An Invisible Recipe

When I was eight, I spent my afternoons at the local library. Often, I was not picked up by my mother until after it closed. The librarian graciously held the library open for a half-hour or more until my mother showed up. By this time, it was dark outside, and you don't leave kids alone on a curb in the dark.

This experience created a shared camaraderie with this librarian. She shared her dinner with me in the mysterious lunchroom below the books' stacks and asked me what I liked to read. I told her I wanted to read about invisible people. The librarian told me to use the catalog and search under the words "The Invisible Man." The first one I found was called Invisible Man, by Ralph Ellison.

It was an adult book but the librarian felt I had "long ago left the children's section under life." Ellison's message of finding identity by going within, that isolation and invisibility were part of the landscape of society dedicated to denial and minimizing others, the power and clarity of this African American author's work never left me.

The subtle destructive toll of racism in all its forms is still present today. Though I, too, found power in being invisible as a child trying to survive in a violent household, I am learning, like author Ellison, that I am becoming alive through this invisibility. How is that possible? Being invisible allows for other actions to become visible, such as oppression and its enabler, colonization.

Today we think we are in a time of new divisiveness, but we have chosen to believe that racism, drug use, poverty, and inequity were invisible. What we can't see every day must mean that it doesn't exist. And when we do see it, like the homeless panhandler on the street, we look away, willing them to be invisible.

These "tactics" of invisibility come from the need to cope with overwhelm. To increase our feelings of safety, we ignore and avoid people who make us uncomfortable. We belittle or minimize people who challenge us with a viewpoint or a strategy we don't understand because we want to preserve our sense of comfort. We use 'teasing' as a sign of 'affection,' emphasizing the difference of another's appearance, mindstate, or culture we find uncomfortable. [My personal favorites are statements that say, "How does someone like you get a Masters?"]

Ralph Ellison writes: ***"I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me…When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me."***

African American scholar and author John McWhorter of Columbia University talks about this need to cope with discomfort at the expense of others in his critique of the popular book **White Fragility** by Robin DeAngelo:

*"White Fragility* is, in the end, a book about how to make certain educated white readers feel better about themselves. DiAngelo's outlook rests upon a depiction of Black people as endlessly delicate poster children within this self-gratifying fantasy about how white America needs to think—or, better, stop thinking. Her answer to white fragility, in other words, entails an elaborate and pitilessly dehumanizing condescension toward Black people. The sad truth is that anyone falling under the

sway of this blinkered, self-satisfied, punitive stunt of a primer has been taught, by a well-intentioned but tragically misguided pastor, how to be racist in a whole new way."

McWhorter's point is harsh, but also makes a point to show the issues of how deep the structure we inhabit supports the uplifting one culture/person/idea at the destruction of others, the punishment of those rising above "their station", [the origin of the microaggression "how does someone like you do better than me, i.e. successful] even here, in our welcoming, progressive, social justice environment.

As we highlight Black History Month it is vital we understand that we are NOT "done" with learning about oppression, racism, or colonization. Nor should we assume that we are not engaged in or affected by these systems. They run our country. They are part of our culture which is then ***reflected in our behavior. The only way to dismantle this structure is to transform our behaviors.*** That is what it means to do "upstream" work.

We used to say "Get out of your comfort zone" now we call these "growing edges". But they are NOT like sharp knives. Growing edges do not inflict wounds. Growing edges are just that-growing beyond your edge, your container. Think of this idea as too much batter in a baking pan. You will rise out of your container and yes, parts of you will burn, but you also have the potential to be fluffy, well baked, and delicious, because you know you used the right recipe for transformation.

And that is what transformation is, a recipe. Chef and Author of **Salt Fat Acid Heat** Samin Nosrat reflects in her research into recipes:

"In her dazzling, thorny new essay collection, **"The Book of Difficult Fruit,"** Kate Lebo writes, **"Recipes are rituals that promise transformation."** Reflecting upon my meal, I realized that my ritual had indeed made good on its promise of transformation." [bold highlight is mine]

Like cooking***, TRANSFORMATION TAKES TIME***.

I offer a recipe for you to experiment with:

One large cupful each of confirmation, comfort, and creativity

A handful of naming discomforts, acceptance, and grief

Several tablespoons of curiosity

1 quart of LOVE, mixed with vigorously with several eggs of wisdom

Remove any bits of suspicion or anger

Bake at current political temperature.

***The Book of Difficult Fruit*** by Kate Lebo: https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374718336

https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/dehumanizing-condescension-white-fragility/614146/

https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/white-antiracist-allyship-book-clubs/2020/06/11/9edcc766-abf5-11ea-94d2-d7bc43b26bf9_story.html