

# *ISCHUA VALLEY*

## *HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

### **MEMORIES -- A WATER FOUNTAIN**

In 1952 my father received a job offer from a company in Florida to build bridges. We were living in Buffalo at the time and I was nine years old. Dad decided that we would travel there and spend several weeks to see if this was an opportunity he wanted to pursue. It would involve selling our home, leaving friends and family behind and starting a whole new life.

So we packed the car and began the trip to Florida. We stopped in a small town in South Carolina for supper. We sat in the restaurant for almost an hour and found people glaring at us. The waitress refused to take our order and we ended up leaving and hungry. Apparently they saw the New York State license plate on our car and did not want to serve Yankees. I remember being terribly confused and upset. I was unaware of the Civil War and its aftermath.

We stayed with my cousin's family in Florida. One night, while everyone thought I was asleep, the adults were talking about life in the South. My cousin told my parents about several lynchings of Blacks in that town. Terrifying!

We took a few days to stay at a small apartment in Miami while Dad had his interviews. Mom and I went to the local supermarket to buy groceries. While she was shopping I wandered to the back of the store and found two water fountains. One was labeled White and the other was labeled Colored. How fascinating I thought, colored water. So that's the fountain I chose. What a disappointment!

I returned to my Mom and said: "They're liars! There is no colored water in that fountain." I remember the frightened look on Mom's face. She grabbed my hand and rushed out of the store without groceries. "You don't understand," she said, "things are different down here and we have to be careful." Dad turned down the job. My prayers were answered.

Last February we vacationed in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. We were welcomed in all the restaurants. No one glared or even cared that we had New York State license plates. This state was the first one to ban the Confederate Flag. The year before, when we vacationed in Treasure Island, Florida I did not find a single fountain labeled Colored. I guess we have made some progress in the last 65 years.