

## Sandi Abbo

## Transcript

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Interviewer: Kathryn Wall  
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### START OF INTERVIEW

[START 11:45]

Sandi Abbo: “I remember being in high school. I went to high school in 1970...well, ‘69 I guess, ‘cause then after the new year it was ‘70. I was in 10th grade. When I was in high school, it was 10th, 11th, 12th. We were just excluded. We weren’t wanted, we were very *clearly* told ‘you don’t belong here.’ The cat calls, the racial slurs, the ignoring by the staff...you know, just erase us. We were invisible people to them. And they were very up front letting you know that. And I can remember when we had the protests and whatnot inside the school building, and came to school the next day and armed guards with rifles were in the hallways. Looking at every Black student in the hallway. Ready to kill somebody. All we wanted to do is be real humans. We didn’t want to be the invisible people. We had a right to be there. It was not good for me, which was very instrumental in my decision: I’m getting out of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I’m leaving this place. I gotta go. I’m not gonna spend my life here. I look at Chapel Hill now and I’m so proud of Chapel Hill. I am. You know, *I’m from Chapel Hill, North Carolina!* But it was very different. I remember going to our class reunion—I want to say it was year 40. My husband

and I came up here for the reunion. I was sitting outside at a table, and this white woman is talking to this white guy and we were all sitting at a table together, and she said, ‘Don’t you remember when we used to go up on the roof at so-and-so’s house up on the top of the garage—’ I’ve never been at your house. No. We lived parallel lives. I didn’t live the life you lived in high school. We were struggling to stay alive because armed guards had guns on us—no, I don’t know a thing about you being on a roof or a garage. We’re trying to get our rights as human beings established. And we were children. We’re trying to march in the streets with the workers on campus because those were our people. Those were *our* people. Those were *our* parents and *our* big brothers and sisters and *our* uncles and aunts who were expected to work under slave conditions and little to no pay. No, I don’t remember anything about you sitting up on the roof of somebody’s garage. I wasn’t there. That wasn’t me. I was striving to be recognized as a human. And she looked at me and she said ‘What?’ We didn’t live the same life. That’s why I left here. We didn’t live the same life. We were in the same classroom, took the same exam...we still lived parallel lives. And that’s what I remember as a young child—as a teenager. As a young kid, I was just in our community, well-protected, loved, fed, you know, ‘I’mma tell your mama I saw you, you’re supposed to be back down at the house.’ But as a teenager, when I’m old enough to understand, I’m old enough to *see* the injustice. You know, I remember my mother, she was so afraid that you know, we would be...Every night you’d turn the TV on, dogs would be attacking people, water hoses—that was *real* for us. ‘Cause those girls that were getting bit by those dogs looked just like *me*. You know, they were the same age as me. So that was real for me. That wasn’t a cartoon, that wasn’t something I could flick the TV because I don’t want to see that today. These were my people. And I remember, we had the marches here in Chapel Hill to support the workers, and again, *these* were our family members, these were our *people* that were

being persecuted like this. I remember sneaking away to join a march. And how Mama realized that I was gone...oh my God, she was about to lose her mind, you know. Was I coming back? Was I going to be in jail? Was I going to be okay? You know, no parent should have to have—do that. No teenager should have to live through that. Those are my recollections of being raised in Chapel Hill, you know, at that time in my life.”