

From Suzanne Leal:

My sister-in-law, Carol, is American. She is vibrant and beautiful and clever and fun, the sort of person who lights up a room. Last week, she posted this piece on social media (reprinted here with Carol's permission):



Okay, I am leaning in.

I can remember the time when I was eight years old and experienced racism. It was from a schoolmate and it has stayed with me all my life.

I was part of a group that would meet on the side of a building when recess broke out to decide what we would play that day. One day we had too many friends in our circle to play the days game, who would sit out? All of us standing in a circle, my classmate said, "Whoever has the darkest skin cannot join". Everyone looked at me, I was shocked, I was embarrassed, and I knew it was wrong. I did not speak up for myself, I just walked away. In that moment I understood, the darkness of my skin put me in danger, I was no longer under the safety of the group, I was singled out because my skin was dark.

My boyfriends growing up were called N-lover. I overheard two guys at a party saying, 'I could never be a N-lover no matter how pretty she is". Dehumanizing, the message that I am less than, that I do not deserve love from people because of the darkness of my skin. Another time, a boyfriend's grandmother scooted right next me to tell me 'look at you, you got yourself a white boy huh' and 'oh you work for KD, they've always loved those colored girls'. Again, dehumanizing, the message that I do not deserve a job or love from a boy because of the darkness of my skin.

How far would they (the little girl, the teenage boys, the grandmother) allow the mistreatment to go if the circumstance arose? It was easy for them to mistreat me; how far could it go? They think I am less-than because of the darkness of my skin, how less-than could that be? What would their racist ideas allow?

I came by this article that describes something in me that I knew not of, I have 'woke' up in a nightmare:

“A nightmare is essentially a horror story of danger, but it is not wholly a horror story. Black people experience joy, love, peace, safety. But as in any horror story, those unforgettable moments of toil, terror, and trauma have made danger essential to the black experience in racist America. What one black American experiences, many black Americans experience. Black Americans are constantly stepping into the toil and terror and trauma of other black Americans. Black Americans are constantly stepping into the souls of the dead. Because they know: They could have been them; they are them. Because they know it is dangerous to be black in America, because racist Americans see blacks as dangerous.” Ibram X. Kendi “The American Nightmare”

I have not told you the end of the story from the playground when I was eight.

It was a large circle, no one spoke up immediately. As I walked away from the circle, the most popular of all those girls “Jennifer”, caught up with me, put her hands on my shoulders and said ‘what she did was wrong’ and we played together with a few other girls. She saved something in me that day. Even though I knew it was wrong, the support Jennifer showed me stopped the shame from that experience from seeping in my bones. I was witnessed, I was validated of the wrong done to me. What I see going on in the U.S. is a lot of Jennifers supporting us. I thank you protectors of hearts, keep it up, we need you.

Suzanne Leal, June 2020
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