

The Weight of The World



There's something especially inspiring when standing in front of your old elementary school playground at this age. It's oddly sentimental. In front of you, memories of yourself dangling midair; suspended by a very lopsided moving merry-go-round with your friends. Not a worry in the world. Suddenly, the jolting weight of others cause your hand grip to loosen, and the wheel to pick up speed. It flings you onto the playground woodchips. You're not alone.

One by one, people are flung to the ground, laughing and bruised, grown-ups nearing to inspect the scene. I can picture little old me all over again, ready for round three. The physics behind it was not something I could articulate at the time. I just knew the fewer kids gripping on the circular wheel above us meant the faster it spun, taking full advantage of the now lessened load. And of course, you had better hoped you weren't the last one dangling. I want to believe that how I felt as a kid on the playground will take me farther into my adult years.

On June 19th, I'd just gotten off from work and was heading to the school I grew up in long before the working age. Samuel Staples Elementary School is always bright and beautiful against the pane of open space, and pulling up closer, I could see many people surrounding the pavilion. In a predominately white, small town like Easton, I can't express how moving it was to see my community come together to learn about what Freedom Day means to minorities and Black residents like myself. That Friday evening, local music played, and people got together to learn more about the oldest nationally

celebrated commemoration to the ending of slavery in the United States. We socially distanced. We brought blankets and snacks. We listened to speakers talk about the events of Galveston, Texas in 1865.

Residents showed up in their worry and their burden toward the racial inequality and systemic racism in this country. The disparity puts us at a duo pandemic: COVID-19 and racism. One had gone on longer than the other. In the past month, the racial disparities in our health care system were acknowledged on a wide scale. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put some members of racial and ethnic minority groups at increased risk of getting COVID-19 or experiencing severe illness, regardless of age.”

We wore masks to protect ourselves, yet we were distantly hand in hand. We were shaking our heads and holding our hearts, hugging the words of each speaker so closely. It was at the vigil for George Floyd where my eyes wandered and my initial thoughts of recess and fourth grade down time commenced. That darned merry-go-round.

I loved that gyrating carousel thingy. The collective weight of its participants directly determined how fast it would spin. I could see my friends across from me and next to me when it would spin slow. It was relaxing. We were all together, and I could see everything around me. We'd laugh and wiggle our legs. The more weight or the more people on the wheel, the slower it spun. I was illuminated by this fact as a child. And when people vacated, there was some excitement in knowing it would eventually spin out of control.

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” — African Proverb

I feel like in the wake of George Floyd's death, Easton united for a bipartisan change and to acknowledge the death that shook a nation. The Vigil for George Floyd took place at the same pavilion about two weeks prior, where speakers were highlighting stories revolving passive and sometimes blatant racism. When I kneeled to honor the loss of

Black lives, my eyes were closed. When they opened, I gazed at the crowd and behind them, at the playground. This is not a moment, it's a movement but for some reason, this moment was surreal for me.

At the pavilion, I started to think about the time I taught some of my friends how to Double Dutch, a jumping rope game originated among Dutch immigrants in New York City. That's where I learned it.

I was now teaching them the legitimacy of a holiday widely celebrated across our nation. In the same breath, I was informing my peers on systemic racism and the ongoing habits of police aggression that got George Floyd killed. I was happy to see a few childhood familiar faces in the crowd.

I didn't hear the sound of screaming laughter and excitement from my friends, I heard music from the band Steve Clarke and Friends. Theresa Wright's voice stretched in notes that could be heard from the swings. Her sun-kissed skin beamed in the sun as her renditions of Bob Marley and Aretha Franklin serenaded over the field on Juneteenth.

It wasn't our annual SSES Ice-Cream Social in the courtyard; there wasn't any ice cream in sight. Instead, the flavors that evening were honesty, truth and history—in that order. We were learning, and listening. We were amplifying a *mélange* of voices. Juneteenth was a day to remember. The vigil was a day I won't forget.

I could spot my family in the crowd along with a few parents I grew up calling "mom" and "dad." We were grasping what seemed like the weight of the world in a carousel, but together. I imagine that's not always a bad thing. Sometimes the weight of the world in life will allow you to slow down and look at the people around you. Imagine if we all did that? Instead of turning a blind eye to civil unrest, we stuck together long enough to get a real good look at the harm and pain in all systems and institutions that effect our Black Americans. The grief may feel like we are individually responsible for the outcome of fixing a systemic issue. In some ways we are, but not without the help of one another.

I felt like Easton was sharing the same sentiments around social injustice, holding on tightly to the faith we have in the world but also recognizing the problem at hand. History repeats itself, like a wheel that keeps spinning around and around again. These conversations are important and action is required. The load is heavy and we will certainly need each other. I keep reminding myself of the little Black girl I was on the playground. It was never too much fun spinning alone and maybe even quite dangerous. I recall the strength I had when I did, but it wasn't easy.

I can't emphasize enough how much we need each other. There isn't much excitement or joy when everyone departs out here in the real world. When we turn a blind eye is when things start moving out of control, or when society becomes complicit to the realities of these issues that affect us all. I remind myself of little old me on my favorite playground equipment, just holding on for the fun of it. If you were me, wouldn't you begin to think?

As a young adult, you may start to figure that maybe—just maybe—you've carried some of that strength with you, right? You clear the woodchips from your shirt and pants. You dust yourself off.

Somewhere inside of you, a young adult learns to get back up again.