

A

great deal of news space is being devoted to the 50th anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision ordering an end to race-based school segregation. A lesser-known story in Arizona involves the desegregation of the Tucson

Unified School District a few years before the *Brown* ruling. It did not require a court case, but it did involve the efforts of a passionate member of the State Bar of Arizona: my father, William S. "Bill" Dunipace.

Bill Dunipace moved to Tucson in 1927 to recover from tuberculosis, which forced him to drop out of college after his freshman year in Bowling Green, Ohio. His recuperation took almost five years, after which he resumed his education at the University of Arizona, and he finally received his law degree in 1942. His health history prevented him from serving in World War II, and he began practicing with Fred Fickett in a relationship that lasted more than 30 years. During his career, he served as President of the Pima County Bar Association and was a founding member of the Pima County Legal Aid Society.

In the early 1950s, the NAACP began asking why the elementary and junior high schools in Tucson were segregated, even though Tucson High was not and never had been.

At that time, there were no African American lawyers in Pima County. Bill Dunipace had represented a number of the predominantly black church congregations in various matters, so the NAACP asked him to represent it in the desegregation efforts. He agreed to do so without compensation.

In 1950, all African American students in grades 1 through 9 attended Dunbar Elementary or Dunbar Junior High. Once they reached high school, they were integrated into the student body at Tucson High. As curious as this dichotomy may seem today, it was then accepted as the way things should be.

Bill Dunipace considered the possibility of filing a lawsuit, as was done in a number of other places, including Phoenix. However, he believed that the Tucson community was prepared for a less contentious and more constructive approach to desegregation. Robert Morrison, then the TUSD Superintendent, was a neighbor and personal friend. In addition, Bill's law partner Fred


Fickett was on the TUSD School Board.

As a result, Bill undertook a process of negotiation to convince the school officials that voluntary desegregation was in the best interest of the students and the entire community. Many of the discussions with Bob Morrison took place at our dining room table.

In a surprisingly short period, there was agreement that the schools should be desegregated without the expense and antagonism of litigation. However, there was also the practical aspect of how that decision would be implemented. Not only would the African American students be attending schools closer to their homes, but the Dunbar schools would become integrated with non-black students from its surrounding neighborhood. In an effort to erase some of the visible reminders of the prior discrimination, the Dunbar schools were renamed for John Spring, a pioneer who became Tucson's second public school teacher in the late 1800s.

I suspect there were some other practical hurdles that had to be overcome in implementing the desegregation plan, but the school board adopted that arrangement worked out by Bill Dunipace and Bob Morrison. When I entered seventh grade at Mansfeld Junior High in the fall of 1951, we were an integrated school. Obviously, school desegregation in Tucson would have happened sooner or later. But I truly believe that the efforts of one lawyer, Bill Dunipace, were a decisive factor in getting it done right.

The process had taken less than two years and was accomplished without the vitriol that can frequently accompany litigation, especially if it becomes protracted.

It is appropriate that we honor Thurgood Marshall and the other high-profile champions of equal rights on this 50th anniversary of the *Brown* decision. However, let us remember that there were other members of our profession of many colors, even here in Arizona, whose work, though less well known, has positively affected the progress toward equal rights for all citizens that we now celebrate. 

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Another Story of School Desegregation

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