

First Earthquake and Peggy

Fall 1956

I adjusted easily to Kindergarten at Garfield Elementary School on 19th Avenue after the initial shock of being separated from my mother. Kindergarten turned out to be fun. I liked my teacher and my best friend was a little freckle-face red-hair girl name Peggy. We learned the alphabet, played hide-and-go-seek at recess, and shared secrets with Peggy.

One day during a dreary autumn day, we were sitting at our desks which were long tables with cubby holes where we kept our pencils and papers. We were listening to a story and suddenly I felt the tables vibrating and then it started rumbling.

“Everyone, listen to me, get under the long tables.” the teacher said.

We scurried out of our seats and crawled under the tables. I remember Peggy and I were huddled together giggling. We thought it was some kind of game. There was another rumble and the tables shook again.

“Children stay quiet. It’s an earthquake.”

I remember Peggy’s eyes grew bigger as she looked in wonder, her thoughts echoing mine. What is an earthquake? We were no longer giggling. Our laughter had turned into fear of the unknown.

I don’t remember much more about that day, but I will never forget that look on Peggy’s face and our introduction to California earthquakes.

I don’t know if I knew much about color in terms of race, but I have come to realize that the friendship I had with Peggy at the age while not rare was not usually the norm.

I remember distinctly visiting Peggy’s house. They lived a few blocks from us closer to Roosevelt Jr. High School. I remember my father driving me with my mother and I assume my younger brother and sister were with us because my mother did not yet have a California driver’s license. I remember My mother and I going into Peggy’s house. My family left and came back and picked me up. Another time, I remember Peggy’s mother driving her over to my house and leaving her and then coming back. Her mother had a long brown pony tail and she wore slacks. I remember our mothers talking and smiling with each other.

When I look back at our Kindergarten picture from 1956 and the array of diversity in our class, I realized years later it would not have been like that had my family remained in Little Rock, Arkansas.