

Fanny Jones Recounts Memories Before And Following Integration

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When local schools were racially integrated 50 years ago, students weren't the only ones undergoing change.

After almost a decade teaching at the all-black George Clem School, Fanny M. Jones made the transition to Greenville Junior High School, now called Greenville Middle School, in 1964.

She retired in 1984 after 43 years as an educator.

Earlier this week, in an interview with *The Greenville Sun*, she reflected on her career.

"I taught in Kentucky at a segregated school, then, when I came here, it was the same thing," said Jones, who will turn 97 later this month. "A few years after I got here, they integrated."

In Jones' assessment, integration in Greenville went smoothly.

"I think Greenville did it pretty good. I do," she said. "When you think of some other cities that you would read

about, I think Greenville had it pretty good."

She remembered only a few racially-motivated incidents at the integrated junior high school.

"I remember a few little things that happened over at the middle school. I was the only black teacher over there," she said.



FANNY JONES

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"The principal would always call me in and let me know if there was a problem between the two races. I would always be glad to talk with the students. A time or two, students threatened others. Those things didn't really happen, but they would frighten kids," Jones said.

Even though she was the only black teacher at the school at the time, Jones said she always felt respected by her colleagues.

"I have teachers that I taught with there that I still hear from," she said. "I really appreciate having friendships. I was always a person who wanted to do unto others as I would have them do unto me."

She added that she also felt respected by students of both races.

"I really enjoyed teaching over there," she said. "I don't remember any outstanding things that happened to me that didn't happen to other (white) teachers."

There were many differences between the white, black and integrated schools though, she said.

Jones recalled that the earlier, all-black schools had more family involvement.

"They were just like a big family. Any time there was a problem we needed to talk to the parents about, they were always willing to listen and do what they could to correct the problem," she said. "It was very much different from when I retired at the middle school."

Learning materials for black students weren't always comparable to their white peers.

"I was sent over there (to a white-only school) for meetings about textbooks. They would say, 'We're going to use such-and-such textbook for such-and-such class,'" she recalled. "We sometimes got the leftover textbooks from the year before. We didn't always get the new set of books when they changed from one book to the other."

In her Home Economics class at George Clem School, ingredients for different dishes couldn't be provided by the school, so each student was tasked with bringing a component.

"If someone didn't come that day, we couldn't do it," she said. "When I went to the middle school, the materials were bought (by the school). That was different, too."

Prior to integration, some of her students struggled to understand why schools were divided by race, Jones said.

"At times, we had students ask questions like that. Some of them really let me know that they felt they were different. You had a few that were the type of person that wanted to know and wouldn't mind asking," she said. "Then, you had many of them who would not have. They just didn't stir up anything about it."

Jones said her advice to students then was the same as it is now: "If you are a Christian, and you believe in doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, you will get along a whole lot better."