

The Survivor

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There'd been 3 days of steady rain, the sky heavy with gray clouds, rather gloomy weather for the Sandhills. This part of North Carolina is noted for its beautiful blue skies, striking pine trees, magnolias and the remarkable array of long leaf grasses.

It was Oct. 15, when the sun finally decided to make its appearance into a clear, cloudless blue sky. I arrived early at the community college for my 3rd class of Windows 8. It was fall break for the kids that were attending the school, so there weren't too many cars in the parking lot, and not too many students hanging around outside. Rather nice for a change. I checked my classroom, the door was still locked, so I decided to go out to the back entrance and catch some rays while waiting for my teacher to unlock the door.

There I stood, alone, nothing on my mind, not even Windows 8. I heard a very soft voice saying,
"I like the way you look."

Of, course, I opened my eyes and there, about 10 feet to my right stood a woman, her skin was a dark, smooth chocolate, her head was wrapped in an African head wrap, her shirt a

a colorful array of fall colors and her skirt reached the tops of her well worn laced boots. I could see flecks of gray hair peeking out from under her hair wrap.

I looked down to see what I had on: black tights with various sized white circles sprinkled over the black, a black and white checked skirt and a black tee shirt that had a wonderful spider web, outlined with silver shaded studs, 4 orange tinted spiders dangling from silver colored strands of web. Well, what could I say.....

"I love Halloween", I said.

Her words came swimming toward me, "Oh, no, no, I am afraid of that holiday. I like Christmas." She made some comments that I couldn't hear or make out. I stepped closer to better listen to what she had to say.

She asked me if I could tell her age. I know enough never to answer that question to any woman.

She told me she was 54 years old, and she continued to tell me about her life:

"I was born in North Carolina on a cotton farm. At the age of 5 my family put me out into the fields to pick cotton. My father and brother beat me with a leather whip. I was 5, how much cotton

could I pick? This went on for a few more years before I realized I wasn't going to live too much longer if this treatment continued. I must have been 7 or 8 years old when I ran away. I ran and ran, night and day. I had to get away. I was hungry, dirty and crying when I approached a log cabin. I had never seen it before, I didn't know where I was or even how I got there. I knocked on the door and a woman opened it, welcoming me in. There were 12 other children there, ranging in ages from 7 to 14. Boys and girls. This woman, who I now call Mom, feed me, bathed me and loved me. Those 12 kids became my sisters and brothers. To this day I keep in touch with them.....they are my family."

She tells me this woman was a foster mother. I tell her what a wonderful woman. You don't hear too many good things about foster parents.....I tell her she should write her story. She tells me she can't do that. I figure out her reasons why.

And that is why I'm telling you her story.

This whole conversation probably took 25 mins. But, in that 25 mins. I got to know this woman.....

I disclosed to her that when I lived in New Mexico, I fostered 6 infants, all of which were adopted after a few months of my care. I was told these infants were unadoptable. There was nothing wrong with these babies.....they just needed to be hugged, held, and loved.

She asked why would I foster so many babies.....

"You must have been very young."

I reflected back to that time, "Yes, that's true. I was very young. I wanted to keep all those babies, but the social worker said, these babies were not for me. My heart broke when each baby was taken to their new home.

I had lost 3 babies and wanted so much to have children. After a few years of fostering I was able to adopt my first child.....two years after that, another, 3 years after that my youngest and last child."

Now, listen to what she said to me....."Your 3 babies in heaven told each of your adopted children who they were going to be born to, but they should pick you to be their mother. Those babies knew you were going to be a good mother."

My eyes filled with tears. My God, what this woman went through.....to still have empathy for a total stranger.

Then out of the blue, she says, "and we sure did a number on those Indians, didn't we?"

All this I heard because she's afraid of Halloween.

But, this happens to me quite often.
That's why I write stories. I am a Story Teller.
I listen and I hear.....I also ask questions.

There are people all around us that have
a tale to tell. Listen to them.