



Video Story Transcript

Loving Someone Tall: A Conversation With My Father About Race

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Link to YouTube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8xJHcr3Su8>

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.

My name is Laura Packer.

I was born in 1967, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to a nice, liberal, middle-class, Jewish family. I was raised to believe that you judge people based on their actions not on the color of their skin. My mom, she always said that people are the same inside. So, when I brought home my elementary school best friend, Carla, she's African-American, my parents treated her just like their own daughter. It was great. Everything was fine until I was an adolescent. And then, on top of all of the usual adolescent woes, I was dating. And then I brought home the German guy. For my parents, who were born during World War II, American Jews, this was really hard. After a while, they asked if I would stop dating him. And in my adolescent angst, I stomped my feet and I said, "No, he's not like that."

Honestly, I think we all were relieved when the relationship just kind of petered out. They didn't have to keep biting their tongues and I didn't have to feel defensive. I think, it's really hard for parents. You raise your kid you, love them, you want the best for them, and you try and teach them everything that you know is right about the world. It can be kind of a problem when they actually listen to you.

When I was in my early thirties I started dating Kevin. Kevin is funny. He's smart, he's tall, he's handsome, he's well educated. He has a doctorate from MIT. He was everything I could want in a man. It didn't matter to me that he was African-American. And it certainly wouldn't matter to my parents. **Right?**

Well, maybe six or seven months into our relationship, I went home to visit my family. By now, it was clear that things with Kevin were really pretty serious. It was a good visit, although I could tell there was something in the air a day or two before I was supposed to leave.

My father said to me, "Laura, I'd like you to run some errands with me." Now, in my family, that's code. My father and I sometimes have a, kind of, difficult relationship and I'll do something, inadvertently, offending him. He will have his feelings hurt and he needs to talk to me about it. He needs to let me know and describe everything in great detail until I apologize.

I thought, "Oh, great. What did I do now? Sure, Dad, let's run some errands."

So, we went out and we ran an obligatory errand or two. And then he pulled the car into the Denny's parking lot and I braced myself. "Okay. Here it comes. I'm going to hear what I did wrong and I'll apologize. We'll get it over with. It'll be fine. This happens every month or two."

Instead, my dad was quiet. He just sat there looking out the window of the car. I glanced over at him. He wouldn't look at me. Then he took a deep breath. Then he took a deep breath. "Laura," he said, "your mother and I are concerned."

"Concerned? What are you concerned about, Dad?"

He glanced over at me. I could see all this shame and love in his eyes. "Laura, we are concerned about Kevin." How could they be concerned about Kevin? He was smart. He was a good man...Oh...I felt this churning in the pit of my stomach. I began to grind my teeth and I waited. "Yes," My father said. "We're concerned about Kevin."

I looked at my dad. "Dad, why could you be concerned about?" I said. "Is that the Ph.D. from MIT? I mean, I know that's a big educational gap between us but he respects my mind. Oh, oh, I know, is it, is it that it's a doctorate in science not in medicine? I think science is pretty cool. Or maybe, maybe," I said to my father. "Is it because he's so tall?" I know that when we look up at him we do get kind of a crick in our neck."

"Laura," said my father his face turning red. "Laura, that's not what I mean, and you know it. I'm concerned about the racial difference between the two of you."

Ah...I have been foolish many, many times in my life, over and over again, I react when, maybe, I shouldn't. I get angrier than I really need to be. And every once in a while, there is this moment of clarity. And I listen to it. I reached over and I took my father's hand, "Dad," I said. "I know that you were concerned that Kevin's African-American and that I'm not. But I love him and he loves me. Honestly, Dad, I think that you should be proud. You should be proud that you raised a daughter who can love someone regardless of their education or their height or the color of their skin."

He was quiet and then he glanced over at me and said, "He is awfully tall, isn't he?"

"Yeah, Dad he is. Honestly, I think he gives us all something to look up to."

We went home. And honestly, I can't say that being in a biracial relationship has not had an impact on my life. But every relationship has had an impact on my life. Kevin and I, eventually, got married and my father he loves Kevin. When we come and visit, my dad beams with pride as he introduces his handsome, smart, funny, kind, educated, tall, African-American son-in-law to his friends. And honestly, why shouldn't he be him? After all, what parent doesn't want their daughter to marry a doctor?