



The Hillsboro Story – Excerpts

History and Memory

*Every morning I awaken torn between the desire
to save the world and the inclination to savor it.*
--E.B. White

On a hot summer night, July 5, 1954, Lincoln School, the colored elementary school in Hillsboro, Ohio, went up in flames; and my sweet, sleepy, segregated little hometown was suddenly awake. A white man named Philip Partridge was the Highland County Engineer at the time. He had gone to the Hillsboro Board of Education about Lincoln School after the Supreme Court passed *Brown v. Board of Education* in May, 1954, which legally ended school segregation. As the county engineer saw it, the board needed to make a move now. Lincoln was structurally unsafe, playground equipment was dated, and kids were using hand me down outdated textbooks and carrying firewood to school for heat. The board noted the concerns of the county engineer, lit their Lucky Strikes and blew off *Brown*. They would get around to integrating later. So Philip Partridge made a counter move that would force the issue, shock the town, and get quietly and quickly tossed into the dump heap of history for the next fifty years, reduced to a one-liner. "Philip Partridge was crazy."

It is 1955 and I am in Mrs. Mallory's class. She is reading us *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White. It's my favorite thing in the 3rd grade. Charlotte, a smart spider, saves her best friend, Wilbur the pig by weaving the words into her web above Wilbur's pen. *Some Pig, Humble, Radiant, Terrific*. "But Charlotte," said Wilbur, "I'm not terrific." "That doesn't make a particle of difference," replied Charlotte. "Not a particle. People believe almost anything they see in print. Does anybody here know how to spell 'terrific'?"

Negro women in shirtwaist dresses and their kids walk back and forth outside the classroom window, carrying signs. Then they disappear. Then come back the next day. Back and forth on Walnut Street.. Everyday, outside the window, all year.

Our Children Play Together, Why Can't They Learn Together?

One of the marching mothers carried this sign, a message and a distress signal. I was only eight years old with no defenses, so I picked the signal up, and it hummed away quietly somewhere inside me. Then it was back. The memory came calling; and fifty years after I saw the marching mothers outside the window, I went back to my hometown to find them.