The Shades of Grey: Forgiveness and Friendship

March 12, 2013 By Rae Lewis-Thornton

I've never been able to have a poker face or heart. Nope, I wear my emotions all over my face right down to my core. When I hurt I hurt and when someone really, really hurts me, I don't know how to regroup.

But yet my heart is so good. There's something about me that picks up strays all day long. I mean I'm the person who tried to keep the baby pigeon alive on my back porch after her mother deserted her. I'm the person who moved a young gay male into my home after his grandmother throw him out over his lifestyle and I practically raised a teenage girl, moving her into my home and assuming a good deal of the responsibility for her. My Pastor calls it the Pastor spirit. He told me, there's this impulse to save.

Not only is my heart good, it's tough. I take hurt in stride and forgiveness serious. But I tend to be a black and white person with very little grey. Right is right and wrong is wrong and whatever grey that lies in between I've learned over the years can be a very dangerous thing.

I've learned over the years that when someone hurts you, you better take notice. **Loyalty and trust is everything to me.** So when that teenage girl, became a young lady and looked me in the face and lied with tears running down her face, "Mommie, I would never do such a thing." She had been stealing my BMW while I was on the road speaking and one day she left the garage door open and the other tenant's car was burglarized. My landlord said to me over the phone, "Mrs. Thornton, when I came into the garbage the door was wide open." I side with confidence, "But Mrs. Hawkins, I'm out of town. I have nothing to do with this." She replied, "Mrs. Thornton, but your car was gone."

When I came home from speaking I had to deal with it head on. We had our share of growing pains. Of young adult disrespect. That's why she was living down the street and no longer with me. You can't live in my house and disrespect me. We teach people how to treat us; what is acceptable behavior and what is not. But I never thought for one moment that I couldn't trust her, I mean with my life.

As the drama escalated over the week. This girl whom I had given the world to looked me right back in my face less then a week later and said with a straight face, "Yeah I lied. You just mad cause I'm not kissing your ass."

It didn't take a rocket science to see that we had moved into a dangerous shade of grey. That's when I asked for all of my keys home and car. When lying becomes that easy, you take notice. The saying goes, fool me once shame on you, fool me twice shame on me. But it's a hard thing taking notice when you love someone.

Like what do you do with those grey areas for people that you love? With my keys in tote I continued to make an effort and each time I would learn a new lesson the hard way right down to the core of my heart. Then one day I decided that this is not what love should be like.

But their lingered my Pastor Spirit, something inside of me that told me that she needed me to save her… To love all her pain away… But I was trying to save her and killing me in the process.

It was the same thing with my biological mother. A heroine addict for a good part of her life, yet by the time I met her when I was 18, she was clean, married and living an upper middle class life. But by the time I was 24 her demons took center stage and mental illness became a way of life. I had to learn how to protect myself and keep her in my life it was a hard balance and I did it for over 20 years.

Same thing with Mama who raised me. She was a walking contradiction. One moment she was sweet as pie and the next I was bitch this and motherfucker that. But for the most part in my adult years, I negotiated and found balance well. I made my visits and calls short with Mama, because I could never trust her next move.

And after years of finding balance with my biological mother, mental illness, she dug a knife in my heart and twisted it. Lead by her mental illness, she sent me the most horrific letter. It began like this,
"Dear Rae, I hate you and all Niggers."

My therapist at the time, didn't bat an eye, he looked me straight in the face and said, "Leave her alone. Her mental illness is dangerous for you." And I walked away until the week before she died, when I dropped everything to go to her sick bed and then followed through by taking care of all of her affairs during and after her death. Her mother, my grandmother, whom I've never met in person, didn't want anything to do with it. I buried my mother in the tradition of her faith, Buddhism. It was me or the State and it was the right thing to do.

It was the same with Mama. I took care of her for two years in her battle with cancer and then buried her with class and dignity. A girlfriend asked me the day I buried Mama, "How did you do it?" I said, "I took care of Mama because of who I am, not because of who she was."

I try my best to practice what I preach. I try not to judge. I try to meet people where they are at, not where I want them to be. I mean in the end, all a person can be is themselves. But sometimes who a person is, is not a good thing for you. I had to learn, especially in the age of Social Media, that everyone is not meant to be your friend.

I try to love others, like how I want to be loved. But when someone hurts you whether it's a lover or a friend you are left with many shades of grey. Like how do you look someone in the face and smile and they dug a knife into you? And does it make you any less of a person that you can't be their friend? We throw this quote around like confetti, "**When someone shows you who they are believe them."** But when it's time to put this saying into practice, some how we are judged because we don't want to fuck with hurt no more.

Does forgiveness mean friendship? I mean how does that really work? You hurt me beyond anything I could ever image and now I'm suppose to chit chat with your ass?

It's like catching your lover in bed with someone, are you suppose to crawl back into that same bed he shared with another? In this case you are left with a lot of hurt and often times a deep abiding love for that person. At least the person you thought they were. I mean did you ever think your lover would be in bed with someone other than you? Like how am I suppose to trust you ever again? How do I determine who you really are, and who I loved?

I'm faced with this dilemma in my life right now; a friendship that was violated in unimaginable terms. It left my new therapist speechless. And after she regained herself, She said to me, "This sort of stuff happens on TV, not in real life."

For months now I've been trying to sort out the pieces. The different shades of grey. The why? The how could I have been so blind sided? The what the fuck do you do with this kind of hurt; The kind of hurt that scares the fuck out of you, a fear of your own personal well being, physically and emotionally. The profound emotional abuse that comes with this level of betrayal. The working through what is real and what ain't.

Yes, there are a lot of grey areas when it comes to the people you love who hurt you, but I've had to learn that loving me first was the greatest love that I can render.

So, I'm finally at a place where I can work it out in therapy. **I need to heal, and you can't heal holding onto the hurt**. Nor can you pretend this shit didn't happen. You have to deal with it, all of it and deal with it at face value. You must be willing to call a spade a spade no matter how painful it may be, or you are no better off then you were living in the hurt.

For sure, healing must take place before their can ever be a friendship again. And the thing is, while you can be sure of your own healing, you can never quite be sure of the other persons healing. Like have they really worked on the thing that made them violate you in these proportions?

It's been a heavy load. I've had to unpack everything that has been said and perform an autopsy on every single word and deed in the months since the initial hurt. Then on top of that, reexamine the entire friendship. That's a lot of work.

Like for real, for real, trying to determine what's real and what ain't has taken over my life. That's why I'm glad I'm giving it over to a mental health professional who can help me sort out the truths and accept the lies. To help me heal from this unfathomable breach of trust.

What I know for sure, is that Forgiveness is a must in order to heal. Forgiveness is a must if you live the life of a Christian. There is peace in forgiveness. **You must do it because it's who you say you are, not because of you they are, or what they did to you**.

But forgiveness does not, nor should not guarantee friendship. **The betrayal forfeited their right to friendship. Love is a mandate but friendship is a choice that is developed, earned and kept on merit.**

For sure, I know that once their has been a breach of mass portions, nothing can be the same again. The author Nella Larson has a line in her book Passing, ***If a man calls me a nigger it's his fault the first time, but mine if he has the opportunity to do it again.***

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