The Journey from Obliviousness to Consciousness

I grew up in a rural community in the south during the seventies where there was little if any recognition of racial differences and no perception of white privilege. None of us considered ourselves privileged but we were taught to value hard work and would do anything to help someone in need regardless of culture or color. Within my own family, I learned to appreciate racial and cultural differences.

Since my closest friends growing up were African American and Caucasian, so I had no concept of racism until I went away to college. In college I quickly realized the thinking of those who looked different than me did not subscribe to my utopian notion that everyone was valued equally. Suddenly black students didn't like me or want to hang out with me because I was white, and to them my whiteness meant something I had not known before.

Fast forward twenty years, that utopian bubble I had existed in further eroded as my husband and I served as foster parents to children in need regardless of race. While I saw precious children, others saw white people with black and brown children. We chose to build our family by adopting three young Hispanic girls who were part of a sibling group of eight. As a result, we became part of an eclectic extended family with African Americans, Latinos, and Caucasians which expanded my awareness of racism.

Although these experiences created a sense of disequilibrium between how I viewed the world and the people in it versus how others experienced the world I did not fully appreciate the privilege and power my whiteness held until I made a mistake that very clearly pitted my good intentions with a negative impact on people of color. Prior to that experience, I had started my journey of exploring diversity perspectives, but after that experience, I committed to intentionally examining the intersections between race, abilities, privilege and whiteness to unpack the layers of systemic racism.

I particularly identify with Tiffany Jewell's anti-racist definition as "people who oppose the systemic misuse and abuse of power by institutions that lead to us having those personal biases and prejudices against each other." At this point in my journey, I believe there is a difference between tolerance and acceptance. It is simply not good enough to tolerate racist behaviors but for ourselves to not be racist. As our societal awareness increases, it is clear that we must strive for acceptance of others and take actions to be anti-racist.

During the past five years, I've sought opportunities to learn about and reflect on race, power, privilege and how those dynamics are manifested in our society, educational systems, and leadership styles. My exploration has come a long way but I envision being on this journey for the rest of my life and definitely for the rest of professional career. I am committed to being a Bridge Builder who works to bring people and ideas together to heal and create a more just society.

Jewell, T. (2020). *This Book Is Anti-Racist: 20 Lessons on How to Wake Up, Take Action and Do the Work.* Frances Lincoln Children's Books. London: United Kingdom.

Be the Bridge (2020). Retrieved January 2020 from https://bethebridge.com/

Impactful Resources

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Intersectionality in Higher Education

W. Byrd, R. Brunn-Bevel, S. Ovink

Pedagogy of the Oppressed - P. Freieri

Crucial Conversations - K. Patterson

White Fragility - R. DiAngelo

Healing From Internalized Whiteness - S. Kim

The Hate U Give - A. Thomas

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Everyday Feminism - S. Kim