

I REMEMBER

by Virginia Nygard 2017

I remember...

needing my first pair of glasses
in first grade when blurred words
seemed to wobble like jello.

Until those wise-owl eyes
perched upon my tiny nose,
I was just another white face
in a sea of white faces,
in a school of all-white faces,
except for Miss Lily.

I remember...

she was called *Negro* then,
a *colored girl*, and worse
on the tongues of coarser men in town
and whispered so by women, too,
who wondered how she got the job.
How? We kids knew.

She was kind, but firm and fair.
She drew the best from each of us
and proved the least of us had
hidden gifts to give.
Miss Lily grew a garden of smiles
from agape seeds watered with
encouragement and compassion.

I remember...

my glasses fogged at play one day,
one cold, November recess day,
when playing tag, a near miss
made me warn the kids take care.
One took it as a dare, grabbed at my glasses,
and we watched them fall and crack.
Miss Lily heard my wail of woe,
ran to my side, knelt and held me
and calmed my fear
with quiet comfort.

I remember...
in later years it came to me
how alike we were—
Miss Lily and I—
bearing visible differences
that marked our lives.
Her skin was her cross,
my glasses were mine,
making us then the bully's target.
For me, that's not true anymore,
glasses seem to be ignored.
Not so, Miss Lily's kin—
still within her skin they're bound,
still condemned by petty men.

I remember...
the many lessons
Miss Lily never knew she taught.