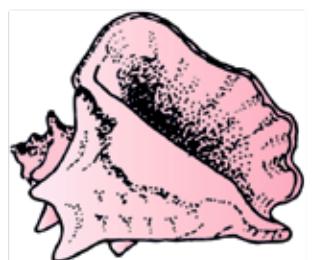


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Harsh Realities - Luke Sommer Glenn Blog	3
Critters: Grateful for Gulls by Carol Ellis	4-5
Obituary: Kyle "Tiny" Rathert	7
Artist of the Month: Erica Makar at Shear Paradise Salon	9
The Key Players Bring Classic Monty Python Comedy	11
Getting from Here to There - Keys Map Page	12-13
Key Largo Locator Map Page	16
Key Largo Branch Library Programs for this Month	17
Daily OM: Entering Into Partnership	18
Business in the Keys	19
Coco-Nut Funnies	20-21
Adopt a Key Largo Animal Shelter Pet	22
Conch Characters / Around Town	23

Harsh Realities — A blog by Luke Sommer Glenn

I went to elementary school in Tight-ass-ville, Florida. The school I attended would've been an entirely white school pretty much except for they bussed the black kids from across town to attend. They'd closed all the black schools and they were now forced to leave their neighborhoods and schools, to come to school with us.

I imagine it might've been exciting for them except for the fact that there was a lot of haters that didn't want their white kids going to school with African-American kids. I was too young to understand what was going on, as were most of us kids.

The schools they came from were severely under funded. They were trying to catch up to a curriculum they had not been previously offered. Kids being kids, we didn't make it any easier for them. We teased them for being behind and not knowing what we thought were easy answers. We did not understand that they hadn't been given the same knowledge at their previous school.

I wasn't raised around haters. My mom was a teacher at the elementary school. My dad had fought the Nazis to make sure that we were all free and that's the way I understood it. I don't know what it would've been like to grow up around parents that used the N-word or inflammatory language about other races out of hatred and ignorance. I bought into the whole "treat other people as you want to be treated" thing.

The first time I heard somebody disparaging a person of color I was mortified. I thought to myself, "What fucking kind of nerve is that? I could never speak to somebody

Note: We had to abridge this article for space. See Luke's online blog for the full story! www.lukesommerrglenn.com

like that."

I was embarrassed to be a white person in that moment. That was my neighbor, Mr. Johnson. The only reason the victim didn't fight back was because Mr. Johnson owned the house the victim's family lived in and Mr. Johnson was a shitty human being. He did things that were illegal and immoral. In his mind, slavery was still legal, just accomplished through the back door, a form of indentured servitude. "Got to keeps these n*****s in their place!" I heard the drunk bastard often slur.

We had a little black dog that he hated so bad that he would do donuts in his own front yard trying to run over our dog for being in his yard. There was a big German Shepherd that left giant stools in his yard and he wasn't sober enough to realize that our little dog couldn't possibly have left them.

He would be in a drunken rage, spewing and spitting cuss words, he ran over his mailbox several times, eventually smashing his green Chevy Nova into one of the citrus trees that surrounded his house...

Then expected us to come over and fix his yard because it was our dog that provoked him.

He was lucky my dad didn't adjust his attitude but dad wouldn't beat up a defenseless old drunk. Instead he managed to calm the situation and the old drunk guy would say, "Alright Sam, I'll just have one of my n*****s take care of it," referring to fixing his yard.

My dad would shake his head in disgust. Unacceptable behavior for someone claiming higher authority.

As I grew up, I realized that these kids in the tattered clothing were that way for a reason. They were poor. There

were poor white kids but these kids were a deeper poor.

A lot of them came to school wearing homemade clothes, with holes in their shoes. They didn't have fancy lunch boxes with cartoon characters and a thermos. For some, school lunch was the only meal available to them.

By the time I was in elementary school, the whole busing thing had become normalized. I think it had a positive effect on the majority of us who naturally intermingled as children should do. I couldn't imagine my high school without all of us. We had a state level champion football team. We would've never achieved those goals as segregated schools.

I guess what pisses me off the most, is that people are just people, no matter what.

There is good and bad in every walk of life, stupidity and intelligence, saints and sinners... For one group to claim wisdom exclusively is uniquely human.

It's reflected in our religions, the saved and the doomed. The fact is that we are all inferior no matter how good we imagine ourselves to be. Logic and reason are not our strong point.

In my freshman English class, the teacher had us doing a spelling exercise that included the word Negro. I had a smart ass comment after every word the teacher called out, an attempt at breaking the monotony of the third grade level words. It got a giggle out of the other kids.

When she called the word Negro, I said a protracted, "Fred," referring to my black teammate on the football team, who sat behind me. During the game the week before, his leg had gotten broken when he was

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shoved over top of me in a pile up and I heard his leg break. I had no idea that saying that would hurt his feelings to the point that he punched me square in the back as hard as he could for a guy with a broken leg.

The teacher came down on him, explaining to him that he was, in fact, by the dictionary, a Negro. Nothing I could say would ever restore the friendship that we had previously. The fact that I was in the wrong but he received the teacher's ire was something I wouldn't understand until later in life. It was no joke to him.

We only know the small world we come from, I didn't know that he and his family were victims of people like my neighbor, I wasn't aware that there was a whole world full of hate-minded people. People that spew venom and derision onto their fellow human being. Nothing aggravates me more than when people start looking at other people as less than human, as if somehow their pain and misery is meaningless.

I hope every hater gets reincarnated as the very object of their hate.

We could do better than this as a species, but for some reason, instead of seeing the creator in each other, we look for the weakness that gives us the edge over our brother.

I only know how to apologize now and I am truly sorry that I caused my friend pain. We should all be on the same team because after all, we're in the same race, the human race.