



DARVESHA MACDONALD
SILVER CITY, NEW MEXICO, USA
JUNE 2020

I went to a public school in Colorado Springs filled with kids from Black and Hispanic communities (in those days - early 1950's - it was "Negros" and "Spanish Americans"). In first grade (age 6) I was invited and went to Patty Miller's birthday party. She was black. I didn't think anything about it. But by 2nd grade (age 7) I was concerned, and one late night I was sitting on the edge of Mother's bed and I said to her, "Mommy, it's because people like us have money that people like them don't, isn't it?!" Fortunately for me I had a mother who agreed and acknowledged me for my perception.

About this time, I rode a train into Chicago and rode thru the infamous Chicago slums. That led me to Jane Addams and Hull house and from then on, I wanted to be a social worker. That is, until in 5th grade (age 10) when we were asked to do a report on the occupation to which we aspired, and I interviewed a social worker. It took about 2 minutes for me to see she was contemptuous of the people she was there to serve. That somehow was the end of my aspirations to fight poverty thru the system.

I fumbled for many years until I stumbled on the Buddha-Dharma and teachings on interdependence, and it is to those teachings and that understanding that I felt I could dedicate my life. If one understands the universe is a cooperative, co-created affair, then how can one not ... well.... cooperate?!

The deeper one goes into this understanding, the more one cannot help but see more and more clearly into one's own behavior, attitudes, ideas, concepts, emotions, prejudices and greediness. One spends their life-time trying to purify and correct. This work is never done. As soon as one sees that by drinking milk she is participating in the most violent of industries, then she turns around and sees she is sleeping under a down comforter full of violently plucked feathers. It never ends. None of us can be judgmental or intolerant because none of us are not participating in various ways in this violence. We just have to keep purifying and choosing our battles. But I am sure of this: there is no action and no behavior that is not political. Everything affects everything. Or, as John Muir said, "Everything is hitched to everything."

Addendum:

In her book White Rage historian Carol Anderson outlines the long history of structural and institutionalized racism in the U.S.A.

"Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced." *

- James Baldwin

“White Americans seem to feel that happy songs are happy and sad songs are sad, and that, God help us, is exactly the way most white Americans sing them—sounding, in both cases, so helplessly, defenselessly fatuous that one dare not speculate on the temperature of the deep freeze from which issue their brave and sexless little voices. Only people who have been “down the line,” as the song puts it, know what this music is about. I think it was Big Bill Broonzy who used to sing “I Feel So Good,” a really joyful song about a man who is on his way to the railroad station to meet his girl. She’s coming home. It is the singer’s incredibly moving exuberance that makes one realize how leaden the time must have been while she was gone. There is no guarantee that she will stay this time, either, as the singer clearly knows, and, in fact, she has not yet actually arrived. Tonight, or tomorrow, or within the next five minutes, he may very well be singing “Lonesome in My Bedroom,” or insisting, “Ain’t we, ain’t we, going to make it all right? Well, if we don’t today, we will tomorrow night.” White Americans do not understand the depths out of which such an ironic tenacity comes, but they suspect that the force is sensual, and they are terrified of sensuality and do not any longer understand it. The word “sensual” is not intended to bring to mind quivering dusky maidens or priapic black studs. I am referring to something much simpler and much less fanciful. To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be present in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread. It will be a great day for America, incidentally, when we begin to eat bread again, instead of the blasphemous and tasteless foam rubber that we have substituted for it. And I am not being frivolous now, either. Something very sinister happens to the people of a country when they begin to distrust their own reactions as deeply as they do here, and become as joyless as they have become. It is this individual uncertainty on the part of white American men and women, this inability to renew themselves at the fountain of their own lives, that makes the discussion, let alone elucidation, of any conundrum—that is, any reality—so supremely difficult. The person who distrusts himself has no touchstone for reality—for this touchstone can be only oneself. Such a person interposes between himself and reality nothing less than a labyrinth of attitudes. And these attitudes, furthermore, though the person is usually unaware of it (is unaware of so much!), are historical and public attitudes. They do not relate to the present any more than they relate to the person. Therefore, whatever white people do not know about Negroes reveals, precisely and inexorably, what they do not know about themselves.”

- James Baldwin