

By: Wayne R. Kramer
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JOURNEY TO A BETTER UNDERSTANDING

When Akram Faizer asked me to write a short note on “inclusion and cultural competence, and how it has affected your career,” I said, “Sure. No problem.” As I thought about the topic, it struck me he was asking that I share from where I came, and how I got to where I am today on inclusion and related issues, which are profoundly important as we attempt to navigate through this time in our history; a time in which this country seems to be so deeply divided.

I was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1952, two years before the United States Supreme Court rendered its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). My father worked for the Aluminum Company of America which had a significant bauxite facility nearby, and we lived in the small town of Benton, Arkansas, some 15 miles from Little Rock. My first experience with the issue of race was through the lens of a young, white male living in the “Jim Crow” segregated South. Caldwell School, my elementary school, was all white and middle class. I observed signs such as, “Colored Only” and had very little contact with African Americans, or any other people of color. Despite being a child in the segregated South, my parents were the antithesis of racists, and I never heard a negative word growing up about people of color. They believed firmly in equality, yet we were living in the midst of anything but such. I had the privileges of being a white male with no real understanding or appreciation of that privilege, or the advantage I had over other young people my age who had a different color of skin.

Later in my elementary school years, we moved to Evansville, Indiana, my first real experience “North of the Mason Dixon Line.” Things were different there. Nevertheless, as a result primarily of economics, I had very little contact with any people of color. The same was true even as a high school student upon our move to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

My first real interaction with African Americans and other people of color came as a student at Maryville College, a place which impacted me in so many ways in how I think relative to issues of inclusion, race and cultural competence. Maryville College has a long and storied history of inclusion. From its earliest days, the College welcomed as students women and people of color, far in advance of other institutions of higher learning in this region. Although the College was forced by law to segregate during the Jim Crow years, in September of 1954, the first semester following the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the College once again was integrated. It was at Maryville College where I came to appreciate the enormous importance that everyone, regardless of race, gender, creed, religion or color, brings to the table and how they enrich our lives. Only when everyone is involved in, and contributes to, decision making, can we develop the best answers.

In our legal world and regardless of the issue, justice and fairness are not possible without a Bar and judiciary that fully reflect the reality of those who live in the community. White male attorneys alone cannot possibly accomplish the same goals of justice and fairness as a Bar and judiciary that are multi-racial, multi-gender, multi-religious and multi-economic. Or in the words of today’s world, all lives cannot matter until black lives matter.

From a young boy in the Jim Crow South to a 67 year old attorney in Knoxville, Tennessee, I have seen much. I have learned that the road is long, the challenges are difficult and the answers are not easy. But we must be vigilant, and the work must continue. For in the end, without justice for all, there cannot be justice for anyone. Despite the division which we see across this great land in 2020, I believe the vast majority of us agree on this fundamental truth. That is certainly my hope, and it will always be my dream.

Join us for a night of fun and games

KBA GAME NIGHT PUB POLL

Thursday, October 8

Check-in 6-6:15 pm

Pub Poll 6:15-8:15 pm

Let's bond over a virtual game night! the registration fee of \$10 helps cover the event expenses and prizes. This is a family event, so everyone in your household is invited! Or if you want to gather together with friends or co-workers, just sign up as a team.

\$10 per team if paid on or before 10/1
\$15 per team if after 10/1

REGISTER ONLINE BY CLICKING OCTOBER 8 IN
THE EVENT CALENDAR AT WWW.KNOXBAR.ORG.



If you've ever seen Family Feud, you know how to play Pub Poll. During Pub Poll, pre-poll results from Challenge Entertainment's online surveys are compiled and teams are asked to submit their best guess as to what the top answer, top two answers, or top three answers for that specific survey question. Teams are awarded points for each matching answer. Leave your book knowledge at school. This is common sense trivia.

