

STORY OF A BLACK WOMAN

My mother spoke to me constantly about being free and, in the same breath, reminded me that I was a Black woman. I thought if I kept my life close to the black community I would be safe and unchallenged. In day care, all of my playmates were black children like me. But, when I entered kindergarten in an integrated school, I was faced by a different world. I was aware of 'differences.' But, were we supposed to stay in separate worlds because of our skin color?

My mother always worked hard. She cleaned the homes of two families and cared for their children whenever she was needed. She worked long hours outside of our home, and my sister and I missed her. As far back as I can remember "kin" took care of us in my mother's absence. "Kin" are women who are not biological mothers, but who play a mothering role in raising black children. In our culture, children are seen as part of and belonging to a communal network that extends beyond their natural parents. That community is always made up of women who are sensitive to the needs of their sisters.

My parents did not spend many years together. When I was four years old, my father left my mother unexpectedly. One day, my mother came home after work and found a fifty dollar bill on the table with a note saying "Good-bye ... hope this helps." The family problems were holding him back from becoming successful. He blamed my mother for being too demanding. I can still remember how sad my mother was. She was scared and confused by my father's unexpected abandonment. I didn't understand that he wasn't coming back. I thought he just needed a vacation from us.