

My Life Span

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Growing up in the Watford household was no easy task. As far back as I can remember, Saturday morning was an early rise day of cleaning our bedrooms, washing and waxing the hallway floor, and having a quick breakfast, all before noon. My Father would cook scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, and sometimes grits which was my favorite because my Mother would put a teaspoon of sugar and butter on top of them, and then I'd have the pleasure of devouring them. I grew up in the Albany Projects in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York; my sister and two brothers shared two bedrooms we constantly stayed in when my Father was home. My Mother didn't work outside the house; at that time, she was a typical housewife attending to her children and husband daily, cooking meals, and trying to educate us as well as she could by giving us books to read to increase our vocabulary. My book was named "Stagecoach," and I didn't like reading it, but My Mother would make me read a chapter a day, and then I had to look up the meaning of the words I didn't know to understand what I read.

I wish I could sit and talk with my mother about my Infancy and toddlerhood years concerning my sensorimotor and cognitive development because I have no memory of babbling or noticing my hand for the first time; there's no proof that I was potty trained, although at some point I'm sure I was. I'll always have questions about when I started feeding and dressing, when did I start smiling and enjoying taking pictures in front of the camera, when did I start exhibiting self-control in situations with my siblings, and when did my language and memory become understandable and efficient according to (Erford & Tucker, 2016). My Mother is alive, but she has dementia, and sometimes she doesn't remember me or anything about my life; she doesn't remember my children and asks questions like when I got married and why I didn't someone tell

her. I've been married for thirty-five years, and my children are grown adults, so to see my mother in this mental state is very dis-hardening.

I remember learning to tie my white skip sneakers, possibly at six or seven years old. I was so frustrated because my sneakers were still loose even though I had learned how to make a bow following my mother's demonstration; After all, the tie wasn't strong enough, and double knotting the shoestring was the key. During this age, my fine motor skills, finger manipulations, and mutual hand coordination were being exercised, my memory was increasing, and I started to become creative with my shoelaces by age seven or eight. I also became more aware of the arguments and fighting in our home with my parents. Their voices started quietly, and then my father would raise his voice and lunge toward my mother. I could hear the scuffling on the floor or against a wall, and I knew that my father was physically hurting my mother, and she would silently endure it. When these events occurred, I think I became empathetic toward my mom and regulated my emotions and responses concerning what I was experiencing.

My father was not the most excellent man I've known, and my relationship with him was practically null and void because he didn't want us in his presence when he came home from work, and he spoke to us only if necessary. These events continued throughout my middle childhood and early adolescence until age fourteen when my parents were finally separated and divorced. My siblings and I needed counseling intervention because I had trouble making friends and trusting people, and my siblings were dealing with their trauma and emotional issues. I lived in fear of my father returning and doing us harm, and in school, I was depressed and saddened; I'd tell my teacher about the events at home and cry in class, one day my mother was called to the school on my behalf, and she was embarrassed and asked me not to share what happens at home again. At this time in my life, I had no peer relationships, was speaking quite well, had

psychologically become my siblings' protector due to my being the eldest child and feeling unprotected, was in complete puberty at the age of twelve, and experiencing my first menstrual cycle.

During my adolescent years, from about seventh through ninth grade, I became interested in who I was. My skin color wasn't an issue until I was transferred to Hudde J.H.S, a predominantly white school to integrate the school on behalf of cultural experience, or at least that's what I was told. It was surprising getting off the school bus and noticing white children looking at us as if we didn't belong there. I heard a white child call us spooks, a word unfamiliar to my vocabulary. As I entered the building, I marveled at how big the school was from the inside, the classrooms were large, with plenty of chairs with attached desks, and I was told to sit anywhere once I found my assigned classroom. Mrs. Jorgensen was my teacher; she was a much older Caucasian woman with salt-and-pepper hair, tall, slender, and needing deodorant. I was the only black girl in my class, and it was strange looking at white children looking at me more than paying attention to the teacher. I felt nervous, unwelcome, and unsure of myself because I didn't understand what the teacher was speaking about; her voice was low, the children were disruptive, and there was no one there I could relate to, so I became psychologically disconnected from my peers but not from the instruction and learning ability that seemed to compensate from not having close friends during the two years that I studied at Hudde J.H.S. I excelled in my academics and graduated with pride and recognized self-worth.

Adler's Individual Psychology Theory states that the "attention-seeking child believes he or she matters only if he or she is being noticed, and therefore he or she engages in behavior that will draw the attention of the adult" (Erford & Tucker, 2016). I found this statement to be true for me as a child about my father because I sought my father's attention by touching things that

belonged to him after being instructed not to. My father loved sweets and would fill his bedroom drawer with boxes of chocolate candy and advise us not to touch them, and my mother was no exception to his ruling. I would deliberately take boxes of candy from his drawer, knowing that he would count them, and become angry while enquiring about them. I never considered that my siblings could get in trouble for it or my mother even though she was his wife; I just wanted my father to notice me, pay attention to me, not to hurt me but to smile at me, have meaningful conversations with me, explain to me why he would beat my mom and abuse my siblings and me even if it meant a horrible whipping. I mattered, and we counted; I was his firstborn child and desired the constant positive attention he showed my sister, but I was not privileged to receive it.

Adler's statement about attention-seeking children sheds a negative light on how attention can be sought, but I want to add a positive value to this statement. Seeking attention from my father by touching what didn't belong to me was a negative in my life, but through God's grace, that behavior changed for me. When I was twelve, one Easter Sunday morning, I accepted Jesus as my Lord and my Savior during a call to salvation. It was the most significant moment of joy I've ever experienced. As young as I was, my new spiritual walk made me feel wanted and loved in a way that I couldn't explain. I felt privileged to have a God that wanted me and wanted to spend time with me, as the Pastor spoke about in his sermon that Easter morning. Seeking attention for me in my young adulthood had turned into trying to assist others where help was necessary. I had become very interested in helping my mom care for my siblings while she took a job out of the home to help support us. I graduated from Clara Barton High School for the Health Professions with a diploma in Lab Technology, volunteered my time at Junius Hospital in Brooklyn, NY, to assist as a candy stripper in the Pediatric ward, became a home health aide, and took care of the sick and elderly patients, worked at Gouverneur hospital in

Gynecology and pursued higher education because I knew it would make my mom proud. I realized that seeking attention from my father had turned into seeking approval from my mother by doing good things, and I couldn't understand how this could be possible.

As a young woman, I received a revelation that I was trying to work for a privilege or a grace that God had given me with unmerited favor to win my mother's approval of my good deeds because she was upset that I still supported and loved my father despite the abuse to her and she stills hold that as her truth today. Still, I accepted her truth and tried to move on with my life as a young adult. I moved from dependence on her to independence; I developed skills and grew in confidence while forming my own opinions and beliefs about how to live my life. I started to challenge some myths that were told to me as a child that were without cause and fact; for instance, my mother said to me that I have a widow's peak on my forehead (a widow's peak is a point of hair that resembles the tip of an arrowhead that joins in the middle of the forehead) and that meant I would be a young widow if I married. I committed to future roles and responsibilities that I desired. I fell in love, became engaged to marry, and took a leap of faith, which was in line with Gould's Evolution of Adult Consciousness.

As an adult, my husband and I lived next to a Caucasian couple for thirty years; we talked to them, laughed with them, invited them over for barbecues, met their adult children, saw their grandchildren, and assisted both neighbors when they fell and were injured outside and inside of their home due to hip problems and accidents. Going into the house to help a neighbor until the ambulance comes is much different from going over to watch a football game or to have a cup of coffee and catch up.

My neighbor's husband passed away two weeks ago, and when we received the call from his daughter, we were so saddened and immediately contacted the wife for anything she might

have needed. Still, it was at the funeral and the repast that the entire Irish family received us as being privileged by them to sit with them on behalf of our dear neighbor and share in the grief, fellowship, meal, and laughter. We were appreciated by all who heard about how we cared for them over the course of thirty years; we were the only black couple in the room receiving hugs and kisses of gratitude which was heartfelt and gracious. When does privilege move from beyond the color of our skin to the condition of our hearts? When people are hurting, in need, and unloved, when comfort is necessary, and when death is sure to bring pain that can last a lifetime for some and a season for others.

It's hard for me to relate to privilege by way of skin color or economic value, even though it has always existed in our lives, but would we have been invited to the repast if our assistance wasn't required overtime at the home of one who would not ask us into the house for fellowship, but only spoke through the hedges which separated our homes in a time of need. I don't know if an example of privilege was my experience of two years in a predominantly white Junior high school attending class with what was considered a proper education with peers that didn't want to sit at the table with me at lunch, or being harassed by the neighborhood boys because my mom purchased a home and moved into a predominately white area in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn New York, or maybe the time I attended Community College in nineteen seventy-seven where I met a Caucasian male classmate whom I liked. We had a magical connection, and he wanted to date me. Still, I was afraid of him being harmed if he came into my neighborhood to visit me due to an unspoken rule that white people were not readily welcomed. Was I ashamed because of where I lived compared to his wealthy neighborhood or was it that I felt embarrassed to introduce him to my family, knowing that they looked like ordinary people trying to survive? I was beginning to understand that privilege also has pitfalls that can

emotionally and psychologically cause harm with the reality that you were granted access simply due to an appearance of what someone thought about you, even if it's in error.

Privilege has always been one-sided regardless of education, integrity, economic power, or spirituality. As a multicultural counselor, I never want to be the one who walks into the room just because I can. Still, I'd rather be the one who walks into the room because I have been humbled by the cries of humanity and bring solutions that uplift, encourage, challenge, and empower people and help them to love themselves and God beyond measure. I remember being eighteen years old and writing a poem in class that received much recognition from my professor and peers. He published my poetry in a book he wrote with my permission and gave me full credit because he said I had a gift for writing and that I should pursue it and develop my potential. Upon reading my poem to my mother, she said, "Ulonda, you sound and speak like a white person; get off your high horse and come back to earth" these were her exact words. She further stated that I act like I'm better than the rest of the family, and my younger sister agreed with her, which caused me to feel angry and disconnected from my family; although there was some truth to what she said, I no longer sound like her or the people who lived within our neighborhood, but her racial blindness prevented her from seeing educated growth in me.

I wasn't content with the typical characteristics associated with black people. I wanted to increase my vocabulary, speak with a lighter tongue, emerge in confidence, and read with perfect pronunciation and pitch, so I modeled myself after what I was looking for. It became part of my intellect and character. It didn't matter the package in which I desired came in; it only mattered the quality of what I was looking for. I followed the motto, "If you want better, you have to do better," and I wanted to be the best version of myself that I could be. I tried to think logically and solve problems, I wanted to be educated in knowledge and educational experiences,

I wanted to be full of wisdom, I wanted to learn how to apply specific skills to my future endeavors, and I wanted to move out of the projects where I grew up and live in New York City to experience cultural diversities and personal freedom from what I learned in my immediate family to be a hindrance, instead of a gateway to privilege.

During my young adult and middle adult years, I've been given the grace to mature, continue my education, marry, have a family, accept my divine call to ministry, and become a stay-at-home mom. I developed intimate relations with friends, family, and even church family, which kept me from becoming socially isolated. At the same time, my husband worked a seven to eleven shift in a Prison every day. My husband and I raised our family in love giving them a spiritual foundation and living in great expectation of God's purpose and plan for their lives as they walk with the Lord for themselves. Now I'm in middle adulthood, asking God for the privilege or grace to live long enough to see our two grandchildren walk with the Lord for themselves working out the grace of God in their lives. In this season of my life, I'm looking forward to completing the courses in clinical mental health counseling and being licensed to serve in recovery, to help people find meaning, grace, and guidance in their lives to pursue their goals and live their best lives without bias, if possible.

This middle adulthood season allows me to give back to the world all that God has bestowed upon me. I've noticed some gradual changes in my appearance, like the cute curls of gray hair starting to swirl around the edges of my hairline and the extra stretches needed after waking from sleep in the morning; genetics plays a trick with female hair loss, now you see it, and now you don't, one day I look a little puggy around the middle section, in research from Erford and Tucker (2016); and the next day organic smooth move tea takes care of it all. It's essential to be stress-free, optimistic, and spiritually sound and increase my coping skills because

clients come from all walks of life seeking words of wisdom, answers to their questions, and problems they desire to resolve with the tools that you, as a multicultural counselor, can provide. Sometimes clients can be neurotic and filled with excessive worry and negative emotions, especially with the current events in our everyday lives and the nations around us; so, I take the time to be informed to pay attention to the external as well as the internal forces that can shift my thoughts and environment. I strive to be the best person I can be and take time for self-care in every area of my life. A married woman's role expectations may change due to sickness, responsibilities, and ethnic differences. My husband is Panamanian and tends to regress to old cultural systems of doing things in an ever-changing environment and culture. Still, I'm persuaded to live life to the fullest and enjoy what's next to come because I, like the world, embrace change, and change brings growth.

Reference

Erford, B., & Tucker, I. B. (2016). *An Advanced Lifespan Odyssey for Counseling Professionals* (1st ed.). Cengage Learning.