

My grandmother, who was born in the year 1900 and had been a schoolteacher, journaled everything: how much she paid the butcher for the roast, who she wrote letters to, who she talked to and what they talked about, what she made for dinner that night. She did this day in and day out for decades. As a historian, I have always found it easier to write about other people than about myself. I made a few short-lived efforts when I was much younger, and they amounted to very little.

The activity I valued most about the *White Privilege: Let's Talk* curriculum was guided journaling, culminating in writing our respective spiritual autobiographies through the lens of race. Although I was characteristically inconsistent in my journaling throughout the six months that the members of the Amos Group studied together earlier this year, I did spend a fair amount of time contemplating—and sometimes writing down—my thoughts about the material presented and the questions raised.

When invited to discuss white privilege or anti-racism we often resort to quick defenses: “I’m not a racist” or “I/my parents worked hard for what we have built/earned.” Yet when considering my spiritual autobiography from the perspective of race, I began to realize both the extent to which race defines us and shapes our lives to the very core, and the prices racism exacts from all of us. All of us, whatever our skin tone or ethnic origin. Race shapes and racism bankrupts all of our life trajectories in myriad ways that are largely imperceptible, until we look for them.

I grew up in a small town in the Rust Belt of northwest Ohio. The town is a microcosm of urban, post-industrial life in a broader agricultural landscape. We were city, suburb, and country in one small elementary school, junior high, and high school. My classmates were the children and grandchildren of those who had made the Great Migration or of Mexican migrant laborers. Every class, every bus ride home from a track meet, every National Honor Society meeting, every Homecoming Court—was Black, Brown and White together. We were, it could be said, *in relationship with one another*. We were aware of race, but we also weren’t; we were friends and teammates and boyfriends and girlfriends.

Not long ago my older sister told me that one of her high school classmates, who is Black, recently told her that she never experienced racism until she graduated from high school and left our hometown. This is not to celebrate my hometown with its many flaws, whatsoever. But it does help me recognize through my own spiritual autobiography the importance of being in relationship with one another—something that is not particularly easy to achieve in the western suburbs of Chicago, but something I will continue to work toward in my next “chapter.” The “Let’s Talk” small group opportunity facilitates understanding of white privilege in the pursuit of a more just society by helping to shine light on the invisible stories in each of our lives; both projects are well worth undertaking.

Judy Johns Schloegel