



Video Story Transcript

I Am Somebody

By: Storyteller Linda Gorham
www.lindagorham.com

Link to YouTube Video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4eNwRWaqj0

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.

I believe we all have a story to tell. We are all a product of those who came before us and we are the preparation for the future. I am somebody. And so is everyone else I know. As you listen to my story, I hope you are inspired to tell your own.

I am somebody.

I am the daughter of a man who believed that dinner was to be served at 6 p.m. sharp and every place setting was to have a fork, a knife, and a spoon, whether they were needed or not. My father would wake us up every morning on Saturdays and Sundays, by playing referrer, revelry. “*It's time to get up. It's time to get up. It's time to get up in the morning.*” Try listening to that at 6:00 a.m. on the weekends. But my father believed that children should be productive and should get up early, have a good breakfast, and get on with their day.

He also believed that children were probably only one reason to be on the face of this earth and that was to get a good education, to go to college, and then to have a good career.

My father also believed that fried chicken and pizza should be properly eaten with a knife and a fork. Now, I can understand a deep-dish pizza but have you ever tried eating a chicken wing with a knife and a fork? In my house, there was something called the 1969 fried chicken rebellion. But that's another story that I'll tell you at another time.

My father told me his proudest moment was after I turned 18, and he took me to the polls to vote in my first national election. We had to get up early. We had to be there at 7:00 a.m. My father was always first in line.

And that day we were too. And I will never forget the look on my father's face when he stepped aside to let me, his oldest daughter, vote first. I will tell you I have never missed an election since.

I am somebody.

I'm the product of a woman who was a light skinned African-American who married a dark skinned African-American man, back in 1949. Now, black people have always known that we come in all shades and all colors but not quite then. And especially not with white people who thought that my parents' union was an interracial marriage; something quite taboo and very rare back then. Well, I will tell you, it was a long time before I understood how hard this was on my parents, especially my light skinned mother when she would walk down the street holding the hands of her three brown skinned daughters. And it was even longer before I understood my mother's disdain for people who judged her without ever getting to know anything about her.

I and somebody.

I'm the daughter of a career Army officer who graduated from officer's candidate school in 1946. It was a proud day. He and five other African-Americans were among the graduating class. Well, that pride turned to utter disappointment when they learned that they would not be able to attend the graduation party because it was going to be held in an all-white officer's club.

I am somebody.

I am the daughter of a woman who believed there were two keys to a successful marriage. Soft feet and long hair. OK, I've never had long hair but I've had soft feet for all 28 years of my marriage but it doesn't matter. I have a wonderful husband. And we have two fine, young men as sons. And they're full of intelligence, and creativity, and wit. And I can't wait to see how our sons take on the world.

I am somebody.

I'm the niece of a woman who was a tireless, well-loved educator. And when she retired, an entire new wing was built on to her high school. And that wing was named after her.

I am somebody.

I'm the niece of a man who in 1952 won two gold medals in the Olympics in track: the 200 meter dash and the 400 meter relay. It was a proud moment when he came home to Jersey City, New Jersey and had a ticker tape parade. The first African-American man to ever have such an honor. And four years later, he went back to the Olympics and won a silver medal.

I am somebody.

I am the granddaughter of a matriarchal woman who was strong and proud and held her family together with good values. And during the one year that my sisters and I had to live with her, she made us take a teaspoon of cod liver oil, three times a week, in the wintertime. She said it would keep us healthy. Have you ever tasted cod liver oil? Swallowing it is horrific. I would rather chew on the head of a dead fish. But the worst part about it is, all during the day it keeps coming up as burps. You try to be in seventh grade, trying to make new friends, and burping cod liver oil. This was not pleasant.

But I am somebody.

I am the granddaughter of a Georgia man who had a white father and an African American mother. The mother was only 14 years old. Her family was forced to live on the father's land as sharecroppers. It was not a consensual relationship. The mother died in childbirth and my grandfather's father, well, he never acknowledged his responsibility as a father. And my grandfather was raised by, as they say, a village. And he only went to school until third grade. And he only went to school when there was no work to be done in the fields. But that man left Georgia. He went to New Jersey. He told us, he walked all the way to New Jersey. My grandmother said he took the train. And I believe the train because a train saved his life. Because my grandfather became a Pullman Porter on that train. And my grandfather, he learned by cleaning the, the that the train cars and by carrying the luggage and by listening to the conversation he learned about what it meant to be a family man.

And he turned out to be a fantastic father and an even better grandfather. And he taught himself to read as an adult. But this very proud, intelligent man, like so many other Pullman Porters was forced to endure being called, "George," instead of his first name because the travelers refused to call him, "Sir."

I am somebody.

I'm the granddaughter of another man, whom I don't know much about, but I know he had a large family. I know he saved up to take his family to the circus and as they stood in line of the circus, he held his tickets up high and someone snatched the tickets and they never went to the circus. But I have a story to tell about him.

I am somebody.

I am the great, granddaughter of a full-blooded Mohawk Indian, whom I'm told, wore a red feather in her long, straight, jet black hair.

I am a product of a family who was intelligent and smart and witty and clever and creative. But a family who was limited in so many ways, will never know all of the potential they could have had, because they were not judged by their potential. They were judged by the color of their skin. But in spite of that, they did amazing things. And they and I are all related to and descended from people called many things African-American, Afro-American, Negro, black, colored, slave...and much, much worse.

Now, I don't know all their stories but I know some. And I tell their stories when I can because that's my past and I am creating my future. And I feel their pain. And I feel their angst and I feel their determination to survive. And I want to pass that on to my children.

And ironically enough, I am also the multi-generational granddaughter of Richard Stockton, proud signer of the Declaration of Independence, the very document that should have forbid slavery.

I am somebody.