

Fires of the 60s vs. the deity of daddy

Written by Azaniah Little
Monday, 23 June 2014 14:35



PART 1 IN A SERIES

The idea of "father" can elicit as many interpretations as the world is filled with "Dads."

Biologically, the father stands as caretaker of human life as millions of sperm contend microscopically for the cherished prize –the egg of the woman.

Only one of the millions of contesting sperm will win after the frantic swimming contest where an explosion occurs and a human being is born. Thus the sperm possesses the crown or "mantle" of priest of human existence.



This is a mystery, and just as there are millions of sperm – but only one "wins," there is an entire range of patriarchal prototypes of "father" –but only one is accurate, and all the rhetoric and human legislation in all of the world can ever change this reality.

Theoretically, there are tribal or "community" fathers – spiritual fathers, ancestral fathers – all existing to support the purpose and destiny of the life of the child, and to be sustained uniquely upon the shoulders of the "First Father – the Heavenly One."

Before I believed in God, my father, William Matthew Little, was my god, and at the advent of

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his death I was forced to painfully re-examine notions of fatherhood which shaped not only the radical love I had for him, but also to consider the very idea of father in my life, as well as in the community and the world.

Unbeknownst to me the process began autonomously –but decisively only weeks prior to my father's passing as I wept with South Africans as they buried their own "father," Madiba – Nelson Mandela.

The entire world joined in mourning him, for he was the epitome of fatherhood. As the nations mourned, memories of Mandela standing ominously in the gap between trigger happy ANC guerillas' trudging wearily through the bush to surrender their guns, and petrified murderous white South Africans all with moist gun powder still wedged deeply beneath their fingernails filtered freely to mind.

I re-examined Mandela's release from Robins Island in 1990, and his decision to employ invisible weapons in addressing the years of murder and pillage from the ferocious Apartheid regime. Prior to his release, Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the underground armed wing of the ANC had made their political position distinctly clear, vowing that, "The white South Africans will either leave South Africa on their own, or swim out in their own blood."

The world watched in amazement as "Madiba" marched, not limped, away from Robins Island wearing an iridescent smile not a angry grimace. However what perplexed the multitudes most was when the word "reconciliation" dripped from Mandela's lips amidst a nation and world that had somehow never been able to understand forgiveness, let alone embrace it.

As I watched the intensity of their grief on the evening news, it took me back to my trip to South Africa immediately upon his release with a group of international observers invited to view what reconciliation would look like for South Africa.

Instead of retaliation, I saw massive building initiatives being launched, community tribunals being conducted, women's cooperatives being formed, youth organizations sprouting up. During an interview with him in Johannesburg, Emmanuel Nkuna, former chief protocol officer of the ANC and former ANC guerilla described the historical day when the ANC soldiers returned from "the bush" – Angola-Namibia, Tanzania, and before the international media wearily laid down their arms.

"Madiba was able to impart the importance of us forgiving. We had spent, many of us, most of our adult lives in exile; even I was not able to attend the funeral of my own mother because I was exiled in Angola. I did not understand Madiba at first, and neither did most of my comrades. We remembered the Sharpville massacre and Soweto, but Madiba was our father – the father of our struggle for liberation, and thinking of his sacrificing his own life for his people propelled us forward to complete trust in his decision, so we surrendered and laid down our arms," said Nkuna.

I had wept with the South Africans, and rejoiced with them, and I began wrestling with the provocation of him being gone.

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I went toe-to-toe with the anxiety of losing *two fathers* in the same breath, as I knew that Daddy would soon join Madiba in taking that last step in the struggle for freedom to receive the eternal crown-not of national liberation...but eternal liberation.

With the rest of the world, I struggled with the hidden meaning of what the world would look like without Mandela, along with the daunting reality that soon, I would no longer be able to call my *own*

father to tell him about projects I was working on, opportunities I was blessed with, all just to hear words I heard him speak faithfully with precision all of my life – "Honey, you can do anything that you apply yourself to. The sky is the limit."

Mandela and my father were nearly the same age, both suffered from pneumonia, and both had been repeatedly hospitalized. Amazingly, it seemed at the same time for three consecutive years, and for each of the three years the surety of both of their absence suggested a forthcoming personal revolution of a dimension I had not yet witnessed.

Nelson Mandela and my father had sacrificed their lives while engaging in a constant head on collision with political forces that oppressed and suffocated the alienable rights of their people, and whose tentacles were so diverse they prevented entrance to even the most basic arenas of human rights and dignity.

My father, like Mandela successfully and skillfully shed light upon intricate and venomous affects of institutionalized racism – my father being a part of landmark civil rights legislation in this country and Mandela instrumental in toppling the regime of Apartheid in South Africa.

With the 27 years that Nelson Mandela spent incarcerated, it was easy for an observer to see the personal price that he paid to wear the mantel inherent of "the office of Father."

However, in my father's case, his personal sacrifice was not so apparent, especially in light of the fact that my father, William Matthew Little, was very discreet in his personal affairs. As his daughter, I had a bird's eye view of his own exile of sorts, or Robins Island experience that all came to a head when the 1960s rolled around.

Azaniah Little lives in Seattle. She works as a freelance writer, minister and consultant, and is currently seeking publication for her first book, "Purpose for Your Pain..."

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