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Elizabeth Lambert

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A beautiful Array of Skin-Tones

By Elizabeth Lambert

This month I felt a tug on my heart to remind readers of Mill Creek's beauty, which includes its residents – we are many races. The tragic death of George Floyd thrust our Nation into another racial crisis. Sadly, the aftermath has divided friends, neighbors, and families. I find myself disappointed when I hear of people labeled as racist because they question ideas or disagree with popular opinion. Is it me, or have you also noticed that there is a marked increase in what is labeled as racism? I haven't always received a warm welcome as a minority, but after living in various regions across the United States, I have learned the difference between the following:

- *true racism*; prejudice directed against a person on the basis of their race
- *racial insensitivity*; lacking in tact toward people of different races
- *innocent curiosity*; the actions of children

A few of my experiences:

- In 1990 I took a short-term computer systems position with the FAA; I was the only black employee. Shortly after being hired, a man from an area where it was okay to be a racist was also hired. During our first interaction, he informed me that his town had a "hanging tree", and that any "darkies" found there, after sundown, could probably still be hanged. He made similar remarks in the first month of his employment. Our human resources department silenced him through discipline, but in truth, they could not change him. His behavior is an example of *true racism*.
- In 1991 I became good friends with a woman, who also happened to be white. We were co-workers and spent a lot of our weekends at social events together. Following the verdicts related to Rodney King's beating, the LA Riots broke out. My friend and I watched the violence in stunned silence. When Reginald Denny, an innocent white man, was pulled from his truck and beaten by black rioters, I asked rhetorically, "What does he have to do with the verdicts?" My friend responded, "Nothing! Black people are so stupid." Immediately regretting the words, she gave a sincere apology. After further discussion, I learned that as a child her grandmother made regular disparaging remarks about black people. These greatly impacted my friend, and to her credit she took action to deal with what was hidden.

Was my friend a racist? Everything else I knew about her said, no. I believed then, she was *racially insensitive*. Was her grandmother **or** the rioters racists? I would say so, based on the fact that their behavior was racially motivated.

- One summer while with my children at Birch Bay, a couple stood in front of us with a precious little one. She had blond hair and blue eyes. Her parents repeatedly told her it was rude to stare at me, and physically turned her face. They were helpless to distract her. Suddenly, as if it was the most natural thing in the world, she reached out to rub the color from my face, then she looked at her hand. I wasn't bothered by it, but her parents were mortified. We spent the remaining time, while waiting, discussing the misunderstandings that happen through our type of interaction. They lived in a small rural town; no other races. They tried through books and T.V. to explain race, but I was their child's first living example. They thanked me for being kind. How could I be offended about the *innocent curiosity* of a child? Were they racist? It seemed doubtful to me.

We, Mill Creekers, are a beautiful array of skin-tones. As topics of race arise in your circles, be gentle with each other. I hope that you will remember that race is part of what makes our city beautiful! Good people want justice for the murder of George Floyd and the changes that will bring it about. It is possible to work toward solutions without silencing or insulting those we disagree with? I have lived in Mill Creek for twenty-four years. I was drawn here from the start. In my mind, Mill Creek was my home the moment I toured my house. There were very few black residents when I arrived as a black spouse in an interracial marriage. That was never a concern for me. As I got to know my neighbors, shopped at stores, and walked my children to parks, it was never a factor for those I met.

Many other black and brown people have since moved here,



but one thing has not changed. Mill Creekers have and still do welcome people of all races.

Elizabeth Lambert
elizabethspeakerandlifecoach@gmail.com