



I'm Leaving This Town

With all that is happening in Gaza, I was reminded of an incident that occurred many years ago in one of my workshops. I think it is a good reminder of the words of Mother Teresa: Perhaps we have no peace because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.

A European American woman in a wheelchair, named Tina, shared how she was raped by a Palestinian man on a date and was leaving town as soon as she could because it so traumatized her. She was crying and visibly trembling. She said that since then she has been frightened of all Middle Eastern men.

Questions for the Facilitator:

- What came up for you about this vignette?
- What didn't she say?
- What are some of the keywords in this story?

I'm Leaving This Town (con't)

- What are some of Tina's issues?
- What is Tina trying to say to the group? Why?
- What is hard about this vignette? Why?
- What does Tina need?
- Who do you work with first? The audience or Tina?
- How can you incorporate the audience?
- Who are you looking for in this audience? Why?
- What do you think will change Tina's mind about leaving? Why?

Lee Mun Wah's Thoughts:

I'm not quite sure why I wondered how she got paralyzed, except that there was something in the ease with which she expressed herself that made me wonder if she had ever been able-bodied. In short, I wanted to know the historical context of her journey to get to this place in time.

Her conclusion that all Palestinian men were dangerous due to being raped by one man of color exemplified how this society often generalizes about people of color from the actions of one individual. I wanted to find a way for her to come to this realization on her own and to explore where it came from and how it continues to affect her perceptions of people of color.

I also thought that I needed to validate the trauma of her rape because it could be so easy to dismiss her response as simply being racist.

Another consciousness that I brought to this vignette was the impact of my being a person of color. I was wondering what impact my being Asian and a man would have on her willingness to also be open. And so I became aware of the space between us and her response to me. I kept watching her eyes and facial expressions as she spoke to me. In moments like this, voice tone and facial expressions are critical. I took my cues from her and acted accordingly.

Throughout her telling her story, I kept looking at the audience for someone of Palestinian heritage who might be reacting to what she was saying. At the same time, I was also looking for a woman of Euro American heritage who Tina might be able to relate to and trust.

Lee Mun Wah's Intervention:

I asked her how she came to be in a wheelchair and she shared that her former husband, who was also white, threw her against a wall in a fit of alcoholic rage, leaving her paralyzed from the waist down. I asked her if she was now afraid of all white men. She was surprised at my statement and shared with the audience, "No, I wasn't. This is the first time I've ever thought of him or myself for that matter, as coming from a white group. I have to really think about that. I just saw him as a person – an individual."

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A couple shared that they were Palestinian and that they were sorry that she was raped and that there were also kind and respectful Palestinians, too. They said that they'd like to invite her over for dinner. Tina cried and said she'd like that. They all hugged and the audience was stunned. There wasn't a dry eye in the entire room. This is quite typical in most of my workshops. I think perhaps because so much has been kept inside for so many people of color and women, that the release of all those years of anguish and pain is a huge relief because they are finally acknowledged and validated for what they went through.

Group/Dyad Process Questions:

- What was the turning point for Tina?
- Who did you identify with? Why?
- What was hard and what was good about this experience?
- What did you learn from this experience?
- Which groups are you afraid of and where did that fear come from?

Audience Summary:

It is not easy to revisit our past, especially if it is traumatic. I want to thank Tina for taking that journey. Sometimes if we don't, a part of us remains there – unfinished and forever frozen with fear and doubt. I also want to thank those who came forth and took a risk to stand with her by opening their homes and sharing their world with her. That is what it will take if we are ever to end racism and all the other isms – to walk each other home.

What you saw here today was not easy. There was no script for this, except to begin. Each person here had no idea what they were going to say today. But, it is my belief that what happened was no accident. Someone once said that there are no coincidences – just planned accidents waiting to happen. I believe that these folks met today because they needed each other – they just didn't know how much.

I also want to thank each of you who witnessed this. I hope that it will inspire you to walk across the room like you did today and to get to know this person you paired up with. Visit their homes and open your doors to each other – who knows – you might have a great dinner and possibly a new friendship.

When I think about what "community" really means to me...it is taking care of each other like a family should. When we do that as neighbors and as friends, then we will grow as a community and as a nation.





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