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Racial Autobiography

One of the earliest memories I have of race was when I was in first grade. As a child, I grew up in a town where I was the only black girl in most of my classes. In kindergarten, playtime is something children look forward to the most during the school day. During play time, especially as a girl, it is fun to play dolls and cooking games while making new friends in the class. During playtime, I recall playing at a “cooking station” with my then-classmate and best friend Leslie. During this time, we usually invited other kids in our class to eat the food we were cooking. One day, while making food with Leslie, I recall one of the girls in my class with beautiful red curly hair and pale skin with freckles coming up to me and saying, “My mommy said I can’t play with you because you’re black and I am not allowed to hang out with black people.” As a child, I really couldn’t comprehend the meaning behind those words. In that moment, the thing that hurt me the most was the fact that she didn’t want to eat the food I had made for her and my other classmates. By the end of the day, I had completely forgotten that she didn’t want to try my food. Looking back on it now, I never realized the impact and severity of her words.

It was not until my first year of college that I became more aware of race and its effect on many things in our world. Growing up in a high school where I was the only black girl in my graduating class, the topic of race was always one that was avoided as much as possible. When it had been discussed, it seemed like there was only one way of viewing this topic which influenced my decisions. Because I wanted to blend in and avoid standing out, I was never given the opportunity to explore different perspectives or do research on what was taught to us because many of the teachers, parents, and students had thought the same way and treated the topic of

race the same way. Looking back now, this is what concerned me the most. I was so comfortable believing what I was being told instead of doing my own research.

When I attended California Baptist University, which had much more diversity and minorities, it was then that I realized the importance of race and doing research. It was then that I realized that there was so much that wasn't taught to us, including systemic racism and the subtle racism I experienced in high school. I began to think outside of the box instead of "wanting to fit in." To me, this was the period in my life where I learned so much about myself and the type of girl I am. During my time in high school, it was easy to feel out of place and "less desirable" because I never saw other girls who looked like me, and when I saw other black boys, I was not their type because all black girls were "too opinionated or too dramatic." However, when I was put in an environment where there was so much more diversity, I learned that I was never "less desirable" and that there was not only one way to think in this world.

Looking back on my past, what concerns me the most is the fact that I was so scared to do my own research and gain more information about justice and race out of the fear of standing out or being "too opinionated." The fact that I was so scared to step out of my comfort zone that I adapted to certain ideals makes me a bit embarrassed about my past. What encourages me the most about my past, is the fact that I am able to look back on who I was in high school and see a huge amount of growth. I have learned to speak up for myself and what is right, I have learned that it's okay to think outside of the box and make my own opinion on certain situations. As I grow up, I become aware of the importance of racial justice. I have now realized that it is not something that can be ignored because it affects me, my brothers, my parents, and my future children. Not only does it affect my loved ones, but it affects so many other people of color and people who look like me all over the United States.

