

Introduction

How It All Began

A few years ago, God helped me develop a new method of fellowship. I wanted to study the Bible, be inspired, and develop a deeper relationship with the Lord. I read one devotional, then two, which quickly became three devotional readings daily. On the third devotional, a new way of communicating with the Lord started. I was able to highlight scriptures and write them down in my journal. As I wrote my journal, messages from God crystalized in my mind. Applying scriptures and these daily messages had a tremendous impact on the people I came in contact with, especially my daughter, Laura. One day I stumbled on a card written by my deceased Aunt Elsie. Reading her card not only cheered me up, but it became a conduit, linking me from the past to the future. I could apply her advice today, even though she wrote the words many years ago. She was still having an impact on me although she was no longer alive. If I was able to get so much out of her cards years later, I felt my journal could be very useful for my daughter years from now. What started out as a message to Laura quickly developed into God's divine plan. During these morning sessions, I realized God wants me to be still, pray, listen, and obey, so that's what I did. I was

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able to quiet my spirit and begin to take the devotional readings as entry points for writing in my journal. God would tell me what to write, give me images and directions on what and how to meditate. These morning God-Sessions were so rich and meaningful, they were like ten sermons preached in 40 minutes. Reading, praying, and listening during these morning God-Sessions revealed personalized hidden messages. As I read the Bible during these morning sessions, the communication between God and me strengthened. God sends messages to his people! As these messages started to take shape, my faith soared, developing me into a true believer. I was able to discern and pick up on things I didn't know or notice before. New ideas emerged. The application of the scriptures became easier. God started to talk with me about everything. The closer I got to God, the closer He got to me. Scriptures and stories came out of the page and became one with me. A message of peace and Unity started to transform. I realized there was a message that needed to come forth. Many of the morning instructions were given as commands

to follow. Anoint your feet. Now anoint the floor. Kneel and worship Me this morning. Play praise music in the car and pray all the way to work. These commands were orchestrated differently every day based on what God wanted me to learn or experience. Take the clutter out of the room because you serve a God of order. Don't worry; I am your shield and protection. No weapon formed against you will prosper, no courtroom lie will be held against you; this was what I heard one morning when I was on my way to court. One morning I was told there was a message He wanted me to spread worldwide. This message became more apparent as time went on. But in that coming day, no weapon turned against you shall succeed, and you will have justice against every courtroom lie. (Isaiah 54:17 NLT)

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Born into the Message

I was born into the message that God was bringing to light. It was a message centered on the importance of international mixing of the races. I was to write a book based on global unity. I resisted, but God said, "Yes, you are capable, and you will write this book. This book is inside you; I will tell you the words. Don't worry! Let it flow." Then Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth; if you have faith and don't doubt, you can do things like this and much more. You can even say to this mountain, 'May you be lifted up and thrown into the sea,' and it will happen. (Matthew 21:21 NLT)

So, I started to take notes in my journal based on my devotional readings. One word kept coming back to me. Because of all the distractions in our world, we have lost our ability to connect with one another. We think we are connected, but we are disconnected when it comes to relating to one another.

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"Let me take you back to the beginning so you can see the connection I want you to have to this message of Unity," God said. The flashbacks God showed me of my life became crystal clear about how my life crisscrossed with other races. He wanted me to see the benefits of Unity so that I could be used to send forth his message.

Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by

every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.

(Psalms 46:10 NLT)

The birth of Jan Ford at 231 Grant Street in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, on August 12, 1956, was unique. She was 9 pounds and 10 ounces “with eyebrows and hips” were the stories my mother told over and over. “Boy, look at those hips and tweezed eyebrows.” That’s what Dr. Silverman said to my mother, Lucille, when I was born. Dr. Silverman was my father’s friend from high school. My father said he used to walk home from school with a boy named Silverman, who later became a doctor. In 1956, the year I was born, there was a terrible baby virus with a high fatality rate.

Five months after my birth, I caught it. Dr. Silverman was determined to save my life. He stayed at our home, converting the kitchen table into a hospital bed for me. Dr. Silverman redirected all his calls from his office to our house. He gave my mother three diapers. He said that if I didn’t have a bowel movement by the third diaper, he would meet her at the hospital because there was nothing more he could do. When the third diaper finally showed signs of improvement, our family was grateful and blessed by Dr. Silverman’s efforts. His own daughter, however, wasn’t as fortunate, as she died from the same virus.

The neighborhood in Perth Amboy was full of a multitude of cultures from around the world. My neighbors were

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my first playmates. Their names were Linda and Jeff. “Jan, can you come out and play?” was what I heard screaming from the back yard. There was no fence in our back yard because this was the second generation of kids. My mother said the families got along so well for three generations they didn’t need to build a fence. Their grandmother had ten cats, and my grandfather had nine dogs. I can’t imagine how that back yard looked with all those cats and dogs running around. I remembered running our wagons through the yard and playing all sorts of games. One day I realized for the first time that my skin color was different from Linda’s. I said to her: “Did you notice that I’m darker than you?”

“Yes, I know,” she said. We didn’t skip a beat and kept on playing. That was the only time we mentioned our skin color. It didn’t mean much to us because we were friends.

Our favorite playtime sessions centered around Linda teaching me dance steps from her dance classes. We would put on all types of shows for our parents. The first dance I choreographed for my parents was Smoke Gets in Your Eyes. I was so proud to complete my first choreographed dance.

My parents proudly applauded as we shared our dance talent. They always recognized the many talents and gifts of their children.

My mother sold Avon products so that she could pay for my dance classes at Miss Ruth's School of Dance, located in Fords, New Jersey. My father orchestrated his flower deliveries around dropping me off at dance school. Sometimes I was late or early, depending on my father's delivery schedule. I was the only black girl at Miss Ruth's School of Dance. That didn't matter to me as long as I was dancing. I don't recall any racial tension or any mistreatment. My focus was on learning to dance. Everyone was friendly and respectful to our family. I went on to join the ballet company, La Jeunesse, which set the stage for what was to come. In high school,

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my schedule included science, in which I excelled, and afterschool dance classes that were taught by a Russian ballet master. She was strict, but I liked her class. This ballet class was followed by a two hour company rehearsal. New classes such as modern dance was added to the list of dance classes. Modern dance was natural for me. La Jeunesse was due to travel for a week, which meant I would have to miss school for that time. My mother and I decided that missing school for a week did not fit into our plans for college. I wanted to get the best grades; so missing school and going on a dance tour wasn't an option.

In my father's flower shop, the diverse community of Perth Amboy loved to socialize while buying flowers. The original owners of Clark the Florist were Lillian and John Clark. These Irish immigrants cultivated this international perspective. They hired my grandmother Laura Ford as their housekeeper. My father started out by sweeping the floor in their tiny shop at age 12. The Clarks paid for classes in floral design, furthering his ability to become an outstanding florist.

My father's favorite story was the day Mrs. Lillian Clark took him as a young boy to Woolworth for lunch. They refused to serve him lunch because he was black. Mrs. Clark's reaction was very unexpected. She had class and style, so in the 1940's it was very unladylike to raise your tone of voice, rant and demand a different outcome. According to my father she acted out so much, she left them with no choice but to serve her and my father. The Clarks' love continued to grow for my father. Since they didn't have children my father was adopted unofficially as their son. Edward L. Ford inherited their business, Clark the Florist, where he served

his community for 50-plus years. From my earliest memories all races came to purchase flowers from Clark the Florist on Smith Street. John and Lillian Clark are role models for

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today's society to follow. Transcending race by your actions benefit the entire community. My father's demeanor was warm and friendly to all. He and the community worked together to create a harmonious environment. There were conflicts, but they never resulted in hate or violence. In fact, during the March on Washington in 1963, we marched in Perth Amboy, singing "Blacks and whites together. Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day." Reflecting on these times, I now know that this song brings people together in Unity.

From Dr. Silverman, a Jewish doctor who helped my family overcome the baby virus that could have killed me, to growing up in the diversity of Perth Amboy, there was a message of how Unity brings blessings. God was showing me that my entire life was enriched by the wide variety of races that crossed my path.

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Finding Unity Moments

Take this time to think about experiences in your life

when you traveled. Did you isolate yourself and talk only to the people in your group? What about the friends in your group? Are they all one race? Did you have a conversation with someone you didn't know? Think back to those situations when you talked to someone of a different race, face to face. What was the topic of your conversation? The answers to these questions can help us reach across racial lines to get to know someone. I call these moments when we just have a person-to-person conversation without us thinking about the color of one's skin a Unity Moment (UM).

If we travel with an open mind without any preconceived ideas and open up to other possibilities, these UMs will happen. The following questions give us situations where Unity Moments come to life. Do we eat with our tour guides? How many people do we converse with in the hotel? Do you have a conversation with the workers, maid, and staff? Investigate where the native people of a place you are visiting go to eat food and have fun. It is tough to live in this highly

traveled world without coming in contact with someone of

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another race. When the opportunities present themselves, take advantage of these golden encounters.

Task 1: Take the time to think about the beginning of your life and map out your Unity Journey. Find those places where you connected, or your parents connected with someone of another color or race. How would your life change if you didn't have people of color in your life? Meditate on the benefits of these UM. Embrace these moments with gratitude.

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