

“I CAN DREAM AGAIN” CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS

CHAPTER 3 – A WHITE BOY IN A BLACK WORLD

New Friends, New Culture

My mom’s involvement in the Civil Rights Movement came with a cost. Because we opened our home to the black and Spanish families in dire need, our family was labeled “white trash” or “nigger lovers.” On the outside, all of us shook this off with a smile, but on the inside, it hurt. The more my mother fought for civil rights, the more rejection came from our neighbors. As a young boy, I was not allowed in my friends’ homes. While my friends went into their homes to play or go into the swimming pool, I waited outside, trying to find something else to do, pretending everything was normal.

The white families in the neighborhood didn’t want their kids to associate with us. So, we sought out more black friends. We struggled with the rejection of the community and Mom and Dad’s mental breakdowns. They were always sedated with prescription drugs, so we hung out with no parental guidance. We “chilled” in the black community in the place we called “down the way.” Today, they call it “the ‘hood.”

We Are Family

I grew up learning the skills of the ’hood. Because of the relationships with our cross-cultural friends, there were times my brothers and I thought we were black. We wore black high-top Chuck Taylor Converse All-Star sneakers, double-knit pants, beaver caps, and slick shirts, just like our “brothers,” the Smiths. When fights broke out, it was often white against black. There was no role confusion—my brothers and I were usually the white guys fighting alongside our black brothers.

Taught to Love

Nowadays when people talk to me on the telephone or I share my culturally diverse background, they wonder what nationality I am, especially with my name being Jimmy Jack. When they meet me, they are really confused. Italian? Spanish? Greek? No. I tell them that inside I am black, Spanish, and Italian; but, outside I am full Scottish—James Macfarlane Jack is my full name. I was raised to love *arroz con pollo* (rice with chicken), *plátanos* (fried bananas), spaghetti and meatballs, ham and cabbage, collard greens, potato pancakes, ham hocks, and black-eyed peas—although I never could get the courage to taste chitlins because I just could not get them past my nose.

But most of all, I was raised to love all people.