

1 SELF AWARENESS

The birth of my younger sister Nicole was significant for two main reasons; first, it ended my life as an only child and secondly, it introduced me to the concept of racial differences. A few weeks after my sister's birth, my mother visited my school and brought Nicole with her. I was excited beyond belief and couldn't wait to introduce my entire class to my brand new baby sister. I was glowing with pride, and I made sure every one of my classmates stood up so that they could get a better view of her, as I smiled uncontrollably the entire time. I was a big brother and felt like the entire world needed to know.

Later that day, while walking home from school, my best friend Antonio Plecebo told me that Jimmy, one of our classmates, called my baby sister a Nigger. I had absolutely no idea what the word Nigger meant but for some reason, it infuriated me. I did not identify the word with anything related to race, all I knew was that it sounded like Jimmy was trying to disrespect my sister, my brand new baby sister, and there was no way in hell I was going to let that fly, so I headed straight to Jimmy's house so that I could whip his ass!

Sherman Avenue was a small street and our rented house was one of a few very small, single-family houses on my end of the block. Jimmy lived in a trailer located in the trailer park at the other end of the block. Walking past my house on my way to Jimmy's trailer I stopped inside to drop off my book bag, kiss my sister and tell my mother that I would be back.

When I left my house there was a small crowd of kids gathered outside in anticipation of the fight that they somehow heard was about to take place. This was way before cell phones and text messages, so the rumor of the fight had to travel from mouth-to-mouth in the 10 minutes or so that it took us to walk home from school. As everyone followed me down to Jimmy's house, the crowd, growing in eagerness, began to talk louder and walk faster and I could feel my heart starting to pound in my chest.

I didn't need the crowd to hype me up because I was already pissed off but their energy definitely provoked more of my anger, so by the time I got to Jimmy's house I headed straight for his door and kicked it as opposed to knocking, to make sure he knew I was mad. His mother came to the door, looked at the crowd and saw the anger on my face and immediately knew that I was there to fight her son. She said, "I'm not sending Jimmy out there with all you boys. If ya'll are gonna fight, ya'll gonna fight him fair." She made no attempt to understand what was going on or to sit us down and work out the problem, this was how things were handled in our neighborhood and she knew this.

I picked up a rock and told her that if she didn't send him out I was going to throw it through her window. Instead of snatching my little ass up and putting me in my place or marching me right up the street and telling my mother what I threatened to do, Jimmy's mother sent Jimmy out to face me. As soon as he walked out of his door I kicked him with all the force I had, square in his balls and he dropped to his knees, with the wind completely knocked out of him and a look of shock on his face.

Before he could even think about moving I punched him two or three times in his face and kicked him in his stomach as I could feel the rage inside of me growing more intense. I looked up when I heard his mother say "you dirty little mother fucker, I told you to fight fair." Without hesitating, I threw the rock I was holding and attempted to hit her with it, instead missing and hitting their front door. Stunned, she closed the door but continued to watch from the open screen.

Jimmy was trying to catch his breath and was starting to moan when I stood over him and started screaming, "my sister ain't a Nigger, you're a Nigger" as I hit and punched and kicked him.

At some point his mother came outside of their trailer and grabbed me, moving me off of Jimmy while I swung and cussed and threatened to punch her. By this time Jimmy was crying and had blood gushing from his nose and from a cut on his forehead. She picked him up and they both went into their trailer. I was furious that she stopped me from exacting revenge for Jimmy's disrespect, so I threw another rock at their door, cussing and yelling for Jimmy to come back outside. Antonio and a few of my other friends grabbed me and dragged me down towards my house. The rest of the crowd was silent, stunned at what they had just witnessed and I was still throwing rocks and cussing the entire way home.

This was the first time that I can remember "blacking out", completely losing self-control when anger and raw emotion took over and filled me with pure rage. And this was the first time that my mother talked to

Chapter 1-Sample from “White Nigger: The Struggles and Triumphs Growing up Bi-Racial in America
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me about race and tried to explain that I was not white like she was or white like the rest of my family was or white like most of my friends. This was the first time anyone told me that I was black, or at least that the world would consider me as being black. I refused to listen to what she was trying to say to me not because black was offensive to me, I had no idea what being black meant, but offensive because it meant I was different.

How could I be different? Why would she say this to me and why say it now, right after I spent my afternoon beating the shit out of a kid for calling my sister a Nigger. How could that term really apply to my sister, to me, to anyone I knew? My stepfather attempted to explain it to me but this only made me angrier and less receptive as I had already developed a strong dislike for him in the few years that he had been in our lives. I guess I’ve always been stubborn, extremely stubborn, and accepting what they were trying to tell me would mean that I was different than my friends and more importantly to me, different than my mother, the woman that raised and loved me and the woman that I loved more than anything.

For the first time in my life, staring back at me in the mirror was someone different than I had always seen. This was the day that I learned that the word Nigger had some sort of attachment to me and my sister and this made me even more angry at Jimmy. Soon after, I was beating him up every day on the way to school or after school when he avoided me in the mornings. Every time I hit him I would hear that word echoing in my head “Nigger” and my anger would intensify.