

# Front of the Bus

By Danielle Feffer, Home School, Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania

*When Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in the front of the bus to a white person on Dec. 1, 1955, shock waves spread across the South, where many states practiced **segregation**, the separation of blacks and whites in public places. Danielle interviewed her grandfather, Roland Crevecoeur, about the day he refused to sit in the back of a bus.*

**Q:** What brought you to the United States in 1956?

**A:** I came here to attend Fisk University (Nashville, Tennessee). I was a lawyer and mathematician in Haiti.

**Q:** What was the first thing you noticed?

**A:** The bathrooms and water fountains had signs on them **indicating**<sup>1</sup> whether a white person or a black person could use them. This was really strange, because this did not exist in my country.

**Q:** Did you feel any racial **discrimination**<sup>2</sup> while attending Fisk?

**A:** Not at all. My teachers were all whites, but there were also two black instructors teaching at the school. Whites from Pennsylvania, Boston, New York, and elsewhere sat next to blacks. We even ate lunch together in the cafeteria. Outside the campus, we did not.

**Q:** What were some of the places that were segregated?

**A:** The bathrooms in the big department stores were segregated. Other areas, such as movie theaters and small shops, had large "White Only" signs posted on their doors.

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<sup>1</sup> **indicate:** to point out, to state briefly

<sup>2</sup> **discrimination:** treating some people better than others without any fair or proper reason

## Reading Passage

**Q:** Was there any time that you did **venture**<sup>3</sup> downtown?

**A:** Once, my friend and I went downtown to buy a television set. I knew that blacks had to sit in the back of the bus. As I made my way to the back of the bus, I saw my friend sitting up front. He told me in French that he was going to sit wherever he wanted. I sat next to him.

The bus driver told us to go to the back, but my friend, Michael, refused. The white people on the bus started to complain. The bus driver told them there was nothing he could do. The whites, however, didn't like it one bit. They flagged down a passing police car. The bus driver stopped the bus, and the police got on.

**Q:** What was going on in your mind at that time?

**A:** I was terrified. I didn't think I would ever see my country or my family again. I thought we were going to be hanged.

**Q:** What happened next?

**A:** The police questioned us, and Michael did most of the talking. He told them that, "we came to your country as guests to study, just as your people have been welcome in our country. You have been treated with respect, and we blacks demand the same treatment."

What happened next was beyond my wildest expectations. The police took us downtown to buy the television and then took us back to the university. The police officer told us not to make a habit of going downtown because this wasn't Haiti. He didn't have to tell me twice. I was simply happy to escape with my life.

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<sup>3</sup> **venture:** go in spite of danger