She was second choice. The leaders of the state NAACP had chosen her older brother to test the Oklahoma law barring African Americans from state colleges. But he was newly discharged from the Army after World War II and eager to get on with his life. A protracted legal fight was the last thing he wanted. So instead, they turned to his bright, pretty, spirited sister.

Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher stepped into the history books.

As the test case for integration of the University of Oklahoma law school, Mrs. Fisher endured years of frustration and humiliation, but this was one tough woman. She emerged with her pride, determination and sense of humor intact, all elements that figure prominently in this wonderfully personal account of her life.

Mrs. Fisher draws a poignant portrait of the remarkable Sipuel family, of the segregated, black community in Chickasha that nurtured her, of undergraduate days at the all-black Langston University and of the love of her life, Warren Fisher.

She also provides an insightful view of her mentors in the civil rights struggle: Dr. W. A. J. Bullock, the respected Chickasha physician and state NAACP leader; Roscoe Dunjee, editor of The Black Dispatch; Tulsa attorney Amos T. Hall; and Thurgood Marshall, the NAACP attorney whose courageous assault on racial segregation would propel him to a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court.

Within the University of Oklahoma, Mrs. Fisher found both support and opposition. President George L. Cross declined her admission application according to state law but in such a way as to provide her with grounds for appeals all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Maurice Merrill, acting dean of the law school, opposed her suit as legal counsel for the University and the state, but later became one of her favorite law professors. OU students both demonstrated for her cause and wrote letters condemning her. It was a strange and bewildering time.

If this were the movie version of the Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher story, the climax would come as the heroine, near the end of her life, takes her seat as a member of the Board of Regents she had sued for admission to OU more than four decades earlier. Not a bad finish.

—Carol J. Burr