

Understanding & Dismantling Privilege

The official journal of the White Privilege Conference A program of the Matrix Center for the Advancement of Social Equity & Inclusion

A poem for my white friends

“I Didn’t Tell You”

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Norma Johnson is a healer, inspirationalist and visionary consultant. For over 30 years, her work spans the realms from spiritual healing to teaching, facilitating and speaking in the areas of the healing arts, of personal & professional systems organization and community relationship dynamics.

As a writer, teacher, speaker and performance artist, Norma is known for her ability to move and inspire through the wisdom that already lives within each of us. There is a vision within us all. Norma connects individuals and community back to the heart centered place, where all visions live.

Norma’s creative background as a professional costumer in the entertainment industry has given her a foundation of seeing ways into no ways and of sculpting raw materials into something magnificent, inspiring and supportive of the roles we want to play within our world.

In her healing arts company, All In Spirit, Norma’s passion for the spirit and creative genius for the power of our lives, continues to inspire all that she does.

A poem for my white friends

I Didn't Tell You

I didn't tell you about my real life
The one that haunts me most days
It comes in moments at a time
Triggered by a look,
an attitude,
a sensing of superiority,
of blatant ignorance,
of good meaning intention
dripping crap down my face.

I didn't tell you about the look they gave me when I opened my door and they saw black me standing there, their mouths agape, their thoughts running loudly through my head.

I didn't tell you about being followed through the store and how I obediently kept my hands and my bag in plain sight.

I didn't tell you how quickly they look away when I catch them staring at me in the restaurant and standing in the supermarket line.

I didn't tell you how the clerk pretended the white woman had been standing at the counter before I had and waited on her first.

I didn't tell you how I have to take a really deep long breath every time before I walk into a room full of white people.

I didn't tell you that in the meeting, the classroom, and the workshop, when the subject of diversity comes up, they all look at me as if I am the spokesperson for the whole nation of people of color.

I didn't tell you that when diversity isn't mentioned and needs to be, I'm too often the one who has to point it out.

I didn't tell you how many times white people say to me in one way or another, "you're different," because they felt comfortable with me and that didn't fit their mold of what they figured a black person was like.

I didn't tell you how disappointed that white man was, when after eagerly questioning me, found out that I was not the exotic nubian he had fantasized, but just another negro girl from new jersey.

I didn't tell you about the white woman, a stranger who chose out of all the white people around us, to sit next to me and proceed to tell me all about her favorite black performers and her black friends and how this country needs to take integration to the next level so I could see how her life is an example of that.

I didn't tell you about the anger I stuffed down when that dreadlocked young white boy gave me a high five and called me "sistah."

I didn't tell you about the white woman I passed at twilight in the park, who tensed her body, tightened her grip on her purse and walked a large curved detour past me.

I didn't tell you that my stomach clenches when I see a police car because it means I may not...be...safe.

I didn't tell you that your world is not mine and that we are virtual worlds apart.

I didn't tell you that while you can somehow think of yourself as multi-ethnically expansive because you have a black friend, I meanwhile just still... stay... black.

I didn't tell you that while you can walk boldly into any place you choose, I *always* have to consider where I am, who I'm with, and how I'm going to affect people.

I didn't tell you how your liberalism chokes me sometimes as you sit in judgment of someone you don't even know.

I didn't tell you that being a good person and being clueless *can* come in the same package.

I didn't tell you about the comments you made that would take a lifetime of explaining how you've bought into the system that keeps us ALL, ...in...our...place.

I didn't tell you about my day because I had been taught not to.

And you have been taught not to even consider it.

I didn't tell you about my day because then I would have to live it all over again ...

And I have to save that... for tomorrow.