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Oakes Core Course 80C

12 December 2017

Wealthily Content

Things that people take for granted and waste away is a true shame for those who aren't fortunate enough to have some of those material items that are beneficial. My father grew up in a crowded household of twelve children in Watts, South Central Los Angeles in a Black urban community that wasn't well off economically. Identifying as a Black man in a family with a fixed income during the 1960s through the early 1980s, my father did not have a silver spoon in his mouth growing up. His family's struggles of not having many resources to live a comfortable life is what shaped his values of not wasting and being grateful to be embedded into his family's practices. From my grandparent's generation up until my generation, I am aware of how essential it is to improve socioeconomically in our family and to take value in the resources we can afford. Because of my family not having many resources, I have been socially conditioned to be content for what is given to me. This is because there are some people who are struggling more than others who have no choice but to be satisfied with what they already have. True happiness in life has less to do with materialism and more on how a person can be happy without material objects.

Seeing value in resources and trying to improve my family's socioeconomic status was always prevalent since the beginning of my grandparents' time. Both of my grandparents had to cease getting their education at a young age to support their family living on a farm in Oklahoma. This is because during their time, Black families' only way to support themselves had to have been working on the farm as their only option. This can possibly be due to the connection with slavery

and the aftermath of it. Many Blacks were not free and were still struggling with trying to make it in a society that did not expect them to be well off in life. This even goes for the Tulsa Race Riot that maybe had some connection during my grandparents' time where in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Black Wall Street was flourishing. There was a white lash attack against wealthy Black businesses and planes from World War 2 that carried bombs were dropped on the city destroying the area where Blacks were thriving economically in their own autonomy. However, it is known that during my grandparents' time, the race riot was never discussed in the upcoming generations and trying to survive economically was the only way to make it on their own by any means necessary. Yet this way of living did not last long for my grandparents who wanted an even better life when they became adults.

When my grandparents met and got married, they knew they had to move to California that was viewed as the California Dream for economic freedom and many other opportunities for their soon to be large family. This was when they decided to move by car to a Black urban community known as Watts, South Central Los Angeles during the 1950s. My grandparents worked menial jobs that were common for Black adults during this time such as working as a custodian and at a laundromat place. My grandmother started having children consecutively almost every two years that she needed to stop working. She then became a stay at home mom taking care of putting food on the table and cleaning the house while only my grandfather had worked countless of shifts. Their source of income wasn't enough to be wealthy, but it was sufficient to live comfortably for their family to survive.

Even though my father's family sometimes lived comfortably, there were times where my father and his siblings had to stretch meals and clothing to make it through the week. My father and his male siblings would sometimes have to share clothes with each other if one of

their clothes became dirty. A typical meal my father and his siblings had were rice, beans, cornbread, and collard greens with leftovers included almost every day. During the week, meat was only given on Sundays as a blessing after church, since it was a Holy Day giving thanks to God through the religion of Christianity. The religion of Christianity served as a means of hope for my father and his family to get through hard times of being impoverished. Christianity at that time had always been prevalent in the Black community to help survive hardships of not having enough in life and losing loved ones. However, it is not well expressed how Christianity was forced upon Blacks ever since slavery to make African slaves seek freedom from a higher being while keeping them away from freedom in the same sense. This relates to how religion was a way for my father's family to not realize their socioeconomic oppression in a poor Black urban area even though it was continuing. It had even led to my grandmother being complacent with what little she had and had caused her to accept the fact that her socioeconomic oppression could be relieved by God's will only and not by their own upward social mobility. However, positive family values of getting an education and being a good citizen was a possibility for my father and his siblings to escape their poor childhood to make their adult lives better.

Having education and being a good citizen were the only two forms of hope for my father and his family to live a self-fulfilled life. Education was a family virtue in my father's upbringing, since it was believed that my father and his siblings could have more opportunities. Having an education and getting any forms of financial aid and scholarships served as a ticket on the way up out of Watts to go to college and to make something of themselves. Education was pushed by my grandparents because they believed that having an education would make their children have a better life than what they had. My grandmother also discussed with her children that being a good citizen would carry anyone throughout life. This is because having good

manners and treating everyone they meet will earn their way to a better life by good deeds. My father had always carried himself respectfully as a young and educated Black man with good manners everywhere he went. Based on his poor upbringing and how he was taught to carry himself in the world, my father made sure that his children wouldn't go through as much socioeconomic disadvantages while still having good character.

Growing up in my childhood, my brother and I lived in a somewhat poor area, but my father made sure that we had enough clothes, food, and money. From being a young girl in preschool up until high school, I had always seen my father work countless of hours lasting until after midnight working at a security job. However, I used to complain that my father would work so much because there were at times where we couldn't go to theme parks and the movies as often as I had wanted to. I remember my brother and I getting nice church attire, new school clothes, and nice school shoes every year until we had graduated high school. We had a variety of three course meals given to us cooked by our mother that was always hot and satisfying all year long. The toys and costumes that we got on the holidays of Halloween and Christmas were even plentiful. The amount of our allowances given to us as teenagers were so rewarding that sometimes my brother and I would get fifty to sixty dollars week after week. However, there were times growing up where it felt like I still didn't have enough when it came to money and clothes. This was because I was conditioned by television to realize that what I had was not enough and that I always needed more to be happy in life. I felt that I always needed new clothes, the next new phone, and the next new shoes. It wasn't until my privileges of having more than enough as a child was brought to my attention by some of my friends in middle school.

In middle school, having a lot of nice material things such as clothes, shoes, and money was always valued as being well off and happy from my classmates. I was always told from my peers and friends that I was rich and I always had nice things. From my perspective, I never thought that I was rich and that I was poor due to the area I lived in and that what I had wasn't much anyways. In my mind, I considered being rich living in a nice house, getting clothes and shoes at any time without having to wonder when I will get something new. My external social conditionings from society influenced me to become a spoiled brat who always felt that what I had wasn't enough for me to be a happy young child and young adolescent. I placed my happiness in nonhuman objects as an obligation to fulfill my own human desire to be self-fulfilled and content with myself in life. I lived through nonhuman objects to search for happiness because I was always unhappy with feeling that I didn't have enough. Obviously, I didn't find happiness from the materialistic objects that were given to me even though I was continuously trying to figure out why I wasn't completely happy. I had to learn the hard way about the true meaning of life and happiness and how it can't be found in nonhuman form, but only through how I view the world around me and see that what was in front of me was just fine.

My personal experiences relate to Eighner's personal essay "On Dumpster Diving" where he discusses how common it is for people to become so consumed with material possessions. According to Eighner's statement "Once I was the sort of person who invests material objects with sentimental value. Now I no longer have those things, but I have the sentiments yet" (Eighner p. 173). I can relate this to how my social conditioning of putting my life in material objects was constructed. As a revelation, I learned how true value in life isn't measured from physical items, but how one can be happy without having much or none at all. Instead, life can

be fulfilling without those things, since finding happiness without those materials can be overshadowed by love and laughter from people who matter the most such as friends and family.

After maturing and realizing that what I had was enough, I realized that my happiness as child had so much emphasis on material things and that I had to find happiness through family and friends. I basically wasted money and my youth wondering why I can never be self-fulfilled. It took me quite some time to realize that what I was told from television was a falsehood and that happiness can never be achieved by just having a lot of things. It wasn't until a pivotal point in my life that I was still given things from my father, but not in the same plentiful amounts while in high school. I was still getting allowances, shoes, and clothes, but not as much as I had wanted. During that time, I was still unhappy trying to feel happy with things given to me from my father. I eventually had to tell myself consciously that having material things such as clothes, shoes, and money wasn't even necessary if I was still getting mostly straight A's and making something of myself in school. I started placing more value in spending time with my family and a new addition to the family such as my niece who was born in my sophomore year. I also started to laugh more with my friends and have a good time as much as possible without having to worry about trying to impress them to then make me happy. Luckily, the time I spent with my family and friends had clouded over the desire to have what I called nice things. According to Eighner, "some material things are white elephants that eat up the possessor's substance" (Eighner p. 172). Unconsciously, humans are succumbed to place so much value in material objects to an extent where we do not realize that what we own is owning us. Material objects controls people over their emotions such as the necessity to have them to be happy. Sadly, my needs to have so many things had blinded me to realize that people like my father had to be content with what they had even though it may be so little.

After learning of my father's experiences, I had to reevaluate how I was so selfish in life and that my so called need to have so many things were unnecessary. My father grew up in his family household having so little that many people wouldn't bare the fact to live in his shoes including myself. Growing up, I had always seen my father happy and making others laugh and I could tell that he was so happy deep down inside. These images that I have of my father starting from a young age up until now will serve as a rich memory for me. In relation to Eighner's view on materialism with his statement "I do not suppose that ideas are immortal, but certainly mental things are longer lived than other material things" (Eighner p. 172), the image of my father's wealth in happiness and peace will always exceed over the fancy items that I have gotten as gifts. Even though my father had to work so hard to make sure his family not only had just enough but more than enough is what made him happy. His happiness was the basis of how he could give his family more resources as a sense of his accomplishment. As a reflection of my childhood and adolescent years, I had to realize that even though my father grew up without having much, he was richer in his young years than I was as a young child growing up.

My father had always been a great role model to me through his actions shaped by his family values as a part of his social conditioning. After watching him interacting with strangers and being able to put a smile on everyone's face he came to contact with has set the bar line for me to clearly visualize how authentic happiness is achieved. Sincere happiness is to not focus so much on pleasing ourselves, but being great to others. It makes me wonder deeply about Eighner's statement of how "Between us are the rat race millions who have confounded their selves with the objects they grasp and who nightly scavenge the cable channels looking for they not know what" (Eighner p. 173). I was one of those somewhat privileged people who had more than enough, but had always felt lost with searching for the unknown to please my inner

sanctuary. It goes to show how even those who are privileged can even oppress themselves by their need to have more when it is not necessary. In my beliefs, I feel that it is because people are afraid of losing more compared to what they are getting in material forms. I had to get rid of that scared notion of not wanting to know what it would feel like to have nothing. As of now, I know that there will never be a time that I will feel that I won't have anything due to what life has to offer. And just like Eighner, "I am sorry for them" (Eighner p. 173). However, I am also sorry for my past self who was once one of those people who did not recognize their own socioeconomic privilege in the faces of those who did not have it the way I did such as my father.

Even though my father's family's virtues of being a good citizen and having good character is what got him through all struggles of being destitute, these great values that my father has allowed to get him far in life. As one of his offspring, the tradition of our family trying to improve socioeconomically generation after generation will be only a part of my means to improve my own life. However, I will not carry with me the need for Christianity that was once practiced within my father's family because I know that serving my own life will have to start with myself first before reaching out for answers from a higher being. If I choose the lifestyle that will involve children of my own, I will consider my failed experiences of trying to be happy and to become a great role model like my father to my own offspring. By this, I can improve my family's generation of always finding wealth in happiness whether or not physical wealth can be achieved.

