



Caprice Hollins

CO-FOUNDER
CULTURES CONNECTING

ADDRESS
Cultures Connecting
17701 108th Ave. SE #353
Renton, WA 98055

PHONE
(206) 353-2831

EMAIL
caprice.hollins@
culturesconnecting.com



My mom, Darlene Jones is white and my dad, Sam Jones is black. I have four older brothers and sisters Mike, Ted, Kelly and Mark who are all white, blond hair and blue eyes, from my mom’s first marriage, and a younger sister Suzanne who is also multiracial. My mother was born and raised in Washington, grew up catholic and married at the age of 18, shortly after becoming pregnant with her first child. She ultimately ended up divorcing her husband and three years after her fourth child was born, became pregnant with me. This created a strain on her relationship with her parents. A white woman, on welfare raising six children alone, two of whom were mixed race during the 60’s was something that most people disapproved of, to say the least.

She met my grandparents Marion and George Simmons, a black couple who didn’t have children of their own, while pregnant with me. She started working for them in their barbecue restaurant and catering business. Eventually she started calling them mama and papa and us kids called them grandma and grandpa. After our sister Kelly died from viral encephalitis at the age of 14 my mother started working off and on, on the Alaskan pipeline and volunteered as a fire fighter. Mark, Suzanne and I went to live with our grandparents during these times. A few years later my mother and grandparents realized that if something was to happen to her we could be dispersed by the state so they legally adopted her when she was 42 years old. I also grew up with two older African American foster siblings, Robert and Judy Wilkins, who stayed with us when things got tough in their home. My brother Mark was openly gay at an early age. My aunts and uncles are my mother’s best friends and my cousins are their children. I have always relished the diversity in my family but it wasn’t until graduate school that I began to understand and acknowledge the ways in which I unconsciously stereotyped people in harmful ways because of their differences.

My area of focus in graduate school was clinical psychology with an emphasis in multicultural and community psychology. We spent the entire first year unpacking our bias and exploring the dynamics of difference. Because my family was so diverse I thought I didn’t have any stereotypes, prejudice or a negative attitude towards people who were different from me, certainly not racial difference, after all my mom is white! In truth, my diverse family experiences became proof of my truth that I was free from bias and stereotyping and this only made it more challenging for me to explore ways in which I had benefitted from privileges as a multiracial light skin woman. It didn’t take long for me to begin to see that my attitudes and beliefs were deeply engrained in my psyche—not only about people who were different from me, but also towards those groups whom I identified with. It was a tender time in my life that involved a lot of pain, anger, shame, guilt and sometimes denial. But the freedom I gained from embracing all of who I am and the ways in which it has deepened my relationships with others has been well worth the journey.

I often see my old ways of being and thinking reflected in the words and actions of people I now work with as I help navigate them through their journey of open, honest and critical reflection around race relations and I get excited for them and the possibilities of who we can become. I understand that this work is demanding, complicated and exhausting to say the least but I also know that there is no better feeling than to see yourself and the world as it really is. When you have an awakening the dance of discomfort in cross cultural relationships begins to dissipate. You begin to shake the fear of being seen and you learn to embrace not only your strengths but your humanness. Somehow along the way you learn to love yourself better and with this a freedom and inner peace that can lead you on a course of action and advocacy towards social justice evolves. This is why I love this work. Because while it is difficult beyond words it is also rewarding beyond explanation – it is our hope for a better tomorrow.

Where I'm From

BY CAPRICE HOLLINS

I'm from an Irish and Scottish world; translated—white, who never fully accepted me but never quite rejected me, like the way they did my dark skinned sisters. I'm from African Queens who take pride in the gaps between their teeth, until years of enslavement divided us with “You think you're better than me don't you?”

That's where I'm from

I'm from a laid back, pool-playing absent father who had children I've never met and “Your daddy loves you honey, he's a good man.” I'm from a pimp for a step dad, Lester Lee Wingate the III, but there were still fun times, in Ketchikan and Valdez, and hey, we got a new baby sister now.

That's where I'm from

I'm from a mother who made us a family when her own turned the other way, who loved me with all her being, who believed that I was beautiful, whose eyes would beam with pride at every step I took, who would take away all my pain if she could, “You have the world to fight, don't fight one another,” shot gun in her hand if anyone was to ever try to hurt one of her babies, and “Don't judge one another,” kind of mother.

That's where I'm from

I'm from Marion and George's barbecue and catering on 23rd and Judkins, grandparents who found the blessing of being grandparents in me, piled high on their bed watching old black and whites seeing whites dressed as Chinese and Indians? Playing penny ante poker, homemade potato chips, costumes, jams and jellies, and a kitchen that always smelled ooh sooo good—everything from scratch except for the closet full of toilet paper and paper towels, because you just never know, and “How come you don't have more black friends honey?”

That's where I'm from I'm from

Myrtle Creek Oregon, white grandparents who were ashamed of the color of my skin; hearing taunts of “Nigger go home!” where teachers pretended they didn't hear, and a white grandmother who believed if she told me to just ignore it that I actually could. Can't wait to go home because names do hurt me.

I'm from Gumbo, Oxtail Stew, Collard Greens, Mahalia Jackson on clean up Sundays, Michael Jackson's Enjoy Yourself, steppin' to the groove and doin' the bump, if you can.

Continued...



Where I'm From

BY CAPRICE HOLLINS

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I'm from summer trips to the Oregon Coast, to visit Father Timmy and Uncle Billy and "Mommy, who's Jim Crow?" Whistle while you work, Nixon is a...
"You kids knock that off!"

That's where I'm from I'm from Coupeville Washington, loving summer life on the farm until... "What's that you're putting in your hair?" and "You must be good at basketball." I don't need to ask you why you won't ask me to dance, I already know, because you nicknamed me Shadow and played games called Nigger Knocking, then said you were sorry that you wanted to invite me to your sleepover but couldn't.

I'm from a family who loves me but a world that still judges me, because of the color of my skin.

Where are you from?

