

3, Jean Clémenceau Street
Clearwater, Florida, USA.

Tuesday November 22nd 1998

My dearest Jean,

How are you ? Following your request in your last letter, I will tell you about my childhood and my youth but also about the evolution of the American society concerning us African-Americans.

Everything started well before my birth. At the time, blacks were badly treated. They were the slaves of whites. They were made to obey them. They had to obey their rules, work in plantations... We did not have any rights.

85 years before my birth, slavery was abolished by a prominent man who was assassinated shortly after, Abraham Lincoln. But he was not the only one who had promoted the cause of blacks. I vaguely remember a famous woman called Rosa Parks who was arrested for not giving up her seat to a white person in a Montgomery bus in 1955. You need to know that black people had to sit at the back of buses while the whites sat in the front. After her arrest, a reverend called Martin Luther King became the leader of the Montgomery bus boycott. My mother explained to me that the boycott had been an action led by colored people as they wanted to be equal with whites. She also told me that they had gone further to obtain it. Thanks to their actions, buses were desegregated in 1956.

When I was at school I had one friend, a very good friend who was my neighbor. Her name was Ruby Bridges. When I was in my 4th year of Elementary School, she was the first little black girl to integrate an all-white school. She was escorted by 4 marshals although school segregation had been outlawed there a long time ago. Ruby was the first but there were plenty of others.

When I became a student, I studied Martin Luther King's famous speech, "I have a dream" which told that he had had a dream. That men are equal. Our reality was that we, black people were prohibited to drink from white people's fountains, to go to their restaurants, go to their cinemas... We could not use the same toilets as whites. White people told us to stay in the colored section! But this has changed since The Civil Rights Act was voted against discrimination in 1964: it gave us the right to vote. Now we have the right to drink in the same fountains, go to the same restaurants, cinemas, toilets...

That's how I spent my childhood. I met with a lot of discrimination. Now African-Americans are equal with whites. The USA is a country where plenty of changes have taken place when it comes to black people's place in society.

Barack Obama was elected for two presidential terms although he was black! You have to keep in mind that a lot of blacks and even whites fought against discrimination and that many activists even gave their lives for the cause.

Lots of Love

Michel