

Writings by Tony Harris:

Tony & Jacob

Meeting a white guy who initiates conversations about race, and know what he is talking about was pretty rare. Meeting a white man who sought out the poorest of the pool, sat down with them and listened to their story was ever more remarkable.

Jacob, at the time of our meeting did not know that he was working on a possible show about his experiences. If Jacob didn't know what he was doing, I certainly didn't know, but I knew enough to understand that this guy should be supported and nurtured while he found his way. Wherever Jacob was headed the outcome was all positive from my view. A white man willing to fight racism must be encouraged. Racism and the fight against it should be led by white people, not unlike sexism as a male issue that should be led by men.

Someone much smarter than me once said "Choose your enemies very carefully, because you may become like them. "

Jacob's generation or our generation in America was the integration generation; we were the first to cross the color line in meaningful ways. We were told that integration was important enough that you were expected to subject yourself to horrible behavior directed at you, and you were to take it, take the blow, and smile. Yes, smile, because we know we will win in the end. We lost many battles, people were hung, people were beaten, people were fined but we won the war.

If we are the integration generation then that mentality should extend into all areas of your life. Me, given the opportunity to reach out to a white man who is reaching out to me makes perfectly good sense. Black people need allies, meeting Jacob led me to the realization that he is not our only ally. There must be many more white allies, who I have failed to notice. It is all too easy to miss potential allies who are white because we live our lives in a paranoid reflex. This reflex goes like this. Back man is walking down the street, he meets a white man who slaps him in his face, that would be slavery, he continues, slavery ends and he continues down the street. The next white man who slaps him in his face, that would be Jim Crow, (separate but equal) we fight and end Jim Crow by pushing for integration. The Black man continues down the street where once again a white man is coming his way. As the white man gets close, the Black man begins to duck, (means and Bob) trying to not get hit. The desire to protect yourself is strong, the reflex comes easy. History says this guy is going to hurt you.

Of course, every White person does not want to hurt you, but you don't know if you should take the risk. Paranoia hard to shake, there is real truth in that reflex. That reflex which can(missing line in Tony's hand script). That reflex actually kills many of us. Many more become the walking wounded (hypertension, High Blood and Heart attack)

Sitting down at the table of Brotherhood that Dr. King spoke about takes many forms. The table of brotherhood with Jacob often was at a party, my house, my family's homes and the bar "the Grill". Where

ever we were together, we were sitting at that table with others. Navigating through Black Culture with a white guy at your side was challenging.

Many Black friends asked me why I brought this white Boy to the party. I simply told the truth, he was hitching across the country having an American experience, and tonight you are a part of his experience. I encouraged Jacob to bring his book of pictures, so my friends could see for themselves what he was up to. After looking at his picture book many of my friends relaxed a bit, others wanted nothing to do with him, and were hostile to his presence all night. Jacob had a relaxed presence, a quick smile and conversation if that's what you wanted. I encouraged my girlfriend to push her friends to talk to him.

Most had never been in this situation, partying, drinking and talking to a white gut. Alcohol makes everything easier. Alcohol however is a two headed sword. Drinking people can be friendly; they can also be hostile and aggressive. Jacob learned early on in his journey that a Bar was his friend. Most people were friendly in Bars; the next largest group remained neutral and stayed away from Jacob. The smallest group was the aggressive drunks. When drunks began to direct their anger at Jacob, he knew that someone from the friendly group would come to his defense and protect him. It was very encouraging to see this behavior pattern play out in bars, grills, parties nearly everywhere we went. Jacob knew how to take care of himself. I watched his back, but I was rarely needed.

It was interesting to watch Black women in these social gatherings, talk with Jacob and actually begin to like him. Black women turned out to be much friendlier than I expected. If we are expecting Whites to treat Blacks as fully human then we must do same, if we must do the same, if you are a Black person can see the humanity of whites you just might fall in lone. If we dare go there we will challenge the greatest of Americans tattoos.

Interracial anything, from relationship to Kids, to integrated school and neighborhoods, may lead to growing social bonds between the races. This is a dilemma for many white Americans. The relationship with Jacob continued to grow strongly as me realized our mutual political positions, on world views matched quiet well. Jacob expressed to me the idea that each generation of white Americans beginning in slavery found themselves on the wrong side of history. History provides hindsight. This hindsight informs us that every right or freedom and legislation that we fought for has come to past. We won these battles because our positions were the logical intellectual extension of a country moving forward. American culture is about change, evolution of the species. It is this culture of change where my hope is deeply rooted. I believe in America, Jacob does too.

Having a politically left leaning view of the world made Jacob a target by the opposition. We were called radical, criminals and misfits. Criminals no, Radical misfits. Probably the Radical misfits could be called into questions, since we talked of softening the Blow of Capitalism, not doing away with it. When we speak of softening the blow of capitalism, we are talking about a pressure to make money, a pressure that can be overwhelming. There are capitalist economies all of the world, but none as intense as the American economic experience.

Standing in Denmark with its cradle to grave welfare state, I relaxed at a level I never been able to **achieve**, running, basketball, reading, some recreational drug use. You had this feeling that everybody was his brother's Keeper. There was a very developed feeling of "We". We is much more important than I.

Jacob Holdt - a Dane

Limit the noise you make, be humble; let people be who they are; welcoming (I see and feel no fear) Danes being naked; Danes dance; inclusive; Non-violent (very, very , very non-violent!!) "

The sun - that's right the sun - that big fireball that keeps us warm, controls Danish life. The sun is close to god. Secure, focused, left leaning led by the heart when young, conservative led by their money when old post World War 2 generation Nazis Jewish death camps occupation of Denmark by the Nazis. To be racist or anti-Semite lead you to Genocide. The people of Denmark took that seriously. Danish women have a real identity, they have a real sense of self, a sense of self makes all people more attractive.

Gender equality in society, Denmark is 6th in the world behind Iceland, Finland, Sweden, Norway, all Scandinavians all ?. A good places to be a woman, compared to most of the planet.

The social contract at that time was "Never get to far out ? more to the center, never leave anyone behind. (beautiful, sentimental)

This is the world of Jacob Holdt. This is the people he introduces me to. My world in Denmark was the world, loving, political, curios, intellectual. Humble, Humble, Humble.

I now understand how Jacob son of preacher, Danish Citizen could come to American and travel, rather hitchhike across the country living with Black people, injecting himself into situations that are governed by a kind of Social apartheid. Blacks socialize with Blacks in the south, whites socialize with whites. No one talks about it, but we all black and white know it is true. The drama of entering a Black business by yourself or even worse walking to a club or a bar with a Black woman on your own creates an immediate challenge to many Black men. This was Jacob's world. Jacob's protection may have been his belief in the correctness of the Black struggle in America; Jacob's protection could have been his desire and overwhelming need to be accepted by Black people. Jacob's protection may have been his socializing with the poorest of the poor. His sitting with them, talking but most importantly letting them talk about their lives, their hopes, what went wrong and why.

For a Black person to meet Jacob and realize there are white people who get it is so shocking(?) it gives you pause, you have a responsibility to handle their person correctly. He is on your side, don't lose him, encourage him, nurture him, finally here is your chance to contribute to the social good of us all, ? I must take great care in my relationship with this guy and so I did.

The “Earth, Wind and Fire” concert (remembered differently in Jacob’s version)

Having known Jacob for 2 years, I knew he could show up at your door at anytime. On this night he came walking up as my guest were walking out to the car, heading to an “Earth, wind and fire” concert. Jacob jumped in the car while stating that a concert is just what he needs after hours of hitchhiking over 900 miles from New York to North Carolina and my house. The problem was that the owner of the car was my work colleague Bob. Bob spent ten years in prison for murder. Bob did not like white people but off to the concert we went. About five miles down the highway. Bob had enough. He pulled the car over to the side of the road and demanded that Jacob get out now!!! He could not take this white guy dropping out of the sky of him. I said good bye to Jacob and we pulled off leaving Jacob 5 miles from my house and 35 miles from the concert (in Chapell Hill). We had no idea what Jacob would do, we knew he was going to hitchhike but I wondered which way? We arrived at the concert and pulled into a parking space. As we all stumble out of the car, standing there 4 feet from us was Jacob. We dropped him off on the side of a dark long stretch of Highway; He beat us to the concert. Bob was extremely upset. I laughed with Jacob on his achievement. I was now impressed. But now it is concert time. I ask Jacob if he needed money to get a ticket for the concert. He replied that he didn’t need any money because the tickets were sold out. He told us to enjoy the concert and he walked away. Bob said “finally that white boy creepes me out. Thank God he is gone”. We were in a long line of anxious concert goers; we were very excited to see the group. We got our tickets and walked in. Leaning against to wall inside the concert was Jacob. Bob wanted to return to prison, or anywhere this white guy might not be. Bob was shunned and felt that what this white boy had done to night was impossible. He must the police or the devil himself. That is where the story should end, but it doesn’t. Bob was so paranoid about the white boy’s magical appearance that he looked around for Jacob the whole concert. Minutes before the final number and encore Bob wanted to rush out of the concert to the car and flee before the white boy catch us. We protested that we would do no such thing, the concert was of the chain, the house was rocking, and the audiences was dancing and going crazy. It was one of the best concerts I ever attended; meanwhile Bob and his date were making their way to the car. I prayed that Jacob would not surprised Bob with another appearance. I could not guarantee that Bob would not take Jacob out. My date and I were not sure if Bob would even wait for us. He did.

Death row inmate Nathan – who took over Jacob’s bedroom in my house

Nathan was my roommate for about a year. Nathan had just spent 19 years in prison for various offenses. Nathan found it difficult to get released because he had nowhere to live; finding some place to live became my full time job. No one wanted a 19 years convict living in their house apartment or room. Even my grandmother who had 6 rooming houses for college students refused to take him. So I invited Nathan to live with me. On the day that Nathan was released I was not informed. I had 8 friends over to drink beer and smoke pot. The house was full of smoke when a police car pulled in front of the house; it was Nathan and his parole officer. The parole officer was to come to inside and inspect the living quarters to see if he approved. I stood in the door not moving with smoke pouring out of the door over my head. It was a stand-off. The parole officer looking at Nathan, Nathan looking at me and I was looking at both of them. Thirty seconds of that was all the parole officer could take. He wiped his face with his handkerchief, wished Nathan good luck and drove away. Welcome to freedom.

Nathan's freedom was long time coming, Nathan as a teenager was a petty thief who shoplifted cheap items for the thrill of it. One night Nathan broke into a home and found quarters and dimes mounted in a book. He took the collection and quickly began buying (?) chips using a quarter that was worth \$ 10.000.

What Nathan didn't know is that the house he burglarized belonged to the chief of Police. He was apprehended and taken to a basement cell where he was beaten very badly. His parent got him out on bond.

Nathan was enraged by the beating he took at the hands of the police, so he returned to the Police chief's house and set it on fire, walked across the street and sat in the park and watched it burn. Police arrested him as he sat watching the fire and eating crackerjacks.

Nathan received 80 years in prison. With unbelievable luck his sentence was reduced and he was transferred to a juvenile facility.

Four years at this facility was enough for Nathan. One night he escaped, stole a car and started driving home. Nathan tried to ignore the increasing hunger he felt, stopping anywhere for anything was a bad idea; he needed to get home as soon as possible. But stop he did, noticing a cafe closed for the night. Nathan smashed a window, entered the cafe and began looking for food. As he moved down the beer cans upon a safe and to his surprise found the safe was open. Someone had made a big mistake. There were stacks of money on every shelf. Nathan picks up to large stacks of money and ran to the car, driving off.

Nathan enjoying his good fortune becomes increasingly unsettled thinking of the money he left. Nathan turned around, went back to the café and took 2 more stacks of money and left again. Nathan would come back 4 more times before he emptied the safe, 6 trips to take it all. \$250.000. Nathans hunger was replaced with excitement and fear. Finally he was back in his hometown. Driving around town on streets he knows well, he met an old girlfriend, he asked her for sex, she said no and he offered her \$10.000 to sleep with him, she said yes. The next night he gave another 15.000 also for sex.

Nathan finally thought it was safe to go home to his mother and father's house. He gave his mother \$120.000 and his father \$80.000.

That same day he was arrested for escaping he had 25.000 on him. The police connected him to the burglary of the café and the looting of the safe in part because the café was on his route home. And because Nathan had heard in juvenile that \$100 bills could be traced to you, at some point during his drive home he threw out of the window of the car 45.000 in 100 bills, all over the highway causing a major traffic jam with motorist picking up the money. This adventure made front page of news in the local paper.

Nathan was charged with one count of escape, one count of auto theft and 6 counts of midnight burglary. "Midnight burglary" in North Carolina carries the death penalty. The law states, that if you enter a dwelling at night with people at home asleep or awake, you face death in the electric chair. Unknown to Nathan the café had a security guard sleeping in the café. Every time Nathan left and returned he got a new charge of midnight burglary, thus 6 charges, which placed him on death row. Police pressed Nathan on where was the money. He refused to say, so the judge gave him the harshest sentence possible, death.

Once the next 12 years Nathan saw his prison sentence reduced to 80 years, then once again to 40 years. Off of death row and now eligible to take classes at the local university, he began to pursue his B.A. and

Masters in Social work. His grade point average was nearly perfect placing him in the top 3 at a university of 30,000 students.

Nathans sentencing reductions made him eligible for parole. After parole his first job was part time teacher at a local vocational school. He soon had a second job teaching at the university he graduated from.

Doing those last 14 years of his sentence his family put to good use the money he had given them from the café. His family purchased a dry cleaner, a restaurant, a hotel and gas station.

Description of a workshop on Racism

Racism not only negativity affects black to white relationship, Racism affects white to white relationship as well.

Doing a lecture for 700 students at U.C. Berkeley, I asked the students if anyone wanted to come up on stage with me and explore their personal issues around racism. An 18 year old white woman joined me. When a student is sitting in the audience, they are looking at me, but when they come on stage and look out into the eyes of hundreds of people, it becomes a bit scary, you tend to get emotional, and you tend to get very honest. Most people would prefer to be on stage with an uncomfortable truth rather than a safe lie.

I am standing on stage urging the young lady to calm down and look at the audience and think of them as her allies. I encourage the audience to look at her with warm eyes and supportive faces. I am holding her hands as another measure of support. It is an emotional experience from the start; she has said nothing at this point. I ask her to tell me what she would like to say. She wanted to talk about her father. She spoke lovingly of this man. She went on to say that it was her father she went to after her first sexual experience, she asked him why did this happen or what does that mean. It was her father she went to when she had her first period, not her mother or older sister, but her father. I was impressed with this relationship, this was a good man.

One day after arriving home from school she found her father standing in her bedroom holding a photograph of her and some of her black classmates. He turned to her holding the picture and said to her: "You should not be hanging out with these people, they mean you no good. They will get you in trouble." She reacted by defending her black classmates. They began to shout at each other, the argument escalated to the point that she ran out of the house, hurt and confused. At that point she wanted nothing to do with this man, a man whose counsel she wanted. There now was a wall separating her from her father. I slowed her down and asked her to get a picture in her mind's eye of her father's face with that look she had come to love, that look that made her feel protected, that look that made her feel safe beyond all measure, that look that says: "Ummm, That is my baby!"

I had her look at the audience and say to them, in a warm voice "You know, I lost my father to racism, that is right I lost this good man to racism, my daddy." At that moment she began to cry, feeling sadness, feeling lost. You can feel an emotional wave moving then the audience as many students begin to tear up in reaction. I keep the feeling of lost active(?) alive by repeating the phrase: "I lost my father to racism" The crying continues. Having reached this emotional summit, what next?

I lost my father to racism was the statement. To be successful, to be a helping partner for this courageous young lady, reclaiming her father, this good man is of paramount importance.

Her father who loves her infinitely x 2. This father who wants to keep her safe and happy, this good man must be managed and returned to his place of honor within her life.

Crying drains that reservoir of emotions, emotions that fuel her defensiveness which informs her behavior. The crying creates a balance between head and heart, as the emotions decrease, intellectual capacity increases. Her best thinking begins to lead the way. Her emotional intelligence also rises, opening up many peaceful alternative reactions to her dilemma with her father. She can return home and revisit this discussion concerning her black friends. Daddy emotionally will be standing in the same position he had when they last argued. He is standing there still feeling hurt, confused. Protective and longing for some understanding, and hoping to get one of the great loves of his life, back in his life. She can ask her father what he would like to say about this issue.

Her father will begin to rant and rave, scream and shout taking up his former position, that to associate with black people is not a good thing. She can encourage him to keep talking without getting hooked emotionally by his arguments. She can do for her father what I did for her earlier on stage back at school.

Once her father finishes with his tirade and stops talking while coming up for air. She can then turn to him and say, "Well dad now what do we do?" having the opportunity to react with no need to scream. He is back and the relationship possibilities are unlimited.

This non-violent, non-judgment approach was one of the greatest gifts that I received working with American pictures. Living in the Kingdom of Denmark gave me the possibility of learning everyday within the workshop. The approach we took with the young lady in Berkeley was a Danish way of living their lives. The Danes were honest, loving, exclusive, sharing and possessing no fair.

American Pictures gave me a platform to speak out. American Picture gave me an audience of tens of thousands. I felt that getting this opportunity to speak to thousands I must be responsible and present a paradise(?) that benefitted everyone. Making a contribution to the social good was my goal; I thank American Pictures everyday for this experience. A magical run of many years on two continents and 16 countries, a humbling experience that taught me so much, an experience that allowed me to unload my ego and focus more sharply on a deeper spirited existence.

Thank you, Jacob, the son of a preacher man.

P.S. A lot of psychologist and emotional stuff that should be added in an edit, would you like me to do an edit?

Incomplete.