Inclusion is Increasingly Necessary

While our world seems to decrease in size daily, it seems that our difference are increasing. Our daily life is one of either/or and only one winner. Just consider a few we see in our headlines continual: Red States/ Blue States, Republicans/Democrats, rich/poor, have/have nots, good/bad, developed nations/undeveloped, Packers/Bears, prolife/prochoice to name a few. Being so polarized in so many areas, we find ourselves protecting our side to such an extreme that we lose sight of civility. As a result we close ourselves off to listening and then understanding other points of view, we cling to the belief that our values and how we live our lives is the only right way, and we find only fault with those that have a different lifestyle. If this continues, civility will quite likely die entirely. Consequently, I will be focusing over the next few months on expanding our inclusiveness.

To start this series I would like to share my story of becoming more inclusive in regards to race. I grew up in a small town in Wisconsin that was entirely white. We did have a neighborhood that was of Norwegian descent, but the majority were German. Consequently race was really not an issue that our community had to deal with. Through education and television children like myself obtained some information on racial bias, but on the whole we had little concern.

The summer after fifth grade my family went to family reunion on my father’s side at my grandfather’s home in northcentral Wisconsin. There I connected with my cousin who was a year older than me. We had so much fun that she suggested that I come home with her family for a visit. I never expected that my parents would agree as we had come only for the day. I was allowed to go. I really cannot remember how I got some clothes, but I know I stayed well over a week. She lived further north.

It was a great time right from the start. Her parents were very kind and helpful. I was not homesick at all. Her dad worked at the train depot. It was great fun to walk there and explore the building. We went often to where they went swimming, her parents took us on some outings, and we played games with some of her friends. Mostly, we seemed to have lots to talk about.

Then two separate things happened. First I had gotten a letter from my mother indicating that my brother and sister were going to go to my aunt’s on my mother’s side for a week. She was my favorite aunt and we always did so many fun things. I started to think about going home. Next we had a huge rain storm. Across the road from their house was a creek with three feet sides. There had been barely a trickle of water running though. That night the water almost overflowed with a raging current. We went out to see it. It really scared me. The next day the water was down, but it had completely destroyed our swimming area. It was time for me to go home.

It was decided that I would take the train home. Previously I had gone with my friend and her mother to another town about 12 miles from my home to go shopping. We had sat in the dome car. To catch the train we they drove me to a larger city. My aunt had made me a lunch and had gotten me seated. Warm hugs and kisses and plans to return were made. Then they left and the train started. I was a bit sad in leaving and a little nervous being by myself. I was also glad that I had a seat to myself. I settled in for the ride home.

Suddenly the train stopped. All the people in the car got out. I looked out and this was not my town. I panicked as I had no idea why the train stopped or what I should do. There was no one there to ask, nor did I have any idea where to find someone to ask. I sat there, getting more and more scared. Then a young girl got on the train and she sat behind me. I looked at her and could tell that she was Indian. I was unable to say or do anything. She recognized my fear. She began to explain that this was Wisconsin Dells and the train had a stop here. Soon it would start up again. I was so relieved and thankful. I arrived home safely. But more important I have remembered that girl all my life. She taught me that we are all human beings and we help each other out. I have tried to so live my life in the same way.

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