the opportunity to tell their stories. Many people who are oppressed by class don't make it to the academy to tell their counterstories.

**Mary:** I disagree with that statement. Many people who are poorer do make it to the academy through scholarships, fellowships, sports scholarships, and other means. So I do think they make it to the academy, but they are no

longer poor so they become a part of the middle class academy. Many fail to share their stories. Ruby Paine's book (1995), *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, is helpful in understanding difference between the social classes.

**Marketa:** That book has been criticized for promoting classism and stereotypes about social class. We need more conversation/research about the effect that class has as a barrier along the bridge. When thinking about class it leads me to environmental racism and how that can be a barrier that permanently blocks an individual's access to the bridge. Here is a definition: "Environmental racism research illustrates how people of color are more likely to reside in areas with increased exposure to air, water, and noise pollution; hazardous waste treatment facilities; pesticide, and chemical exposure; and geographic and residential alienation" (Dickinson, 2012, p. 61). Environmental racism can only be defeated by an examined faith. How can you change your environment if you don't realize anything is wrong? Environmental racism becomes a permanent barrier because the oppressed are defeated by a lack of knowledge. What are your thoughts on place/geography or environmental racism being troubled waters or a barrier?

**Mary:** I think about the "Let's Move" campaign our first lady has created. Many residents of urban areas don't have access to fresh fruit and vegetables in their neighborhood stores. I salute Michelle Obama for working to get more fresh fruits and vegetables in school cafeterias and also encouraging

urban communities to start neighborhood gardens. I think she is trying to help remove that particular barrier of environmental racism. I also think about living in the South. When I was growing up, we thought that living in the South was a barrier. For some people it was. I remember so many classmates and friends moving up north after high school graduation. Everyone one felt that the North was the land of possibilities and opportunities. I read a book *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration* by Isabel Wilkerson (1996). This book reminded me about the hope that many African Americans had by moving to the North to pursue better opportunities.

A silent pilgrimage took its first steps within the borders of this country. The fever rose without warning or notice or much in the way of understanding by those outside its reach. It would not end until the 1970's and would set into motion changes in the North and South that no one, not even the people doing the leaving could have imagined...Historians would come to call it the Great Migration. It would become perhaps the biggest underreported story of the twentieth century. (Wilkerson, 2010, p. 8-9)

The irony is that many African Americans saw the South as a barrier because of racism and lack of higher paying jobs. I feel that because I stayed in the South it was an asset that helped me along my journey. Don't

get me wrong Jim Crow was troubled waters along the way, but I am a proud Southerner who has lived here all of my life. Many people have such negative view of the South so I can see how living in the South can be a barrier. I realize that the history of the South can be a barrier because of the racial turmoil, the loss of the civil war, and Jim Crow laws. It all comes down to individual perspective as to what barriers detour or hinder your journey across the bridge over troubled waters. Each person has their own bridge to cross. Who knows what barriers you will meet along the way? I don't know what each person's individual oppression looks or feels like. I only can speak to my experiences. I choose to use Spirit and faith as I continue my journey across the bridge.

**Marketa:** Louise's testimony, *Goin' up Yonder*, about her brother Cesar and how he was forced to go up North was influenced by the Great Migration and how many Blacks went north. I know in my own family we had many people migrate to New York and New Jersey. It is interesting to think about what others see as barriers. Cesar didn't want to go up north, but he was forced because of his circumstance therefore he might have seen going to New York as troubled waters. He was forced to leave the South because it was an unwritten rule that a Black boy could not shoot a gun (even in the air) near a white man in the South. This also could have been troubled waters for Cesar as an individual. Troubled waters and barriers exist in each life it is how you deal with them that matters.

### What Makes the Black Woman's Journey so Complex?

**Mary:** Black Women have carried such a heavy load. Traditionally, Black Women have been caregivers and taken care our own families and others.

**Marketa:** It's interesting that you talk so much about Black Women's ability to care in a different and unique way. Here is another definition of the ethics of care that feminist talk so much about. Listen to the definition. "The Female approach to moral problems...tends to be responsive. Care, love, trust, dealing with specific persons who have specific needs, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, the importance of not hurting anyone, and the authority of feeling in solving problems emerge as central concerns of Females when dealing with moral issues" (Kessler, 2004,p.108). I agree that Women have a unique ethics of care, and I think that being a Woman of color gives more differentiated ethics of care.

**Mary:** As a mother and Black Woman, I feel that our intersection of being Black and a Women gives us a different type of care. When I really think about it, as a mother, it's about wanting to protect your family and your children from the obstacles that are out there. As a Black Woman, you want to instill in them an inner strength and understanding of what it means to be a Black person in this old world. You want your children to be physically, mentally, and emotionally prepared because you know how harsh the world can be. You have your Black Woman consciousness. In Louise's



testimony, *I Am Number One*, when Louise's mother gives her advice, she uses that ethics of care to dispel advise that she feels will protect her child.

**Marketa:** This is a great point. WomanistCare is what you are describing. Foster-Boyd (1997) describes it as, "WomanistCare is the intentional process of care-giving and care-receiving by African American Women. It is the African American Woman finding her place and her voice in this world...The focus is the holistic care of body, mind, and spirit in order that healing and transformation occur for African American Women and their circles of influence" (p.198). I see this WomanistCare practiced throughout my community and family. At my church we have a group of older Black Women that are called "Pearls of Wisdom" who mentor and interact with younger Black Women and share their knowledge and wisdom about life. I am reminded about my own WomanistCare experiences. An example is how you and my other "Mother Wit" mentors are always providing me with nuggets of wisdom about how to navigate through life as a Black Woman. I don't think that WomanistCare is just limited to Black Women sharing information with other Black Women, but I feel that it is Black Women sharing our love, sense of care, and knowledge among ourselves and the world. What else do you think makes the Black Women's journey through troubled waters and around barriers on the bridge so complex?

**Mary:** I think it's our creativity. I think of my mother and how creative she was. She was resourceful and managed to raise eight children with the

resources and limited funds she had. My father was always there helping to provide those resources, but she was the creative mind that maximized those resources.

**Marketa:** Creativity and passion for our family/community. As Womanist we have a passion and desire to see our entire community/family flourish and succeed. This quotes describes the care that Black Women have that is interlocked in our passion.

To be in touch with our passion and to acknowledge our passion as a gift of God's good Creation is to give birth to a new way of being in the world... Our foremother's passion enabled them to see a future where their children would have more options educationally, professionally, socially, and most assured economically. Our passion gives courage to speak the unspeakable. Our passion compels us to speak the truth about our lives. Our passion is that life force that enables us to risk speaking the truth in the hope that our children will have even more options than we have today.

( Hunter, 1996, p. 192)

I believe that our multiple consciousness as Black Women leads us to have WomanistCare, passion, creativity, and dedication to our families and our communities.

**Mary:** I remember that during the time of desegregation that many of the students that were chosen to desegregate were Black Women. Looking at the history of Black Americans I see Black Women providing the blueprint of

how to build the bridge for the rest of the community. Many times these Women were not acknowledged for providing the blueprint. Why have we as Black Women allowed ourselves to navigate troubled waters, create a blueprint for the bridge, and not received credit for the enduring the struggle?

**Marketa:** In our community we do not challenge the oppression that we receive from our own brothers, fathers, sons, and husbands. Mary, listen to this quote by Wood (1996) that clarifies how Black Women's oppression is ignored in the Black community. "Idealization and romanticization of Black Women's suffering is as insidious a habit in the African American community as it has been historically in the dominant society. Elevating women's suffering to a form of martyrdom for the cause (of others) virtually guarantees that it will remain unexamined" (Wood, 1996, p. 39). We as a people are sensitive towards racial oppression, yet we ignore oppression based on our sex. I also believe that the Black Woman is misunderstood. Many Black Women struggle with being strong, caregivers, yet we are seen as the "Black bitch" when we stand up for ourselves. Louise and her mother were told that they had big mouths because they were women who spoke up for themselves. Louise's mother was silenced by domestic violence. Speaking about domestic violence against Women is taboo in the Black community. "The assaults that women and girls experience in their homes is seen as normative...assaults of women go unmentioned in the writing, civic commentary, or sermons

of male religious leaders...when a battered women approaches her pastor for assistance, she is frequently advised either to become a better wife; bear her cross in faith; or pray for her husband” (Wood, 1996, p. 40).

Black Women want to be strong and powerful therefore we don't want to be seen as victims of domestic violence. In the story *Boys and Bubble Gum* the white boys at Queensburg High and the principal tried to silence Louise by telling her that she should not defend herself.

**Mary:** It is interesting that you bring up this topic. I have found when Black Women are more aggressive we are seen as pushy, overbearing, angry, loud, and bitchy. Barbara Anne struggled with seeing herself as a “Black bitch”. Her life circumstances, culture, and the dominant society helped her to have a negative image of herself as a Black Woman. It wasn't until others began to see beyond Barbara Anne's color or gender that she began to see herself beyond the title of “Black bitch”. How can we help Black Women to overcome self-hatred based on our identity? Why did it take others outside of herself to help her begin to define herself beyond the words “Black bitch”? We have allowed other people to define who we are and to cloud our identity. Listen to this quote that speaks to this confusion of identity. “Women who struggle to claim their own identity and shape their own way within the community. Doing it ‘the way they say do it’ has required silence about women's experiences...as well as other forms of oppression manifested by the hydra-headed monster called misogyny” (Woods, 1996, p. 41). The confusion about our identities as Black Women continues plague how we are viewed by the dominant in society and how we are seen in

our community. Until we begin to recognize and publicize who we are presently and who we have been historically we will continue to be defined by others. We owe it to the generations of Black Women who will continue to travel troubled waters to explore our identity and the complexity of who we are so that they can stand proud knowing they are Black Women.

**How Does Using Fiction as a Methodology to Tell the Counter Story  
Empower the Oppressed?**

**Marketa:** Fiction allows the counter story to be told without the permission of the dominant in society. Using fiction to tell the counter story/testimonies of you (Mary), Louise, and Barbara Anne, I am able to tell desegregation stories that are reflective of many small rural towns in the South. It was important for me to collect the oral histories so that I could hear reality in the voices of my fictional composite characters. The setting, sounds, feelings, thoughts, and scenes were all taken from reality and massaged into fiction. I look at Black Women novelist such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker and how they have used fiction to craft Womanist counter narratives that have transformed how people theorize and think critically about the lives of Black Women. These Women use fiction to expose things that are unspoken and taboo. Mary Helen Washington wrote an essay on Alice Walker. Washington (1993) describes how Walker uses her writing to address the souls of Black Women. “Her main preoccupation has been the souls of Black Women. Walker herself, writing about herself as a

writer, has declared herself committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties, and the triumphs of Black Women” (Washington, 1993, p.37). This quote speaks to how Walker, as a Womanist, is committed to exposing truths through fiction in order to promote the love of Black Women as a whole.

**Mary:** After reading and viewing Alice Walker’s *Color Purple* and being flabbergasted by the reality that rang true in the story. I can recall people in my community who had situations that mirrored those of a few of the characters in Walker’s book. In the rural small town I grew up in, people didn’t talk about lesbianism, rape, incest, or teenage pregnancy. Oppression and pain run deep and are difficult topics to discuss, but fiction is a viable way to discuss the unspoken.

**Marketa:** Fiction is a roadmap to personal truth. It delivers a safe way to tell the story with passion, anger, pain, hurt, rage, and agony. I felt comfortable collecting oral histories and looking at them critically in order to create stories that exposed truths that have not been publicized. Fiction is very political. Dickson (2012) makes the powerful statement: “Fictional narratives have played a powerful role”(p. 65). It can both confirm political theory and destroy ideology. Toni Morrison (2008) talks about how she wants her fiction to be political. “If anything I do, in the way of writing novels isn’t about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills on the obligations of my personal dreams-which is to say yes, the work must be political. It must have that as its thrust”(Morrison, 2008, p. 64). Fiction is not

restricted because it doesn't have the boundaries that are required by other genre's. Fiction is free to define itself and grow out of whatever truth is revealed in the writer's mind. Truth is relative to individual perspective. Fiction allows the ladies that I interviewed to safely remain anonymous while exposing their truths.

**Mary:** After reading your stories, I recognized the power that fiction gives to the oppressed. The story can encompass the true feelings and mask the identities of the individuals through fiction.

**Marketa:** Many scholars in the academy don't see fiction as research. I would argue that any research can be fiction based on the perspective and lens in which it is viewed. Statistics, surveys, case studies, quantitative measures, and other forms of inquiry can be skewed to tell the story/results that the researcher wants to reveal. Traditional research is believed to expose truth. Depending on the lens, traditional research may be proven to be false and fiction can expose truth. The question then becomes, what is truth?

**Mary:** Although my character is created out of fiction, my testimony is true. It is truth that rings forth out of many desegregation stories that have yet to be publicized. I am a representation of the Black Women whose testimonies remain mute because the American history books fail to tell my story. I am grateful for fiction allowing my truth to expose reality and allow truth to be shouted loud and clear for all those who will listen to hear.

**How is the Use of Words/Language Powerful in Articulating the  
Struggles of the Oppressed?**

**Marketa:** After listening to the lived experiences of the women that I interviewed I felt that it was important to use the language that I heard them speak and refer to in their story telling. The language that they speak directly reflects their Southern, Black identity. It was important that I listen closely to their dialects and words that honor their language in my storytelling in Chapter 4.

**Mary:** I feel that the language that is used in Chapter 4 helps to shape my identity and give the reader a glimpse of the larger reality of Queensburg. It is important to honor the language of the oppressed because the language/ words in which the story is told aid in the development of the story.

**Marketa:** I think about the slave narratives and how using the language and words of the people added power to the stories that were told. It empowers the oppressed to know that their words have an important story to tell. I am going to read you a quote from Alice Walker (1983) that describes how her mother's artful language helped her mold the stories that she writes.

Yet so many of the stories that I write that we all write, are my mother's stories. Only recently did I fully realize this: that through years of listening to my mother's stories of her life, I have absorbed not only the stories themselves, but something of the manner in which she spoke, something of the urgency that involves the knowledge that her stories - like her life - must be recorded...But the telling of these stories, which came from my mother's lips as



naturally as breathing, was ... (the) way my mother showed herself an artist. (Walker, 1983, p. 140)

The expression of Black language is the art of those who are telling the story allowing themselves to provide the full validity of who they are through their own language. Honoring the authentic language and dialect empowers the oppressed to know that their words are important and deserved to be heard. To massage the language of the storyteller into “standard” American English is to devalue their culture and experience. It says that the way you speak is wrong or incorrect. This makes me think about Black students in school and how teachers don’t honor their home language. Students are told that the way that they have learned to speak, the way their parents and community speaks is not correct. It provides the students with the idea that something is wrong with their home culture and that there is a correct/ appropriate way to speak, live, and “Be”. This is the message that is received by correcting/changing the language/words of others. We don’t honor them if we don’t honor their language. I begin to think about myself and how throughout my education I have struggled to express myself and find my words in the academy. I start to question the idea of the “standard” education that we receive in school as being oppressive. Why can’t different forms of education that are learned through culture and home be acknowledged? What makes the “standard” English, knowledge, and culture correct and the ways in which we are taught from our individual cultures wrong? How do we approach the idea of different types of education that honor who we are as individuals and the ways in which we use words? The way in

which I have crafted this final chapter shows how using my own words, style, and the use of dialogue encompasses who I am and how I identify with my own identity. I was reading *Toward and Afrocentric Feminist Epistemology* by Hill-Collins (2004) and it reminded me that my words and thoughts are different from the “standard” academy. That doesn’t make my thoughts or words less valuable. Here is a quote about how dialogue helps the Black Women to develop her words/thoughts.

For Black women new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals and are usually developed through dialogues with other members of the community. A primary epistemological assumption underlying the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is that connectedness rather than separation is an essential component of the knowledge validation process...not to be confused with adversarial debate the use of dialogue has deep roots in the African-based oral tradition and the African American culture...The widespread use of the call-and-response discourse mode among African-Americans illustrates the importance placed on dialogue. (Hill-Collins, 2004, p. 296)

I believe that I am a better scholar because I have been given the freedom to use my own language and dialogue to develop this final chapter. Storytelling comes natural for me because it is a part of my culture and the language of expression that I have grown up with. How do we build a bridge between home cultures and the educational system “the academy”? What is type of exposure/training is

necessary for professors/teachers to respect student's ways with words, language, knowledge, and understanding? My conversation with you, Mary has helped me understand my oppression and question how my language/words provide me with a sense of freedom. The ability to testify and witness is freedom. Telling your story through your own words is cleansing and empowering. Ross (2003) gives an example of the liberating power witnessing and testifying through your own words. "As moral practice, the significance of witnessing and testifying lies in the possibility and hope these practices bring to common civic life" (Ross, 2003, p. 15). I believe that words can oppress and liberate. We have to develop ways to educate, yet honor how culture reflects words/language.

**What Implications Does This Research Have for the Future of Schooling?**

**Marketa:** I pondered this for a while. I came up with a few implications. The first implication is a need to bring awareness of spirituality. Schools today are afraid to approach the concept of spirituality and faith within the institution. We need to bring awareness that there are many different ways that spirit is recognized in the lives of individuals. Recently, I had a conversation with a colleague about decorating the school for Christmas. We talked about how these decorations might offend some students and parents. I feel that we should expose students to: Passover, Ramadan, Christmas, Chinese New Year, and other spiritual

holidays. This creates a safe place that honors all types of religions and spirituality. Students need to know that whatever you believe is respected and honored. Here is a quote by Alice Walker (1997) that speaks to this issue. “Nature would never advise us to do anything but be ourselves. Mother Earth will do all that She can to support our choices. Whatever they are” (Walker, 1997, p. 26). Students need to know that their identity, ideas, religion, race, and/or gender will be respected when they walk into the halls of their school. You, Louise, and Barbara Anne did not feel this when you all entered the doors of Queensburg High School.

**Mary:** Respect for diversity and understanding is what I would call for in schools. In the testimonies that you wrote there were people who were not accepting of us. They reacted based on stereotypes that they believed all their lives. These people allowed their ingrained prejudice to dictate their reaction to desegregation. There were white people like Coach Hanna who didn’t care what Barbara Anne’s race was because she was a good basketball player he wanted to help. On the opposite side of the spectrum, you had people like Rachel Eaddy who beat me up just because I was a Black student desegregating Queensburg High School. Educators have to learn that they need to teach respect for diversity. Students need to respect each other for their differences whether it’s a handicapped student, a student of a different nationality, a student of a different race, or any other distinct factor that makes us different. Each person is worthy of respect.

**Marketa:** I like that idea of accepting diversity. But, I thought of it in this aspect. When students come into schools with multiple oppressions, they have a different level of consciousness and teachers need to have sensitivity to different complex layers of oppression. The school as an institution needs to educate those who work intimately with students at school on how to empower these marginalized students. Each person has been taught prejudices in their life. We as a society need to allow individuals to be themselves and accept people for who they are.

**Mary:** Before desegregation there was not a need for as much acceptance because there was not as much diversity. Teachers were from the same communities as their students and had similar life experiences. It all boils down to love. Acceptance, diversity, respect, is inclusive of love. If you learn to love people as individuals then these attributes are apparent in your dealings with others. Ultimately, when an individual surrenders to love, diversity, respect, and inclusion they are enlightened because they are given the opportunity to discover that someone has experiences different than their own. The oppressed need an examined faith to understand their troubled waters and the barriers that meet them on the bridge. Examined faith helps focus your spirit on the obstacles ahead.

**Marketa:** Spirituality can provide liberation for the oppressed. It also can help the oppressed question their own blind faith and begin to develop strategies to overcome their oppression. Educators who have met oppression on their bridge need to be more transparent and develop relationships with students. It would be powerful for educators to testify about how they have navigated their journey and continued forward on the bridge. Testimonies continue to be a powerful

method of spirituality that can liberate. Listen to this quote that rings true to my spirit: “Witnessing and testimony both carry religious values and practices into the public square and identify and pass on values that help form others as religious persons, who also reproduce the values through their influence on the perspectives and work of those following in the tradition” (Ross, 2003, p.235). Testimonies and storytelling can help others navigate troubled waters and find their access to the bridge.

**Mary:** Do you see any other implications for schooling?

**Marketa:** Yes, I have one final implication that I want to discuss. This inquiry brings light to the separate and unequal schooling that occurs today in cities all over the United States. Small towns like Queensburg Alabama continue to have public schools that are divided by both race and class. Separate and unequal still exists today in 2013. If you look at school systems today, you consistently see separate and unequal based on class. Title I funds helps with some of the disparity of resources, but it does not make education equal. I believe that all students should receive equal access to education. What does equal access mean? Providing students with the same materials, curriculum, resources, buildings, and quality of teachers is what equal access means to me. Our current system of education is failing to meet the needs of many students. I am deeply concerned with the current shift in our nation’s educational system to support charter schools. Extensive research has been done by groups such as the United Federation of Teachers (2010) and has proven that charter schools create a greater disparity in separate and unequal schooling. Charter schools do not have

the same demographics as the public schools. “On average, charter students are less poor, less disabled, and more likely to speak English than their counterparts in district public schools. Some students, particularly those of African-American descent, are attending more racially isolated schools” (United Federation of Teachers, 2010, p 9). In Georgia a charter school amendment that was passed in November 2012 which gives the governor the authority to appoint a commission that can make the decision to create charter schools and take that out of the hands of local boards of education. In metro Atlanta many local boards of education reflect the community that elected them. Many of them are predominantly African American. It is my belief that charter schools further aid in the decline for equality in schooling.

**Mary:** What about white flight and how that has create separate and unequal schools? After the forced desegregation and busing in the 1970’s, communities experienced white flight. White citizens left urban communities to move to the suburbs, so their children could attend predominantly white schools. In rural towns many private schools opened, so that whites would not have to attend integrated public schools. This quote speaks to that issue:

White flight, may be attributed to a number of factors quite separate from busing, such as urban crime and overcrowding...whites running from the Blacks in inner cities, have hidden in the suburbs behind an impressive array of economic, social, and legal barriers. ..racial isolation in housing has both created single-raced schools and insulated these schools from court challenges. Eventually, school boards were able to explain away

single-race schools as the result of natural separation rather than official discrimination, and through such arguments were able to avoid desegregation decrees. (Bell, 2004, p. 110-111)

Separate and unequal schools still exists today in 2013. Just open up your eyes to reality.



## EPILOUGE

### HOW I GOT OVER: STARTING A NEW JOURNEY

*How I got over*  
*How I got over*  
*My Soul looks back and wonders*  
*How I got over*

Once you access the bridge, you realize that the new journey has begun. The barriers continue to block your progress as you start on your journey. Hope provides you with the diligence and tenacity to continue the journey. You realize that each step through troubled waters has prepared you to begin a new hopeful journey on the bridge. Looking at the current education system today reveals an ugly reality that schools today are separate and unequal. Schools before the 1954 Brown decision look very similar to schools right now in 2013. Desegregation shined a light on the inequality in education for a brief time, but yet again, we find schools still separate and unequal. As an educator I am concerned that the achievement gap continues to get larger. The contributing factors to the gaping disparity in achievement include race, class, and gender.

More than material resources alone, a combination of factors was heavily correlated with academic achievement...The composition of a school (who attends it), the students' sense of control of the environments and their futures, the teachers' verbal skills, and their students' family background all contribute to student achievement. Unfortunately, it was the last factor—family background—that became the primary point of interest for many school and social policies.

(Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 3)

We consistently allow a students' family background to determine the quality of their education. This is a travesty and injustice. Factors such as charter schools, requiring students to pay for high school exit examinations, and parental ability to financially support the school are significant factors that aid the ever increasing achievement gap between the dominant in society and poor minority students. How do we use past desegregation stories to provide vision for the path of schooling today?

The desegregation of schools has provided a place for people of various races to develop relationships and respect diversity.

It [desegregation] improved educational opportunities for students of color, particularly for black students in the South. It also created a generation of people for whom diversity was the norm. The movement did not fail. Rather, government failed to actively support desegregation and, during the Nixon and two Bush administrations, worked against it. (Eaton & Rivkin, 2011).

Why do specific politicians and media sources become a barrier to educational equality? What do they have to gain by making desegregation a myth of the past? Society continues to allow the government and media to create the illusion that politicians have some “new” plan to make education better. When these plans are studied with a closer lens, they help to create further division between poor minorities and the dominant in society.

As key participants in an increasingly interracial society, reporters, writers, and editors need to consider their role carefully. Effective public discussion of school resegregation requires full information about the positive as well as the negative perspectives on civil rights policies. Politicians at all levels often yield to

temptations to exploit racial fears. As the courts retreat and research is limited, choices are being made. The local press tends to accept uncritically whatever the local school bureaucracy says without any of its normal skepticism about improbable claims. (Orfield, 1996, p, 353).

Political legislation such as: A Nation at Risk, No Child Left Behind, and Race to the Top continue to camouflage the larger issue of separate and unequal schooling that causes the achievement gap to get wider and oppression to continue. This oppression not only includes race but also class. “National data shows that most segregated African American and Latino Schools are dominated by poor children but that 96 percent of white schools have middle-class majorities” (Orfield, 1996, p. 53). We have to figure how to close the achievement gap and gain equity in education for all students. Race and class should not determine what type of education you receive.

Studies have shown that it is not the race of the students that is significant, but rather the improved all-around environment of schools with better teachers, fewer classroom disruptions, pupils who are more engaged academically, parents who are more involved, and so on. The poorer students benefit from the more affluent environment. It’s a much more effective way of closing the achievement gap.

(Herbert, 2011, A27)

The troubled waters of separate and unequal education continue to flow.

How do we get our poor minority student’s the benefit of a more affluent environment? What have we gleaned from desegregation stories/testimonies of the past? Hope with action is still a viable strategy to help stomp out separate and unequal schooling .We need to seek out injustice and put a stop to it. Martin Luther King, Jr.

(2004) boldly states, “Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed...justice too long delayed is justice denied” (p.176). It is time we learn from history so that we won’t be doomed to repeat it. We have a duty as educators to teach freedom (Ayers, 2004). How do we gain equity in education? How do we make sure that equal education is a reality for all? How do we make sure all students can gain access to the bridge? Eaton (1992) states, “I am more optimistic about the effects of schooling upon poor (minority) children. We are, I believe, in the beginning stages of a new dialogue. What may emerge is a movement that will discuss the relationships between schooling, learning, school finance, poverty, (race) and educational opportunity” (Eaton, 1992, 239). I believe that we need to spark a movement and speak for those marginalized groups that continue to receive inequity in education. Each individual educator has to take responsibility, know themselves, and teach all students (Nieto, 2003).

As an African American female assistant principal, I realize that my own spirituality has been essential to my success as an educator. There are times that students and teachers who understand and know what my beliefs are request that I tap into that part of who I am. I had a teacher to come into my office and tell me that she was going to kill herself and she needed me to pray for her. I called upon two other Black women who I know share the same beliefs and we covered our wounded sister in prayer. Through this experience I believe that we helped her change her mind that day and choose life. My spiritual relationship with God has allowed me to be a bridge for those who need and value spirituality at my job. I have had students, teachers, and parents speak to me about how I have navigated troubled waters and approached my own bridge. Through my own

journey I realize that as I continue to access my bridge as I clear the path for generations of Black Women who are to come.

I have learned many different lessons through traveling through troubled waters. I gained my access to the bridge through examined faith in God. The question is asked, “How did I get over?” I believe that in life’s journey, no one makes to the other side. Your journey always continues, and God will meet you at each and every barrier in your way. The fight for equal education is a journey. I believe that examined faith will aid in the struggle toward equal access to education for all. The foundation of a new movement for equal education starts with an examined faith. We as individuals have to decide if we are willing to begin a new journey through troubled waters for those who are marginalized and cannot navigate troubled waters themselves. The barriers are gigantic and numerous, the waters are rough, the bridge is narrow, but God aids you along this new journey towards justice. You are different this time because you understand where the barriers exist. You have a new awareness and maturity as an individual. After enduring your own rigorous journey... Are you willing to travel troubled waters so that all children have access to the bridge? Get ready for a new journey to begin.

*How I Got Over*

The bells of Justice and Equality rarely ring for me.

I always have to fight and find a way to survive and be the best I can be.

I do know

One thing

The voice of those who care about me

Helps me to understand and know

those years ago

going to a different school.

Where people treat me as if I should be

a

second

class

citizen

and receive the least of what is offered.

How I Got Over ???????????

Only God knows that

I

Had to prove myself to myself and others?

Ultimately, what does it matter IS

I overachieved and I succeed,

but it's not enough

still 40 years later

I realize that

I just got.....

GOT BETTER

GOT SMARTER

GOT STRONGER

GOT MORE FAITHFUL

GOT JESUS

THAT'S HOW I GOT OVER!

~ Marketa Bullard

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