

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Standing Up & Sitting In

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I was at Woolworth's that day. I remember it being a very cold day. There was a little bit of snow on the ground. We typically did not get much snow in the Carolinas, and what we did get did not last long. However, it was windy and cold, so it looked like this would stay for at least today. I would soon discover it was cold in more ways than one.

Mom was sending me to the store to pick up some school supplies. I had run out of lined paper and pencils, and Woolworth's always had the best prices. Since I was now 12, she felt I was old enough to walk the two blocks to Main Street. I was very excited! Mom had even given me a little extra money to buy a hot chocolate from the lunch counter. Of course, she made me promise to come straight home after I enjoyed it. She told me I would not be allowed to enjoy this freedom again for a very long time if I did not obey.



So I bundled up in my parka and pulled on my boots and gloves. I double-checked that the money was securely in the deep pocket of my coat and headed out.

"Bye, Mom!"

"Bye, dear. Be careful and hurry back!"

Even though my boots were heavy, I nearly skipped the entire way to the store. This was great!

I entered the store and headed to the school supplies. I found the paper right away, but was having trouble finding the pencils. Then I heard someone say, "Can I help you find something?"

I looked up and gulped. It was a young black man, who I guessed to be about 18. He was dressed in a coat and tie and had a bright smile. I got nervous, though. My mom had always told me not to talk to strangers, especially black people. I could never understand why that made a difference.

"Uhh, I can't find the pencils," I stammered.

"Oh, they are around the corner in the next aisle," he responded kindly.

"Uhh, okay. Thanks," I quickly answered then quickly trotted off.

I soon forgot about my nervousness as I got caught up looking at a few toys. Before long, though, I remembered about the hot chocolate.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

As I walked toward the lunch counter, I noticed the black man and his friends paying for their supplies. Then they headed to the lunch counter, too. I stopped for a moment and watched them get seated. I decided to sit at the other end.

"What would you like?" the waiter asked.

"I'd like a hot chocolate, please. But I can wait. They were here first," I answered, pointing at the black man and his friends.

"Don't worry about them," the waiter answered. "They'll be waiting a long time."

"Why?" I asked.

"Kid, just don't worry about it. Do you want the hot chocolate or not?"

"Okay," I answered, and looked apologetically to the black man. He just smiled at me.

As I enjoyed my hot chocolate, I watched a number of other people come to the counter and get served. The waiter kept ignoring the black men. Then I realized something. These customers were all white. The waiter was prejudiced! I had heard things here and there about the civil rights movement, but I never knew what it was about. Now I realized these black men were trying to be served lunch and were being ignored!

It took all the nerve I had, but I called the waiter over again.

"Would you like some more?" he asked.

"Yes, a refill please."

"Coming right up." The waiter soon brought a new mug with fresh hot cocoa.

He had started to turn away when I took a deep breath and asked, "Why haven't you served those folks?"

He grimaced at me. "Kid, I told you not to worry about it. We don't serve those kinds at the lunch counter."

"But you'll take their money for supplies?"

"That's different," he answered.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

"No, sir, I don't think so. It's not different. It's discrimination."

The waiter and several customers, including the black men, looked at me in shock. I went on.

"I suppose you think that's an awfully big word for a twelve year old. Well, guess what. I know exactly what it means, and I think it stinks. In fact, I plan to boycott this store until you can understand what it means to treat people with justice."

And with that, I walked over to the black man, gave him my hot chocolate and said, "Thanks for your help. God bless you."

I stormed out of the store with my head held high. I could tell everyone was staring at me. I didn't care. I hoped those guys stayed in their seats until the store closed if that's what it took.

I got home and didn't talk about the incident. Later, at dinner, my dad said, "Hear what happened at Woolworth's today?"

"What?" I answered, stammering a little.

"Some black men wanted to eat lunch at the counter. They sat for several hours in quiet protest waiting to be served. I think they stayed until the store closed." He chuckled. "They should've realized they wouldn't get lunch there! Hon, please pass the potatoes."

I smiled and thought to myself, "It has to start somewhere. Way to go, guys."

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## Questions

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1. What store was the child going to and why?

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2. What special treat did the child bring money for?

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**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

3. What happened at the lunch counter?

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4. Who did the child give his or her hot chocolate to?

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5. What did the child say to the waiter?

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6. This story is based on true events that happened February 1, 1960. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 declared segregation at lunch counters unlawful. How old was the child then?

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