

MY
DAYS



JULY
2023

LINDSAY
WINCHERAUK

Lindsay Wincherauk

JULY 2023

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slush pile productions

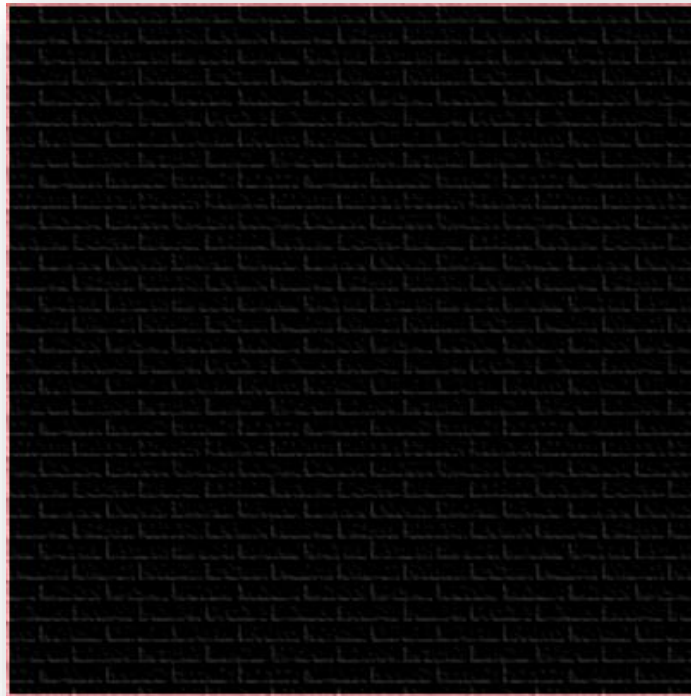
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MY
CONVERSATION
WITH

A BLACK MAN

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At the age of 63, I recently (yesterday) had a significant experience. It was my first real conversation with a black man, although I've had several black acquaintances throughout my life, hell, I've been to Jamaica four times – I hesitated to call them friends, not wanting to come across as racist, as only racists feel the need to mention the ethnicity or sexuality of their companions.

But I must confess, I made a mistake. To give this story the impact it deserves, I need to open up and be vulnerable. I must be willing to embrace the potential discomfort that comes with engaging in a lengthy conversation with someone I barely know, especially when we come from different racial backgrounds.

But let me backtrack for a moment. I grew up in Saskatoon, a predominantly white and close-knit community. It's a city I adore, but I can't deny its lack of diversity and the way Indigenous people who lived there were treated.

We, as a society, failed to treat them as equals. And it's not just Saskatoon; this issue extends far beyond Saskatoon's city limits.

Growing up in this environment, I witnessed firsthand how my community reacted to anything they didn't understand. Probably a better sentence would be anything they wanted to control. We tended to belittle and dismiss what was unfamiliar to us.

It's as if understanding others required too much effort.

Sadly, this attitude was ingrained in us through media, entertainment, books, and even music. We were conditioned to believe stereotypes – Indigenous people were drunks, people of colour were criminals, and Asians excelled in math but struggled with driving.

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You May Still Be Racist If? →↓↓

The following requires honesty. It's not easy, but you can do it.

- When you encounter someone who doesn't share your race, take a moment to reflect and be honest with yourself. What is the first thought that crosses your mind? If it has anything to do with their culture, heritage, or anything other than seeing them as a fellow human being, then it's a sign of underlying racist tendencies that you still need to work on. And that's alright because you are being honest with yourself.

Example: There's this guy in our group, let's call him Karl (to protect his racist ass), who always joins us on Gummy Friday's. Every time he sees someone who isn't white, he thinks it's an invitation to unleash his arsenal of racist jokes stored in his brain (which, by the way, is never locked). I can't stand Karl. He's a 68-year-old bigot who refuses to evolve. And when Karl starts spewing his hateful vitriol, some of the other idiots at the table feel compelled to laugh along, dragging us all down into the gutter.

- When people like Karl speak, you laugh.
- When people like Karl speak, you participate.
- When people like Karl speak, you don't confront him about his repulsive behavior because you'd rather avoid an uncomfortable conversation.
- When someone speaks up against Karl's abhorrent rhetoric, you defend Karl and dismiss their concerns, suggesting it was just a joke and they need to lighten up.

How to Evolve →↓↓

The following requires honesty. It's not easy, but you can do it.

- When you encounter someone who doesn't share your race, and here's where the honesty comes in again, if any thoughts cross your mind about them, make a conscious effort to suppress those thoughts and keep your ignorance to yourself.
- The next time you come across the same person or others who don't look like you, suppress any thoughts that arise and keep your ignorance to yourself.
- Repeat the previous two points until the day comes when you see someone who doesn't look like you (is not white), you no longer have an urge to say anything about them at all. ⁽¹⁾

- 1) Repeat the previous point until the day comes when you see someone who doesn't look like you (is not white), you no longer know you are just suppressing urges. ⁽²⁾
- 2) Shower. Rinse. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

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When I moved to Vancouver, I realized the importance of listening and unlearning these biases.

Every white person on this planet should strive to become a recovering racist; because, let's face it, most of us have been influenced by these harmful stereotypes for the entirety of our lives.

How could I not have been racist?

I had a brother, who because of a dark family secret was really something else, a brother I deeply admired and loved. He is a good man, kind-hearted, but when I was just a ten-year-old, he named our Siamese Cat Guy after the hockey star Guy Lafleur, and added derogatory slurs like **"Rice Gobbler," "Gook,"** and **"N-Face,"** to Guy's name.

Many nights, I would stand on our front steps, shouting out, "Come home Guy-Rice-Gobbler-Gook-N-Face on a continuous loop, completely unaware of the impact the words had on me and others.

If you laughed at that, please stop reading, no... keep reading.

What kind of effect did it have on others?

Whenever our devout neighbours caught wind of my chant, they often let out a hearty chuckle.

At ten, I didn't fully understand the implications, but I can't deny that it left a mark on my psyche.

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So, here I am, at 63, about to share my first genuine conversation with a black man. It's a moment of growth and self-reflection. I recognize the importance of challenging my own biases and striving for a more inclusive and accepting world. Even if I deny I still have biases.

Throughout my life, I've had the chance to form amiable relationships with black men, particularly during my time on sports teams, and in University. And I did. And so, I did, referring to them as friends. Yet can one truly claim to have a friend if they fail to invest the effort in understanding their true essence?

Well?

Can they?

The answer is a resounding no.

Whose fault, is it?

It would be convenient to attribute the fault to both parties involved, but that would be a dishonest assertion. How can our indoctrination not result in a deep-seated apprehension towards those who do not bear a resemblance to us?

White is inherently flawed, tainted by its own privilege, fragility, and ignorance.

Am I fragile?

Of course.

However, I regretfully admit that we never took the opportunity to truly connect and engage in meaningful conversations. It's a pity, really. I realize now that it was a missed chance for personal growth.

Despite having friends, I, like everyone else in my social circle, would shamefully partake in jokes without fully comprehending the extent of our ignorance. We would jest about having a token individual on our team, oblivious to the harm it caused. There was a colleague of mine named Lawrence, who happened to be indigenous. We interacted on a daily basis, but I never truly delved into understanding who he was as a person. Instead, I saw him through the lens that society had conditioned me to use. Reflecting upon this now, I am not overly harsh on myself, but I am deeply ashamed that I allowed myself to exhibit such levels of ignorance.

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Apologies for the interruption. I recently took a well-deserved break to spend time with a friend and celebrate my birthday, albeit a little belatedly. You see, as I've grown older, I've come to embrace the notion of a birthday month, allowing myself to revel in the joy of turning a year older. So, hooray for me!

Now where was I →

→ Over here

No.

I must get back to were I was.

←←←

←←←

I'm back.

Feeling a bit weak today, I decide to divert my attention away from the queasiness by revisiting yesterday.

I play the news on the corner of my computer screen and, of course, they're talking about Trump. The queasiness intensifies.

In an effort to improve my mood, I click on a YouTube music video. Ah, that's much better.

But before I move on, a thought crosses my mind - could writing this piece be considered racist?

"Linds?" Sparkly calls out.

"Yes?" she responds.

HOLD ON. My grammar AI just called me she. Stop it. I continue →↓

"Don't think of it that way. Writing this piece can be an opportunity for growth." Sparkly says.

You know, throughout my life, I've had many black acquaintances who would consider me a friend. Is it racist when a black person says they have white friends?

"Linds, a black person would never add 'white' to that statement," Sparkly says.

"Oh, I get it," I admit, though I'm not entirely sure I fully understand.

Earlier, I mentioned how I used to participate in racially insensitive jokes, but as I grew older and wiser, I realized they weren't really jokes. They reflected the ugliness that exists within us white folks.

This realization is when my journey of evolution and healing began.

Eventually, I moved to Vancouver. Suddenly, the world wasn't just white anymore. I could feel the hostility lingering in the air. Some people referred to Vancouver as "Hongcouver" – and one of my aunts tried to persuade me to move to Edmonton, claiming there were too many Chinese and gay people in Vancouver.

It was then that I realized I had unknowingly become part of a group.

During this time, I was dating a Canadian who came from a Chinese background.

As I continued to listen and observe, I overheard a friend mentioning how their neighbours were scared because new people were moving into their neighborhood who didn't look like them.

My evolution persisted, and I couldn't help but question my friend - why does it matter? Unfortunately, my question left him dumbfounded.

Another friend, constantly checking to see if anyone was within earshot, asked me if I wanted to hear a racist joke.

I calmly asked why he seemed so nervous, and I made it clear that there is no such thing as a racist joke.

I declined his offer, refusing to engage in his hateful speech.

To my surprise, my response left him dumbfounded as well.

Another friend scolded me, claiming I was too uptight and took things too seriously. I no longer consider this person as a friend, though I haven't explicitly told him yet.

However, some people still occasionally tell me I overreact to things, stressing he or she was only joking, and I need to lighten up.

Personally, I don't believe I react enough, especially when acquaintances find it amusing to try to make everyone at the table say the name of the country "Niger" out loud. I realize I need to take a stand and react more, or take the easy way out, just leave the table.

I know I can't change deeply ingrained attitudes, but the least I can do is distance myself from those who find it acceptable to perpetuate hatred.

We all must acknowledge the existence of racism, but what can we do about it?

I believe part of the answer lies in becoming the entertainment. By making it known that I am disgusted by such attitudes and severing ties with friendships that condone them, I believe people will be forced to pay attention.

Because if you are the entertainment, and you choose to walk away, those who enjoy being entertained might just realize that the racist individuals are not entertaining at all.

Some dinosaurs still roam the earth, and it must be a miserable existence for them.

I think I visited the Fitness Asylum that day, although my memory is a bit fuzzy. I know I read and walked.

As I wandered off the beaten paths in Stanley Park, I noticed several men aimlessly roaming around. I happened to come across someone I knew, who greeted me with surprise. "Linds, what are you doing here?" he asked. I replied honestly, stating that I was just passing through. He mentioned that he was cruising, which I mentally acknowledged as his choice to live his own life. But then things took a strange turn when he revealed that his knitting group regularly meets in the woods. I couldn't quite grasp the meaning behind his need to add knitting group to his cruising.

"Good to see you," I said, eager to continue on my way.

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I arrived at my favourite watering hole and was delighted to find my friend Chris there. He had recently returned from a month-long trip to Edinburgh and Berlin. We exchanged pleasantries, and I expressed how I had thought of him a few times during his absence. Chris smiled in response.

To my left sat Mike, an acquaintance who happens to be black.

I pondered why I felt the need to mention his race when introducing him in this piece.

“Linds.” Sparkly said to get my attention.

“Yes?” I replied.

“Because it’s in the title of this story,” Sparkly reminded me.

Relieved, I said, “Phew! That’s a relief. I’m trying my best not to come across as racist.”

Mike placed his cellphone on the bar and excused himself to use the restroom. Seizing the opportunity, I playfully took his phone and set it on the stool between me and Chris. When Mike returned and noticed his missing phone, I didn’t let the joke linger. I held up his phone and confessed to stealing it. Mike laughed, followed by Chris. Chris left, leaving Mike and me alone.

My friend Sandy approached us, proudly displaying a book on Indigenous life that he had contributed to. Intrigued, I asked him to show me his part in the book. As I read a bit, Mike also took an interest. It struck me how important it is to explore the experiences of others through literature.

Our reading session opened the door to conversations that could potentially become uncomfortable or unpleasant for non-white individuals. I found myself contemplating the toll it must take on them to constantly educate ignorant white individuals like me.

Interestingly, Mike is an educator himself, residing in White Rock of all places. A town known for a rock painted white. I didn't delve (Google) into the history of the place at that moment, as I was engrossed in my conversation with Mike. I won't go into great detail about our conversation, but I will say that it lasted over an hour and revolved around colonization and Canada's self-righteousness when it comes to equality.

We acknowledged the fact Canada's history involved stripping Indigenous people of their way of life, a topic that runs parallel to the centuries of slavery in the United States.

Both instances involved erasing identities and forced assimilation to maintain white advantage, an advantage that many of us white individuals refuse to acknowledge.

I feel uncertain about whether it's appropriate to write about this conversation. Perhaps I should have Mike read it and offer his critique.

Nevertheless, we pressed on, engaging in an intellectually stimulating discussion.

Mike shared stories of his constant efforts to encourage his students to read a diverse range of books, as the educational curriculum often fails to provide a truthful perspective.

I proudly claimed to be an avid reader, but I also confessed to experiencing peculiar urges when reading books about other cultures, particularly the black experience. These urges compelled me to want to show the next black acquaintance I encountered what I was reading. I never did.

As I typed those words, and, said them aloud, I realized how potentially racist they sounded. I recognized that I wasn't any better than those white individuals who never bothered to read; or dismissed me sharing with them what I was reading as merely one person's opinion.

Surprisingly, Mike wasn't offended.

In fact, I believe he appreciated my willingness to engage in uncomfortable conversations and strive to understand.

Mike proceeded to regale me with an intriguing anecdote concerning a well-liked student, known for his quick wit and self-assured demeanor. This narrative shed light on the underlying reasons behind his propensity for humour and boasting, revealing that it stemmed from his family's arduous battle to put food on the table on numerous occasions. It was almost as if these behaviors served as a shield, a means of self-preservation in the face of adversity.

I found myself identifying with Mike's student's struggles.

We were only scratching the surface of acquaintance, yet I felt compelled to share a bit about my own upbringing, about being born in a place where secret babies, demon seeds were born—eerily similar to residential schools. It seemed to strike a chord with Mike. I wasn't consciously searching for common ground in our experiences. Instead, I simply shared, acknowledging to myself our passing the path of acquaintance.

As it was time to head home, I contemplated what to make of our conversation.

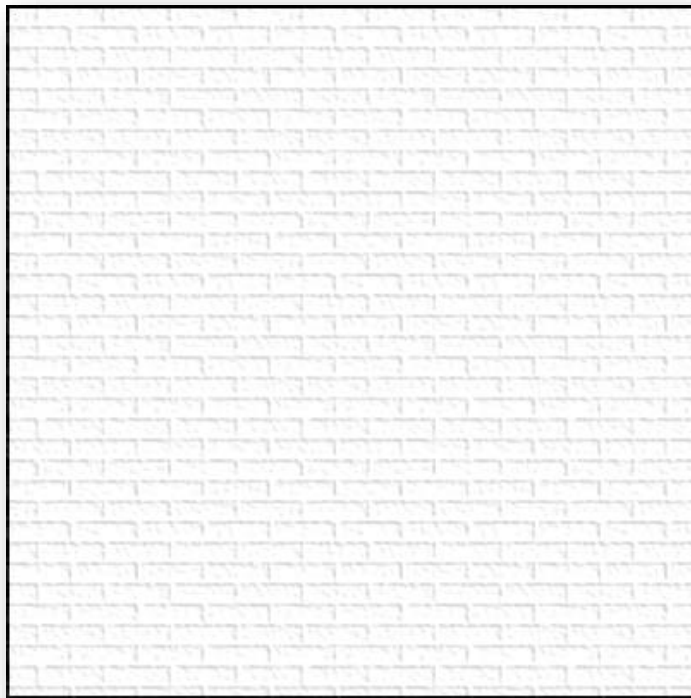
Could I now consider Mike a new friend?

A voice inside (Sparkly) advised against it. "Don't," Sparkly whispered.

Instead, I concluded it probably wasn't appropriate to label him as a friend just yet.

Perhaps in the future, during our next encounter, Mike might feel comfortable sharing his own upbringing. Or maybe it would take a couple more chats, or even longer, for him to trust me enough to see beyond my whiteness and truly consider me a friend.

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A 60ish-Year-Old-Man Goes to an Employment Agency



What brings you here today?
You look old, how old are you?

|Lie| I'm 60. |Damn|

Do you have jobs for 60-year-olds?



No. I mean, why are you looking for work?
Never mind. Silly question.

What was your last job, career?

What do you mean you were great at it—



—but you're not allowed to talk about it?

How long were you there?

Oh my. That's a long time.

Did they provide you with a reference?



No. Well that is problematic.

We don't usually have things for older people.

Please, I need to work, to eat, to live indoors.

Maybe not for much longer. |Oops, use inside voice|



Have you considered dying?

Man, I'm glad I'm not you. |Oops|

I have jobs at Amazon—but they'd likely kill you.

Workers at Amazon wear diapers.



Do you wear diapers yet? |Oops, inside voice|

Do you want to drive an Uber or Lyft?

I don't have a vehicle.

Loser. |Oops|. Maybe consider dying. Good luck.