



Video Story Transcript

Being Black Enough: Bullying and Race Discrimination

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Link to YouTube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCS3SM439sY>

Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

Hi, I'm Linda Gorham.

Do you remember Ben Carson? Ben Carson was the African-American surgeon who ran for president of the United States back in 2016. Well, during that time, Ben Carson made a statement about President Barack Obama. He said that Barack Obama was not black enough. Here are his reasons. He said Barack Obama grew up in Hawaii with his white grandparents. Ah, Barack Obama went to private schools and Barack Obama didn't grow up poor and in the ghetto.

When I heard that I wanted to scream. I wanted to go and talk to Ben Carson myself. I wanted to say to Ben Carson really are you going to go there? Are you going to do what people have been doing for generations and take an entire race and determine what it means to be black? Are you going to do that to the President of the United States? Are you going to do that to me? Are you going to take me back to every time somebody told me I was not black enough? Because my grandparents didn't live in the south? Or because I didn't wear an afro or African clothing? Because I didn't grow up poor? Are you going to label me, like so many others, because my black parents looked black and white? Or because of the way I speak? Or because of the way I fix my hair? I know it's cliché but if I had a penny for every time somebody told me I was not black enough, I'd be rich. But who wants that kind of wealth?

My father was in the service and he was a career Army officer. And he always said, "You, Linda, the oldest child, you are the one that has to set the example for your sisters. You have to pay attention and respect your sisters and take care of your family."

"Yes, sir."

He would say to me, "You have to always make sure you get good grades and graduate college."

"Yes sir."

And then he would say to me, "Linda, remember you have to be three times smarter to be equal."

"Three times smarter to be equal? Three times smarter than who, whom? Equal to whom?"

"Number Ones, Linda. Number Ones," my father would say.

My father and my mother did not want us to use negative terms when it came to race. My father was a brown skinned African-American man. My mother was a white, light skinned African-American woman. When they got married in 1945, people thought their marriage was interracial. Something very taboo, something very unusual back then. And they were called many, many names. And they didn't want us to grow up with that.

So white people were number ones. Black people were Number Twos. It was casual. Like if I said a white guy and a black guy. My father would say a number one and a number two. OK. Well, you know, what I said to my father, "Why can't we be the number ones and they be the number twos?"

And my father's answer was always the same, "That's the way it is, Linda. That's just the way it is." He was in the service. We had traveled everywhere. That's what you do when you're a career Army officer. My father, I would say, with his travels, by the time I was 13, I had lived in seven houses, on two continents. I had traveled 17,000 miles, not vacation miles, moving miles. And I had attended five schools in three states. And that's the way it was. And that's the way it was going to be. Number ones. Number twos. We are number two.

I learned what it meant to be number two for the first time when I was in kindergarten. It was 1959 and we were in jur... in New Jersey. And it was St. Patrick's Day and my mother dressed me all up in green. I had on a green shirt. I had a green plaid skirt on, it was wool and it had vertical stripes. Nice, beautiful stripes. And I had green ribbons in my hair. And I went to school that day and another kindergarten teacher, not my own, looked me up and down said, "Well, my, my, my I have never seen an Irish nxxxx before.

When I got home that day, I was behind my mother when I said to her, "Mommy, what's an Irish nxxxxx?"

My mother turned around so fast. She had two long braids that hung down her back. When she turned around, one of those braids whipped through the air and smacked her on the other cheek. She smashed out her ever-present cigarette. And with the words and the smoke, came her feelings she said, "Well, that will never happen again."

The next day she took me to school as she always did. She gave me a kiss at my door and she went straight to the principal's office. I would love to tell you that that teacher apologized. She didn't. And my mother never mentioned the incident again until St. Patrick's Day rolled around next year and every year after that. She would stick her head in my room and she'd say, "Remember, Linda, no green today not even a speck."

I know what she was trying to do. My mother was trying to help. You have to learn to adjust when you move around a lot. You have to learn to adjust when you're number two or three or four or whatever you are. In my

case, that meant we moved, we made friends, we moved on. And that's just the way it was. My mother would say, "Think of every move as an adventure."

From my father, "Linda, make every move work. Be an example for your sisters. Be a soldier, make it work."

"Yes sir."

And I did. My early schools, I was the only black student in the school or one of a small handful. And I made it work. But seventh grade was an experience I will never forget. My father was shipped off to Vietnam. It was 1965. My sisters, my mother, and I were shipped up to New Jersey to live with my grandparents. Another school. So what? I was used to another school. I was ready for it. Make it work. And this school was right around the corner. I didn't have to go far. And this school was 100 percent black. Number twos, my people. I'm ready... Right?

By the end of the first week, the girls in my class were calling me, "white girl." And it wasn't just the two words, "white girl," it was the way they said it. As if those words burned on the insides of their mouths. And when they said those words, they had to spit them out to get them out. It was a roll of the eyes and a roll of the head. It was, (mocking huh and sound), "White girl." And the taunting was relentless. "You dress white, you act white, you talk white, you think you are white."

"No, no, I'm just like you. I'm not white. I'm not!"

"Sure you are." (Sing-song mocking), "Linda is a white girl. Linda is a white girl."

I was dying inside. How could I not make this one work? What could I do? I tried everything that I could think of. I wanted to tell my mother what was going on. But my mother... Well, my father was in Vietnam. My mother was living with her in-laws. She had enough on her plate. So, I told myself to buck it up and be a soldier and fight my own personal war. But after a point, I couldn't stand it anymore. And I sat down with my mother. And as I told her everything, three months of tears came out of my eyes. I told her everything. The taunting, the harassment on the way home from school, the pushing, the shoving, the names, the glue in my hair, the threats to cut off my ponytail. "White girl."

My mother said. "Oh, Linda. These girls have been together since kindergarten. They all know each other. You're new. You're the new person. The other schools you went to, they were used to having kids come and go. This school isn't. Soon as they get to know you, it'll be fine."

"Can I transfer? Please. Anywhere."

"No. It's your school around the corner. You were assigned." Now my mother went to school the very next day. My mother went to school many, many, many, many, many days. My mother even came to pick me up after school. But I'm going to tell you the truth. Seventh grade was hell. The good news, my father came home from Vietnam and we moved again, another school. Thank goodness.

Now eighth grade was in a school that was almost all black. Not quite there yet. And I was fine. And then high school was the same way. But in high school, in 1967, well, the, the, the, the Black Panther movement was going and there was a lot of activism. And so, my classmates started wearing African clothing. They started wearing Afros. They started greeting each other by saying, "Habari Gana," which is Swahili for "Hello." I didn't do that stuff. So, they started saying to me, "You're not black enough."

Not. Black. Enough.

OK. Where do I fit in? Who am I? I thought I knew but it doesn't seem like I'm fitting in anywhere. I needed a plan. I was not going to fight another war. So, I decided, OK, I will join clubs where I know some popular kids are and maybe that will help. And then I tried out for the cheerleading squad. Cheerleaders are popular, right? It took me two years to make it on the squad and that helped a lot.

In my junior year, some of my friends, friends, were calling me by another name. And I liked it, Bubbles.

Here's my mother. "Bubbles?" (Blowing smoke from cigarette.) "Sounds like a stripper name to me."

"Mom, no, it's not a stripper name. They call me Bubbles because they like me. They say I have a bubbly personality."

(Blowing smoke from cigarette.) "Still sounds like a stripper name to me." But for me, it was the first time in so long that I was acknowledged but being the same me I had always been. I had friends. And by the way, in high school reunions, they still call me Bubbles.

But some wounds...some wounds run deep. It was 17 years before I wore green on St. Patrick's Day again. I had graduated college. I had my first professional job in a corporation. And that St. Patrick's Day morning, when I put on a green scarf, I felt a surge of power over that kindergarten teacher, over those seven grade girls, over those high school girls, and everybody in between who had called me ugly names.

I am black enough. I am Linda enough. I am enough.