

STORY SHORT WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

featuring audio and video story excerpts with a discussion guide

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT THE END'S GONNA BE by Storyteller Diane Ferlatte • www.dianeferlatte.com

THEMES

Family Ties that moved from conflict to care and love across racial lines.

STORY SUMMARY

Storyteller Diane Ferlatte recounts the evolution of her relationship with her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law, whose “ancestors came from England” refused to attend her son’s wedding, where he married Ferlatte, whose ancestors “many years ago lived in Africa.” And after that, she kept her distance from Ferlatte and her new husband, although he called and visited his mother on his own.

Only when they had children, did they begin to visit Ferlatte’s mother-in-law as a family. The first visits were stiff and uncomfortable since her mother-in-law didn’t know any black people and had formed all her opinions from television during a time of the militant black power movement. But over the years, Ferlatte and her mother-in-law spent more time together, with the grandchildren, sharing domestic tasks, even creating music together.

Finally, Ferlatte’s mother-in-law seemed to have softened enough towards her that she risked inviting mother to Thanksgiving at her home where Ferlatte’s parents would also be. Ferlatte’s parents won over her mother-in-law with their warmth and their excellent, traditional southern cooking.

But the real point of Ferlatte’s story, perhaps, is to remind us all that “we have to be very careful how we treat each other, because you never know what the end’s gonna be.” For, at the end of her mother-in-law’s life the very people she least knew and most distrusted—African Americans—were the very people who surrounded her bedside, caring for and loving her.



Diane Ferlatte

Visit www.racebridgesforschools.com to download the corresponding audio (MP3) and video (MP4) files.
Approximate Length of Video and Audio: 5 minutes 20 seconds

**REFLECTIONS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ABOUT
*You Never Know What the End's Gonna Be***

1. When Ferlatte and her husband married, it was unusual for blacks and whites to marry. Some states still forbade interracial marriages and most people did have a diverse social circle. How do you think things have changed in the last 40 years? What kinds of romances upset people today? What do you think—are there boundaries today that need to be crossed?
2. Ferlatte and her mother-in-law developed a relationship over time. What do you think are all the factors that allowed them to become friends and to eventually love one another? What allowed her mother-in-law to enter into Ferlatte's family? How do you imagine Ferlatte's mother-in-law changed? Is there a group of people with whom you are uncomfortable? How might you become more comfortable?
3. Ferlatte's story ends with a sobering reminder to be careful about how we treat each other since we don't know what the end is going to be. For her mother-in-law, a white woman once suspicious of black people, the end meant being cared for almost entirely by African American friends, family, and medical staff.
4. How might her end have been different for her, had she retained her prejudice? Have you ever had to trust someone very different from yourself or of whom you've been distrustful? Did allowing another to care for you change your feelings? If so, how?

Taking Action

Many of us change our minds about others during a crisis—when someone different from ourselves helps us when we are in trouble. But we don't have to wait until we are injured, in danger, or at death's door to open our eyes to the humanity of others! Try reaching out, this week, to people who differ from you by race, age, class, language, or some other difference; start just by making conversation. Then, next week, perhaps you'll invite someone out for a cup of coffee, to sit with you at lunch, offer help to someone whose car is broken down, or accept help when you need it.

**STORY TRANSCRIPT of *You Never Know What the End's Gonna Be*
by Storyteller Diane Ferlatte**

Note : The transcript below of the video and audio story is not in correct text book English. It is a transcription of the spoken story. There are also a few variations from the spoken word. This text is for your guidance and reference as you start to study and think about this story.

My name is Diane Ferlatte. I'm a story teller. I am going to tell you a small excerpt from a story from my life, okay? My ancestors, many years ago, lived in Africa...yeah! But my mother-in-law? Her ancestors came from England, and when she found out I was going to marry her son, "cough, cough!" she got sick and couldn't come to the wedding. Well, her son told his mom, "You miss this wedding? It's your loss." So, she didn't come. And the relationship between a mother and her son began to change. She didn't call her son anymore, didn't visit her son anymore. But her son would call his mother once or twice a week to see how she was doing. That went on for about a year or so. Then he went to visit his mother, without me, to see how she was doing. That went on for a year or so.

Then, my husband and I decided to adopt a little baby girl, and he went to visit his mother again. This time he brought . . . me and the baby! When we got to her house, she was nice. She opened the door, that was a start! We went in and sat down on the couch, she sat way across the room. And there was no conversation, just questions. See, my mother-in-law, she didn't know anything about black people. All she knew about black people is what she saw on the TV. Back then it was "Power to the people and all political prisoners!" That's not me, that's not my family. But that's all she knew. But after a few more visits, pretty soon she is holding the baby, I'm playing the piano, she is trying to sing, I'm helping her in the kitchen, having a wonderful time. After a really good visit one time, I couldn't believe, this my mother-in-law tried to give me a half a hug, but that's better than no hug!

After about a year or so later, we adopted a little boy, three-and-a-half years old, and when she met him, oh, she loved Joey! She was buying little gifts, we were playing games, I was playing the piano, and we went for long rides in the car. The visits got better and better and better, because we were talking and sharing our stories, you know what happened to that wall between us? It slowly began to come down. My mother-in-law was warming up! And one time after a good visit, I couldn't believe this either. I was leaving her house and she tried to give me a whole hug, I was, like, "Whoa!" Could she like me? I know she couldn't love me . . . could she? I said, I'm gonna test her. I invited my mother-in-law for Thanksgiving dinner, and what do you think she did? She came! She came! And to spice things up, I invited my Mama and Daddy, who had never met her in life. Well, my daddy walked in to the house and saw her, when he found her name was Lorraine, he walked over, picked up her hand and sang the whole song by Nat King Cole, "My Sweet Lorraine, Lorraine." She loved my daddy, but she missed all those years knowing him. Everybody liked my daddy, who took time to get to know him! And no offence to anybody who is English, but my mother-in-law, she couldn't cook, just throw stuff in the pot, just boil it, no flavor, no seasoning. She loved my daddy's corn bread dressing. She loved those greens, she loved that big chicken with that long gravy. She was eating like it was the last supper! And I see my mother and my mother-in-law talking about their early childhoods, how tough they had it in life, then they said, "Wait a minute, we had a tough life, but we survived, we made it. We're still here!" My mother-in-law was coming around, realizing that she had family, she had grandchildren, she had good eating on holidays because every holiday, where do you think she was? At my house, at my mother and father's house, or we brought the food to her house.

But I tell the story to say this, we have to be very careful how we treat each other, because you never know what the end's gonna be because when my mother-in-law was on her death bed in the hospital, guess who was all around her bed? Black folk! The nurse: black. Me, my mother, my father, my brother, my two kids, and her husband and son. Do you know who put lotion on her dry, dry legs and feet? My mother. Do you know who fluffed her pillow and rubbed her back, because her back was hurting her so? My mother. Yeah, we have to be very, very careful how we treat each other, because you never know who might have to give you a cool drink of water or rub your brow. That's the story, a true story from my life. And we all got 'em. Yeah.

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