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White Students on Race: Parents' Views Differ

Despite growing up in a racist home, my views on people of color have changed. In some ways I am like my parents. In some ways they have changed. But I also want to be different from the way they were.

I'm Jenna Nicholson for Voices of Race and Change.

I grew up in an area of Miami, Florida that was segregated or all white, and I learned from my parents and others that people of color could not be trusted. They are people who are on the lowest level of the economic chain.

Those ideas never totally leave your head – especially when you encounter situations where people of color also exhibit prejudice as well towards whites. I've been in that situation in the workplace.

Robert Gossett is an attorney in Hollywood, Florida. His parents had similar views to my parents on race. His oral history interview is in the Race and Change Oral Histories archives in the Special Collects at the African American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

[Looking back on it, there really wasn't much distinction from my mother's family attitude from the north, and my father's family attitude from the south. They seem to have the same racial attitude there was a separation. Black people were different.]

Sean Thompson, who was in Mrs. Kathy's preschool class with me at Spanish River Christian School in Boca Raton, Florida, was the sweetest kid I ever met. That's when I began to realize that what my parents said wasn't true.

When Sean and I were in fourth grade, the class went to the Kennedy Space Center in Orlando, Florida for the entire weekend. It was the first time that I ever spend with an African American outside of school. I remember our first night there. We missed the dinner call, so Sean, a couple other friends from my class, and myself went to the vending machine to get something to eat. My mother got freaked out and made me come back inside the dorm room. To this day I do not know why my mother got so scared of me eating junk food with friends, unless it was because that friend was Sean.

In middle school I met the nicest person of color who, after we were in class together for a year, helped change my mother's notion about Black people, and he has remained one of my closest friends to this day. However, I have seen that my parent's views are very different than mine, and we don't have to be the same.

Now that I am older, I know that there are certain things that I will continue to live by that my parents were raised with, such as, my love for God, showing kindness to animals, and getting a great education. Everything that was instilled in me, I will pass this onto my children and hopefully they will be able to continue the tradition. The one thing that I will know I will not instill in my children is my parents' prejudice.

Voices of Race and Change: The Younger Generation is produced by students in Dr. Kitty Oliver's Multimedia Practicum at Florida Atlantic University for the Race and Change Initiative multimedia project. Until next time, this is Jenna Nicholson.