Alabama Essay, Research Paper

It must have been around eleven o’clock in the morning when I awoke from a stuffy and uncomfortable sleep, in the back of a moving mini-van. My mouth was dry, my nose was sore, and my eyes itched from sleep crust. A huge yawn escaped from my mouth as I tried to stretch my aching limbs. As I was stretching out, I accidentally kicked my little brother Sam in the head. So much for peaceful sleep, he woke up in a foul mood. He must have thought that I kicked him on purpose because he punched me as hard as he could in my leg.I got really mad at him I yelled ” Why did you do that, I kicked you by accident?” I punched him in his chest. Now he was really mad, his screaming and his curses were pretty incoherent. He said something like ” Punk why did you hit me?” I said ” You hit me first, call me another punk and I’ll hit you again!” We probably sounded like two babbling drunks because we were half sleep and using slurred speech. I was about to belt him one more for getting in my face but that was before he yelled “Auntie, Ron hit me!” I said in a whinny little voice ” He started it auntie, I didn’t do nothing!” “Knock it off you two, can’t you see that I am trying to drive?” “Keep quiet before you wake up your grandmother and your sisters”, said Aunt Florence as she gripped the wheel with one hand and turned to give us that cold ” don’t mess with me today stare”. That kept us quiet, we did not utter another word after that.As for not waking everybody else up, it was too late for that. Brenda, who is the youngest, awoke first. She was being pretty quiet but the silence would not last. She wanted to stop and use the bathroom but instead of waiting for auntie to find a rest stop she thought it would be better to nag everyone’s ears off. Her nagging and whining woke Remy up; she is the oldest girl. The first thing that came out of her mouth was ” I’m hungry let’s stop at McDonalds” She was not too happy when Aunt Florence told her to look for a ham sandwich in the cooler because we weren’t stopping until we got to Alabama. It was quiet again for a few minutes. Then Remy decided to wake up grandma to see if she could get her to convince auntie to stop at “McDonalds”. That was not really the best idea because grandma was not in a good mood either she had been driving most of the night and had gotten only a couple hours of sleep.Everyone was feeling the effects of being on the road. As a matter of fact everyone was getting pretty sick of each other. Lately all we did was argue. It was a pretty tough year for the family and this trip was supposed to be that needed escape from all the stress brought on by everyday life in the city. This trip was also sort of a business thing too. My grandfather’s brother had recently died and left him some land out in the country. We were going to finalize all of the legal business that was involved with the deed and the will. The plan was to build a cabin on the land and use it for a family vacation spot. I sat in the back seat and imagined how red dirt roads, green grass, and trees, big trees, would look from the view in the new family cabin. I wanted to swim in a real creek instead of the city pool. I wanted to relax in the shade with a huge cup of cold lemonade. I wanted to play in the hot sun and see the stars light up the sky at night. In Detroit it is hard to see stars because the big houses and the massive buildings and skyscrapers blocked the sky. I wanted a change of pace and scenery. I wanted to be free of cares and worries. I wanted to be happy. It seemed as thought I had forgotten how that felt. I was looking forward to spending the rest of my summer in a country paradise. When I saw that huge sign which read “Welcome to Alabama” I was more excited than could be imagined.Everything was as I had imagined it. Alabama was so beautiful. It was as if a huge weight had been lifted off of my shoulders because I began to instantly relax. I could see that everyone else was happy too. It was a little strange because the dirt roads were really red. I thought that that was some kind of tall tale. People wore straw hats, overalls, and jeans with big, shiny belt buckles. It was different from the hustle and bustle of Detroit. Everyone seemed very laid back. Everything seemed to move at a snails pace, which was fine for me. I thought that nothing would be able to spoil my mood. It seemed that finally I would get something that I wanted. Too bad that wasn’t the case. Actually this was the worst summer vacation that I have ever had.Utah, Alabama is a small place. You probably won’t be able to find it on most maps. That’s probably a good thing because you probably wouldn’t want to go there, especially if you were black. To most of the whites in Utah being black was like being cursed with an incurable disease. That was a concept that I could not grasp at the time, being black never felt like a bad thing to me. I am from a predominantly black city where blacks did not have to endure strange, hateful stares and racial slurs like spook and nigger. At least that was how I remembered it back then. If it weren’t for television I probably wouldn’t have known that there were white people around. The mayor, the police chief, most of the city counsel, my principal, and all of my teachers were black. Everyone in my neighbor hood was black and a white face was rarely ever seen.I was sheltered to a certain extent because I thought hatred, ignorance, and racism was a thing of the past. In school we learned about Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. but I was lead to believe that I would never be called a nigger or be refused service in a restaurant. I was not even fully aware that I was a minority. I had heard the word a couple of times but I was not sure of its meaning. I would soon know the feeling of being out numbered and for a brief moment in my life I would feel like a nigger.My grandfather was against the idea of taking a trip to Alabama. He had discussed this with Grandma Mattie and Aunt Florence numerous times in private. We did not find out about the trip until one Sunday at family dinner. That is where we discussed the week’s events and other family stuff. Aunt Florence saw this as the perfect opportunity to ask grandpa about the land and rally for our support. She brought the subject up sort of casually. She said “Daddy what are you going to do with all of that land uncle John left you down in Alabama?”Poppa was really irritated by her question. It was evident by the look on his face. He answered her in an angry, booming voice. I had never heard anyone talk to auntie like that before.He said ” What did I tell you about that land in Alabama? I told you to sell it for me didn’t I? Why are you trying to make me look like the bad guy for not letting you go? Whites don’t want us down in Alabama and you know it! Go down there if you want! I ain’t stoppin you, but I ain’t comin wit ya either. Cause the next honkey dat calls me a nigga will regret it! I can’t believe that I am getting disrespected in my own house!”He got up from the table and left the house. I have never seen him so mad. He didn’t come back for a couple of hours and he didn’t speak to us again until we came back from the trip. I wish that he would have. I wish he had explained to me exactly why he was so mad. After that incident I wondered what a honkey was but no one would tell me.Grandpa always said that he left Alabama because he heard that Chrysler was hiring and because there was a chance for a new beginning in Detroit. He insisted that he loved it down south. It wasn’t until later that he would tell me the real reason why he left Alabama. A man named Floyd Walton originally owned the land he inherited. He allowed our family to sharecrop on the land after the civil war. Our family roots traced back to Alabama. My ancestors were his slaves. That’s where we got the last name Walton. My grandfather was given the name Floyd just like the master. Grandpa told me horror stories of mob violence and public humiliations. He even described in graphic detail a gruesome lynching. These are things that he personally witnessed while living in Alabama. He said that he was constantly scared for his life. He said that he had never felt like less of a man. This is the real reason why he left and he vowed never to go back. Aunt Florence and grandma knew all of this but they wanted to go anyway. I think that they may have been in denial about the racial situation in the south. Whatever it was, nothing was going to change their minds they were just as stubborn as grandpa. Besides that all of us kids wanted to go too. Papa was outnumbered and he knew it. It was final we packed the mini-van up and headed for Alabama without another thought. At the time I felt that grandpa was being unreasonable. If I had known how serious this race issue really was I probably would have stayed home. Anyway it was too late for all of that now. We had just crossed the state boarder and we had to stop somewhere. We had to stop and let Brenda relieve her. Remy would not stop whining about stopping at McDonalds. I wanted to stretch my legs and I had to go to the bathroom too. It was about ninety degrees in the shade that day. My mouth was as dry as one of my teacher’s history lectures. I wanted ice-cold lemonade. Grandma and Sam wanted to stop and eat too. Everybody was too impatient to look for a Mc Donalds so we stopped at the first place we saw. This place wasn’t worthy of the title restaurant. It was shabby and it was barely sanitary from where I was standing. It sat on a dirt lot right off of the highway. I really didn’t care because I was glad to finally get out of that stuffy mini-van. The place was packed it seemed to be a popular spot. I could smell T-bone steak and barbecue ribs it smelled so good that it made my mouth water, I was ready to eat. I was really in a good mood now.As we piled out of the van I could notice that people were staring at us funny. I felt as though their gazes would burn a hole through my chest. There were two guys who were talking about us. I was trying not to pay too much attention to them but I heard one of the men say”Damn where did them niggers come from cause they sure ain’t from round here”Those feelings of excitement and anticipation quickly wore off. We kept on walking toward the diner anyway. I felt that this was probably the longest walk that I had ever taken through a parking lot. We stayed close to each other and walked at a slow, unsure pace. The dust seemed to settle in the air with every step we took. It was at that moment that I had begun to feel like a “minority”. The only black faces in that parking lot were our own. We were defiantly outnumbered and I could tell that these people did not want us around. I felt as if I was alone in a world filled with people who hated me just because of the color of my skin. Reality set in like the impact of a speeding car against a brick wall. Everything that grandpa had said was true! We had not been in Alabama for any more than twenty minutes and we had already been called niggers. I was shocked at the nerve of these people. What ever happened to southern hospitality? I could not believe what I was hearing. A little boy who must not have been any older than twelve kept repeating over and over “Go away niggers!” “Go away niggers!” I felt like I was in the “Twilight Zone” This couldn’t really be happening to me! We finally got to the door. It was too late to turn back now. We were at the point of no return. I mean how would we have looked if we had turned around and ran for the mini-van and pulled off? When we stepped through the door it was like walking into a country western movie. We were the bad guys who did not belong in the saloon. In the movie the bad guy always wore black. In This situation we were covered in natural blackness. I like to call it my permanent tan. Just like in the movie the bad guys walk through the door and everyone stops what they are doing just to look at them. I swear that every person in that diner stopped what he or she was doing to look at us. Even the cook and a few dishwashers came from the back of the restaurant to see what was going on. I can remember that my hunger had suddenly disappeared. I was getting a stomachache and I was ready to vomit.Any way we decided to take a seat and get some food. We sat in a booth next to a family of four. As soon as we took a seat these people got up from their seats in disgust and left their food at the table. We must have sat there in that booth for about twenty five to thirty minutes before a waitress would even approach our table. While we were waiting for service I could hear people whispering and talking about us. The waitress who came over to our table was very rude to us. She was fat and ugly just like a pig. She felt that we were not good enough for, “Hello what can I get for you, sorry for that long wait”. Instead the lady said to us in the rudest way possible, ” You niggers got to go, we don’t serve niggers here.” She snorted when she talked just like a pig. I was still in shock. I wondered how someone that ugly could talk negatively to anyone. I just wanted to leave and find a place to cry or something. I probably have never felt as low as I did sitting there in the middle of that diner. Aunt Florence wasn’t about to put up with any more of the disrespect. She flew off the handle and she was steaming mad. She said to the woman “We have been sitting here for thirty minutes while you passed us up to serve people who came in after us. Where is the manager I want to see the fucking manager.”A guy, who was sitting at a table from across the room said, “Bob don’t want to talk to no nigger”Auntie told the man to shove it. I never heard her curse before I could not believe what was going on. She got up from the booth and got in the waitress’s face. Grandma was saying to her that she thought that we should go. Auntie was too mad to listen to reason. She was a stubborn as a mule and she was not going to budge until we got service. Bob the manager threatened to call the police on us. He was a fat little bald headed man with bad teeth. His face was red and he seemed quite pissed to see us still there. He said,” I thought Mary already asked you niggers to go, we don’t want you hear.”" You can’t tell anyone to leave. All you can do is take my fucking order! Then she turned to me and said, “Ron you said that you wanted a steak right?”I was like ” Uh, I don’t know, can’t we just leave, they don’t want us here?” I was scared that we were going to get arrested.Everyone else wanted to leave except for Sam. He was rooting auntie on he was like, ” Yeah auntie you tell him, we ain’t nobodys nigger. I was the big brother but that day he was defiantly more brave than I was. After about twenty more minutes of arguing back and forth we gave up and left the diner. We piled back in the mini-van and drove off. We decided to find a hotel and drive back to Detroit in the morning. We ended up selling the land to someone instead of keeping it. It took me a long time to get over the emotional trauma of this incident. Sometimes I still think back on it just to remind myself that racism still exists in America.

316