

Brown ruling altered lives of plaintiffs, entire nation

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) - Linda Brown had no idea she was making history in the fall of 1950 when her father, the Rev. Oliver Brown, took her by the hand and marched her to an all-White school near her home.

Several other Black parents in Topeka also tried to enroll their children in all-White schools that fall. Their requests were denied, laying the groundwork for a legal case that would overturn segregated education nationwide 50 years ago Monday.

In the years since, Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education has been a blessing and a burden for the Brown family: A blessing because the family helped change history; a burden at times because of media attention it brought.

Linda Brown, now Linda Brown Thompson, has mostly shied away from reporters, although she has spoken at several events in recent months in anticipation of the 50th anniversary of the ruling.

She and other family members have stressed that their story is just one of many in the struggle for racial equality.

Linda grew up in a racially mixed neighborhood, where the children played with White, Hispanic and Black youngsters, said her mother, Leola Montgomery, who remarried after her husband's death.

When Linda began attend-

ing a segregated school 20 blocks away, the children were confused because the all-White school was only five blocks away.

"She was always sad every year when it was time for school that she had to go one way and her playmates the other way," Montgomery recalled. "It was just silly to think they couldn't go to school together."

Now 83, Montgomery said her late husband was reluctant at first when a former high school classmate and local civil rights attorney asked him to become a plaintiff in a desegregation case. Of 13 plaintiffs in the case, he would be the only male and was hesitant to "be in there with all those women," she said.

But the attorney, Charles Scott, persisted. "He said for the good of all children as well as your own you need to get into this," Montgomery recalled.

The lawsuit was joined with cases from Delaware, South Carolina and Virginia and became known as *Brown v. Board of Education*. A similar segregation case in Washington, D.C., was decided at the same time in a separate ruling.

Elsewhere in the country, angry Whites terrorized plaintiffs in parallel cases, making it hard for them to make a living. In Clarendon County, S.C., the home of the minister who organized the

lawsuit was burned down.

But in Topeka, the Browns experienced no backlash, "not any whatsoever," Montgomery recalled.

The plaintiffs lost at the federal court level and the case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court along with the four other school challenges.

Almost three years passed before the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the "separate but equal" doctrine had no place in public education.

Montgomery heard the news on the radio as she was ironing.

"I could hardly wait for my husband and children to

get home so I could relay the message to them," she said. "Oh boy, everyone was happy. The children were jumping."

Montgomery said Linda Brown was already headed to junior high school when the court ruled. In Topeka, the upper grades already were integrated.

Linda's two younger sisters, however, attended recently desegregated elementary schools.

The case also led to the desegregation of hotels, lunch counters and other public places. "Of course we never thought about that at the time, that all this would be the out-

come of the decision," Montgomery said.

Linda Thompson, now 62, attended Washburn University in Topeka and taught in a Head Start preschool program for low-income youngsters.

Oliver Brown died of a heart attack in 1961 while he was a minister at a church in Springfield, Mo., where the family had moved two years earlier. After his death, the family returned to Topeka.

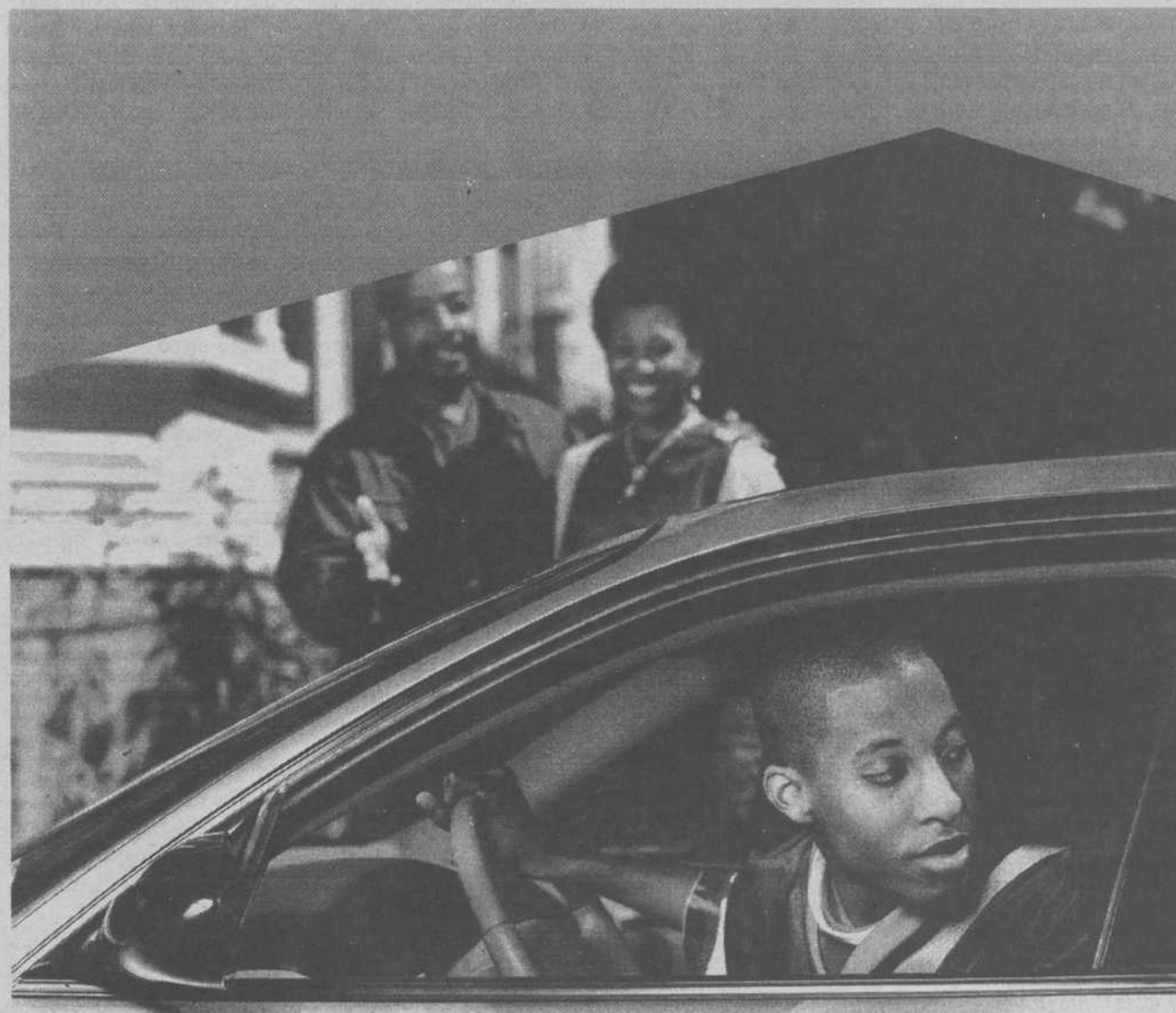
"I'm so sorry he didn't remain alive to see and be a part of it," Montgomery said. "But that is what happens sometimes."

His daughters are carrying on the legacy. Linda

Brown plays piano at the Topeka church where her father was a pastor. She helps her sister, Cheryl Brown Henderson, with the non-profit Brown Foundation. It is housed in Linda Brown's former grade school, which has been transformed into a national historic site.

During a speaking appearance in March in Laramie, Wyo., Linda Thompson said "de facto segregation" remains a half century after the ruling because of economic segregation.

"The rights of Black children," she said, "are crucial to the survival of the entire country."



On the road with Family.

It's your world and this is your road! Loving the whole experience between point A and point B. Peace of mind has no boundaries when you're traveling with family. American Family Insurance. Over three generations of drivers have placed their trust in the auto coverage that means more peace of mind on the road. Give us a call or visit us at www.amfam.com and find out why nobody protects your auto like family. American Family Insurance.

American Family Mutual Insurance Company and its Subsidiaries
Home Office - Madison, WI 53783
www.amfam.com

AMERICAN FAMILY
INSURANCE

All your protection under one roof

Three hospitals offering free skin cancer screenings

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Sunrise, Mountain View and Southern Hills hospitals will offer free skin cancer screenings from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Saturday. The American Cancer Society estimates that skin cancer will kill an estimated 9,600 Americans this year. However, even malignant melanoma is highly curable if diagnosed and treated early.

The screenings will be held at the following locations: Sunrise Hospital Diagnostic Center, 3006 S. Maryland Parkway, 1st Floor (located north of Maryland Parkway and Desert Inn; to register, call 1-877-427-8674); Mountain View Hospital Center for Sleep Disorders, 3150 N. Tenaya Way, Ste. 115 (located west of the Cheyenne Avenue exit from U.S. Highway 95; to register, call 233-5300); Southern Hills Hospital, 9300 W. Sunset Road (located on Fort Apache and West Sunset Road/Interstate-215 exit; to register, call 1-877-764-4557). Screenings are for adults only. Babysitting services are not available. Educational materials will be available. Appointments are required.

Those interested in more information or an appointment, call the location nearest you.

In a state where the sun shines most of the year, Vicki Koceja, oncology program director for Sunrise Hospital's Certified Comprehensive Cancer Program, says southern Nevadans need to be aware of the dangers of overexposure to the sun and the importance of skin self-exams and yearly check-ups. "There are many steps you can take to reduce your risk to overexposure," Koceja said. "The American Cancer Society recommends limiting mid-day exposure (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) and when you do venture outside, use sunscreens with SPF 30 or better, and wear protective clothing."