



How I Shed My Skin: Unlearning the Racist Lessons of a Southern Childhood

Jim Grimsley

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More than sixty years ago, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that America's schools could no longer be segregated by race. Critically acclaimed novelist Jim Grimsley was eleven years old in 1966 when federally mandated integration of schools went into effect in the state and the school in his small eastern North Carolina town was first integrated. Until then, blacks and whites didn't sit next to one another in a public space or eat in the same restaurants, and they certainly didn't go to school together.

Going to one of the private schools that almost immediately sprang up was not an option for Jim: his family was too poor to pay tuition, and while they shared the community's dismay over the mixing of the races, they had no choice but to be on the front lines of his school's desegregation.

What he did not realize until he began to meet these new students was just how deeply ingrained his own prejudices were and how those prejudices had developed in him despite the fact that prior to starting sixth grade, he had actually never known any black people.

Now, more than forty years later, Grimsley looks back at that school and those times--remembering his own first real encounters with black children and their culture. The result is a narrative both true and deeply moving. Jim takes readers into those classrooms and onto the playing fields as, ever so tentatively, alliances were forged and friendships established. And looking back from today's perspective, he examines how far we have really come.

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