

What She Said, Part 6
July 14, 2021
Wednesday

My Good Neighbor's Story
Barbara Thompson, Guest Writer

Today's Treasure

But he (the expert in the law) wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "...and who is my neighbor?"
Luke 10:29

We read the familiar parable of the Good Samaritan and along with the expert in the law, frequently, miss the point. At least I did until God sent me a good neighbor. I missed the fact that I identify more with the expert in the law than with the Good Samaritan. Three decades ago, justifying myself, I said "of course I have no problem with an African American neighbor next door." After all, I was a social worker and had many colleagues and experiences beyond my own white culture.

Thirty years later I am privileged to tell parts of the story of my good neighbor to whom I am a debtor. In the early days, we worked away from home, were parenting teenagers, were involved in our churches, and leading busy lives. We had occasional conversations from our car windows and frequent waves across the yard.

At a neighborhood dinner, I sat with Edwina and began to hear her story. She is the great-granddaughter of enslaved persons who lived on one of the most famous plantations near where the movie *Steel Magnolias* was filmed. And she is the great-granddaughter of a Chinese physician who was brought to Louisiana to treat enslaved people who were not treated by the white doctors. Edwina's heritage is easily identifiable, especially in the African American community. And as we grew in friendship, I learned more about her experience of mixed-race heritage.

Edwina increasingly became real to me and not just another person with whom I have no connection. She and I often discussed movies. When she told me of her experience of a Tyler Perry movie which had greatly impacted her, I saw the movie. This was my introduction to her experience as a Black woman.

The story of Edwina is multidimensional and complex. I learned that she was the first Black high school student in a small paper mill town. She shared her experiences of loneliness, bullying, exclusion, and fear.

And the most remarkable part of Edwina's challenging story is her unpacking of how God has worked each struggle and experience for His own glory and her good.

I began this devotional with my confession of what a good neighbor I was to Edwina. I end with this confession. I am a debtor to Edwina because she trusted me with her story and let me sit with her as she cared for and buried her husband, pray with her as her son was deployed to the Middle East on multiple occasions, shared with me her adorable grandchildren, and continues to call me sister and neighbor as we face time.

LIFE-GIVING ENCOURAGEMENT

When we treasure the stories of others, God opens the eyes of our hearts to rejoice and mourn and to see dividing walls of hostility demolished. In the place of walls are bridges to our good neighbors.

PRAYER

Lord, work in our hearts that we may read the parable of the Good Samaritan with a fresh perspective, repenting of our "I've got this" attitude. Give us eyes to see our good neighbors and have our hearts melted by the Gospel.

Your story: Look over the story you are writing and consider the characters in your story. Who are you? And how are others in your story identified? How is the Spirit working in your story to lead you to repentance and forgiveness?