

:: Dana's Weekly Insight ::

08.06.07 – Magically Delicious



Who am I?

Am I the work that I do, the goals that I reach, the mistake that I made last week?

Am I my gender, the clothes that I wear or could it be that who I am mostly is -

the color of my skin?

His words landed disruptively AND in the middle of our very private conversation.

In other words we didn't care to hear what he was trying to tell us! We were not interested at all in his truth.

It was Saturday morning and I was five years old. Sitting at the table, eating a bowl of Lucky Charms, I was engaged in one of my favorite activities in the world - basking in the warmth of my little sister's admiration. Denise was four years old and to say that she looked up to me would be a mis-characterization of our reality. She worshipped me and I milked that for everything it was worth.

The highlight of my week was Saturday morning because Saturday was when I had the time to really lay it on thick. I would embellish my kindergarten heroics and then ride the wave of adoration that would last me for an entire week. We would sit and I would talk, and as we separated our oats from our colored marshmallows, Denise would hang on every word that fell from my mouth.

On this particular Saturday however, I was less in need of worship and more in need of consolation, perhaps even affirmation, as I tried to sort through how I felt about being called such an ugly name.

"Black."

That is how I replied when she asked me to tell her again.

"Black! They call me Black!" I protested - more hurt than I was offended.

Denise looked stricken, but I wasn't at all worried because my plan was to fuel her misery just long enough to enjoy her company before I would tell her that none of what they'd said to me was true.

"Don't you worry, honey",

I told her (and I really called her honey).

"They don't know what they are talking about. Look at my arm" I demanded as I grabbed the black crayon from out of the box and scribbled my proof frantically on my placemat.

"This crayon is Black! Does that arm look Black to you", I demonstrated, not at all sure that I was convinced I was right.

When she shook her head "no" I felt so relieved that she seemed to be coming around and that we could finally get back to our cereal and milk.

And,

That's when it happened.

"Yes you are Black!"

I heard what he said - but I honestly did not want to believe that he could actually be so mis-informed.

Did my father not have eyes? Could he not see that the color of my arm looked nothing like the crayon in the Crayola box? Had he no appreciation that this was, in fact, a two-way conversation?

Denise cried and I hugged her tight. Huddled against the wall in the kitchen, I whispered to her again and again:

"Don't worry. We are not Black. We're not Black."

Standing between us and our only way out of this nightmare, my father kept repeating his horrible claim only to eventually surrender with an order to my mother to get us set straight once and for all.

And that is exactly what she did.

She called her friend Marva and the two of them dressed us up in our favorite clothes and took us out for an ice cream sundae. I can still remember the hot fudge as my mother took her time and explained to us that we were beautiful and that -

we were Black.

She said that because we were beautiful that meant that being Black must be a beautiful thing to be.

Her words made a whole lot of sense to me.

The kids at school didn't understand yet so, they thought Black was bad. My father's militant anger represented a time and a place. What my mother offered to me was a new way to see but I was the one who had to choose for myself who I am and -

who I wanted to be.

Yes I am Black and I am glad that I am. I am proud to be a woman and a wife and a mom. I love that I have curly hair and that I sneeze whenever I cough. I can tell a great joke and I am a pretty good listener, but -

I am not defined by any of these things because:

Who I am is far greater than the sum of my best and worst parts.

And you?

Are you simply white or woman or mother or chief or shy or funny or "morning person" or any other label that might be assigned?

Who I am, who any of us are, has far less to do with other peoples stuff AND everything to do with how we will allow ourselves to be defined. To my classmates in kindergarten, Black meant something bad and they tried to push that meaning off on me. To my Dad Black was something to defend and then wear like an honorable badge of defiance.

But me --

I choose to see Black as something that I can love being; as something that I can choose. I choose it as something very beautiful to be, because I choose it --

to be me.

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