

Kimberlee Williams: So, when you call somebody in, you're saying, what I value most is my relationship with you. I value my connection to you. I value you learning more about me. So, when you have offended me and there is value and investment in a relationship with you, the fact that you've offended me says, wow, we're not as close as I thought we were. Or, wow, there's something about my story that you don't know.

Sam Fuqua: That's Kimberlee Yolanda Williams, and this is Well, That Went Sideways! A podcast that serves as a resource to help people have healthy, respectful communication. We present a diversity of ideas, tools, and techniques to help you transform conflict in relationships of all kinds. On this episode, we talk with Kimberlee Yolanda Williams about engaging across difference. She is an educator, a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion administrator and consultant, and the author of the book, *Dear White Woman, Please Come Home*.

I'm Sam Fuqua, co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hi Alexis.

Alexis Miles: Hi Sam.

Sam Fuqua: And we're so pleased to have Kimberlee Yolanda Williams with us as our guest for this episode of Well, That Went Sideways! Hello.

Kimberlee Williams: Hi, Sam. Hi Alexis. It's great to be with y'all.

Sam Fuqua: Your book, *Dear White Woman, Please Come Home*, there's an interesting story, I think, about what prompted you to write it. Can you share that with us?

Kimberlee Williams: Yeah. So, I was angry. I was angry. Um, I will tell you, so my publisher, I worked with Debbie Irving, the author of *Waking Up White* to publish *Dear White Woman, Please Come Home*, and we had been friends for years before the book was even an idea. So, whenever she was in town giving a workshop or something like that, we would try, my partner and I would try to support her work. And so, for my birthday, my partner surprised me by taking me to one of Debbie's events. And, it was like, oh my gosh, you know? Um, and it was a workshop that was designed specifically for white women and black women to come together, to heal, to connect, to share truths with, truths with one another. And, uh, the last activity of the day was a full day workshop. The last activity of the day really got me, uh, fired up, and it was weird. This was pre-COVID, of course, where two people sat knee-to-knee, face-to-face, and the black woman had the opportunity to share a truth. And, it sounded something like this. I didn't tell you, fill in the blank, and here's why. Fill in the blank, right? And then, the white woman had the opportunity to respond and, and say, thank you for sharing that truth with me. And you know, so forth and so on.

And white woman after white woman after white woman responded to the truths that they heard. Uh, oftentimes a black woman would say, "I didn't share it because I didn't think you cared." And the white woman would oftentimes, I wanna say nine out of ten of them said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. What do you mean I, I didn't care. How could I care if I didn't even know? I didn't know." And I thought to my, I start, every time I heard one of them say, "I didn't know," I just felt the fire in my belly get hotter and hotter and hotter. And so, when I left that workshop, or at the end of the day when I left and we headed home, I was, I was fuming. And, I got home and I got into my, this chair at our, our, uh, kitchen island, and I said to my partner, I said, "Listen, I'm gonna write a book and I'm gonna write it directly to white women so that they

can never

again say they didn't know." Because I think, you know, at first, I was like, they're lying. How can they not know? They're on YouTube, it's on the news, it's on Facebook, it's on, you know, Instagram.

And I thought, wait a minute. Okay. But growing up as a black girl, I was taught with, within my own family, within my own community, within my school that you don't tell white people the truth because the consequences of telling white people the truth might mean loss of life. Might mean loss of career. Might mean loss of, um, property. Might mean damage to your property. It might mean, um, that your physical safety, uh, for you, you and your family is, is at risk. And so, I have been trained not to tell the truth too. And so I thought, okay, I'm risking a lot by doing this. I'm breaking the rules that we have because if we're gonna move forward, if we're actually gonna move forward in authentic relationships and white people don't actually know the truth, how can we ever actually and possibly be in authentic relationships if they don't know the unfiltered truth? And, if we're not willing to go to the table to tell them the truth, how can we then continue to try to hold them accountable for things that offend us? And so I said, I'm writing this book, and, and that was four and a half, five years ago now when I sat at the kitchen island and I started writing because I was angry. I was angry.

Sam Fuqua: So, it wasn't that the white women in the workshop were feigning ignorance, it was that they may have actually not known, and that you as a black woman may have been self-censoring. Is that an apt description or?

Kimberlee Williams: Yeah, absolutely. That I, I had, that I wasn't telling the truth. And, and Sam, it's funny because when people, when I work with organizations or I give workshops or the question always is, okay, what is this truth you wanna tell me? And you know, and I think people are always thinking so deep, like, what hidden secret is Kim not telling me? But let's start with the most basic lie that, that we as a society, we tell every day, all day long. When somebody walks past you and they say, "Hey Sam, how are you?" Right?

Sam Fuqua: Yeah, I'm fine.

Kimberlee Williams: Right. Exactly. Like your, your dog just had a bad appointment. Like your car was just like, somebody like keyed your car. Like, you know, you might have had a flat tire on the way to work. I mean, I myself, just before getting on this call was, was just, came from a doctor's appointment and was put in a, a fractured boot today or a walking boot. So, so, but if you ask me, "Hey Kim, how are, how's it going?" I would probably say I'm fine, even though I'm not, I'm sitting here and, and I'm like, oh, this thing is hot and it's uncomfortable and I need to be in this for the next few weeks. So, that's one of the most basic lies that we tell, and we tell it even more, like it's a, even more turned up lie. When we're talking, um, I know for me, uh, the black women that I grew up with and the black women that are part of my life, when they're speaking to white people, that's, it's an even bigger lie because you add, you sprinkle on this tone of voice that's not your normal tone. What, "Hey Kim, how are you?" "Great. How are you?" That's not my real voice. Like the voice that I'm speaking to you in right now is my real voice. But we've been trained to code switch so that we make sure that, um, two things, white people stay comfortable and that white people see us as one of the good ones, one of the educated ones, one of the safe black people to be around. And how do we ever move forward into authentic relationships if my authentic self is not even in the room?

Alexis

Miles: And you hit on a really good point there because it seems that in your entire book, what you were talking about is authentic relationships, and the power and resilience of authentic relationships. So, you mentioned Debbie Irving...

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: ...earlier, that you're friends, and she wrote the forward of your book.

Kimberlee Williams: Yes.

Alexis Miles: And she said something to the fact that you have a rare ability to meet white women where they are, and put them forward.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: So, can you talk about what it is in you that allows you to meet people who don't know things that we think they should know?

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: Because it's so visible to us...

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: ...as black women.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: And so, it's almost, it's hard to imagine that they can't look at us and know that there is some, a different reality for us.

Kimberlee Williams: Right.

Alexis Miles: So, what is it in you that gives you that capacity to meet people where they are and then push them forward?

Kimberlee Williams: Yeah. I would say, so this is something that I lo, I love this question because it's something that I love to talk about. Had you talked to me ten years ago, I probably wouldn't be having the same conversation or come from the same viewpoint. But, um, I like to share with people that I have had several encounters in my life. And when I say encounters, I, I teach workshops about encounters, and I feel like an encounter is something, it's an event that happens directly to you or to someone you love that forces you to see, feel, or experience discrimination in a way that your privilege previously prevented. And so, one of my most life-shattering and life-changing encounters, um, was the fact that I woke up one day in 2016, and I come from the dance world, so I spent most of my days and afternoons dancing anywhere from two to four hours a day. That was normal for me. And I was a dance coach. And I woke up, I woke from one

day to the

next, I woke up and I couldn't walk. And you know, when I first put my feet on the ground and fully expected to get from my bed to the bathroom, um, and I fell to the floor, I thought maybe I'm getting older. Maybe I just need to shake it off and, and try again. And I tried again and I fell to the floor. And I remember just the panic that flooded my entire being, um, that nothing had happened to me.

I had, you know, people, the question again and again was, you know, what happened? And there was nothing that happened. I went from one day to the next, and all of a sudden, I was dumped into the world of people with disabilities. And, all of the injustices that, had you asked me, you know, a week before this happened, I would've told you this country does a great job taking care of people who live with disabilities. I mean, I grew up in a home with a sister, an older sister, who was born mentally disabled. So I definitely, and I saw all of the resources that my family, uh, was able to have access to for her. So, I definitely thought that the government did a great job of caring for people with disabilities. And, and then, I became one of those people and I, and my disability, I mean, today you can see it, but most days you can't even see my disability because I live with it every day silently. So I, to the average person, I, I don't "look" to say, "look" to, I put quotes around that, and I realized that first of all, the way people treat me, they treat me as if I'm able-bodied. They approach me as if I'm able-bodied. They invite me to do activities every day that I can't do. Um, they invite me on trips that I can't go on. I mean, there, there's this whole life that comes with living with a physical disability. And yet, my disability does not impact my life enough that the government sees me as disabled. So, even though it impacts my daily life every day, it doesn't impact it enough that the government would classify me as disabled.

So, um, and so, I think about all of the things that my eyes were open to when I was, from one day to the next able-bodied to someone living with a disability. I didn't know how I was gonna get around. I didn't know how I was gonna get to the hospital. I needed to go to the hospital. Obviously, I couldn't walk, but I couldn't get to my car. I didn't know, all of a sudden, I, to get to food where I used to eat. Where, at this place where I was living, I needed to go downstairs. I could no longer walk down the stairs. I mean, all of a sudden, I think about every single thing I did. I could no longer shower. I mean, I couldn't take a sh, I could no longer shower by myself. Like, I mean, all of these things that I just had never thought about. And Alexis, I hope you laugh at this. I remember, um, in one of the most ridiculous moments, I mean, because when this happened, I ended up being, living life on one leg for nearly two years. Okay? So I, and, and I was, uh, for a long time I was on wheels. So I went, I remember going, wheeling myself into a handicap bathroom stall and the toilet was on, you know, and the stall is larger, and the toilet was on one side of the stall, and the toilet paper was on the other side of the stall. And, I just remember sitting in there like, this was not a person with a disability that designed this bathroom. An able-bodied person designed this bathroom 'cause it didn't even make sense.

Why was the toilet paper on, and so, all of a sudden, I started to find compassion because that we're, we're having a conversation about being able-bodied versus, um, someone having a disability. I started to have compassion for people from other groups, right? We can turn this conversation into race. We can turn it into gender. We can, if you have not had an encounter and been forced to look, to take a deep look without flinching or looking away at the issues that face other communities that you don't belong to, you're always gonna need your, to whatever the government or your family or your church or your extended family or your, your colleagues have taught you to believe. And I would've been, you could not have paid me to say that there were not enough handicapped spaces in the parking lot at the grocery store. And, now that I live every, you know, my handicap pass is in my mirror right now. Uh, you know, like, and, and now when I go to a place and I see only one handicap parking space, I notice it right away because I belong to that group. And, I have to question, why would you only have one space? You know? And so, if you don't belong to it,

it's like

someone removing a, you've been going through the world with a blindfold and it's because you haven't had to see it.

But when you remove that blindfold and you see all of the daily injustices as small as, right? Because we talk about injustices and we wanna go straight to George Floyd, right? But when we, when you think about the fact that the toilet paper in a bathroom stall is not on the same side as a toilet, that is a daily injustice. Something as simple as toilet paper. And so I, I wanna, wanna ask the world to intentionally remove that blindfold. And not because George Floyd has been killed or not because, you know, something huge in the media has happened, but because of the small daily things that are in my book that are happening, because those are the things that lead to that death by a thousand cuts, like, uh, feeling or experience. And so, I try to meet people where they are because I don't expect them to readily see. I don't expect them to readily see. Because there I was, walking through the world as someone that could park anywhere, walk anywhere, dance, leap, run, jump, and now I, I move through the world very differently.

Alexis Miles: And, when I hear you say that, part of what I hear is we all, we have something that obstructs our ability to see certain realities.

Kimberlee Williams: One hundred percent.

Alexis Miles: And so, there is no shame, no blame.

Kimberlee Williams: Exactly.

Alexis Miles: And you use the word in your book, *interrogate* a lot.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: And I like that.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: That rather than shame, blame, judge...

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: Um, interrogate. Ask why.

Kimberlee Williams: Yes. Yes.

Alexis Miles: Um, and, and use curiosity.

Kimberlee Williams: Yes. Yes.

Alexis Miles: And you also use the word *heart* a lot in your book.

Kimberlee

Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: Space versus heart space.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: And, something else you said that really got my interest was the community we live in, and also the community we think in.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: So, can you talk more about that and how those kinds of spaces, heart space, the community we think in, relate to building community across difference?

Kimberlee Williams: I will tell you, and, and that's part of why I, or the feedback that I've received, is that my book is super unique because the approach is so different. Um, it's my job to read a lot of the DEI books that are out there, right? I'm a DEI director, so I do this work all day, every day. And so, part of that, that responsibility is reading a lot. Um, and so many of those books are, are wonderful books, and they are, and they speak to your mind. They speak to your mind. They're written from a scholarly point of view. There's a lot of data, there's a lot of charts, there's a lot of statistics, and with that, we are able to disconnect ourselves from the experiences on the ground that those numbers represent. And so, this book is about showing you how your, your neighbor, how you're possibly offending your neighbor or even your "best friend." Even your, your, and I put, I have put quotes around that, because if the person is your "best friend" and you're offending them and you don't realize you're offending them, are they your best friend, you know? And so, I've tried to pull on the heartstrings, right? Because when, when you start moving from a place of, that's, that's so and so with the head sheet on, you know, the sheets on, the hoods on their heads with the, the fire torches and the, you know, chanting, those are chanting that.

So, this could be me. And this could be my neighbor. This could be my in-law. This could be my, um, my child's teacher at school. This could be, you know, when you move from that to that heart space, when you find the human connection, you cannot turn away. You can turn away from a statistic. You can turn away from a chart. But, when you attach a human being to the end of that, you cannot turn away. So, it moves you from a head space thinking about this, and you know, I'll, I'll, I'll say to someone when I say, hey, how do you feel about this, this, and this? Well, Kim, you know, I think this, this, this, and this. I said, that's funny because I asked you how you feel and you responded, I think. And you're like, oh, you know, I don't, wait, I don't know how I feel. I'm like, and I got time. I'm, I'm willing to wait to hear how you feel, because I don't wanna know what you think. What we think if we have not interrogated it is what comes up for us automatically based on our socialization. What neighborhood did you grow up in? What state? What city? What religion? What, um, what community? What county? I'm from Washington, D.C. So there, we talk about counties a lot. You know, what, what, um, what college did you go to? What, uh, political party are you affiliated with? All of those things produce what we think. But, it is human interaction and relationship that produce what we feel.

Last summer, somebody said to me, it doesn't matter what you feel. You, it is all about logic and what you think. And I was like, wow, you and I are not gonna be able to talk about this because, right? And so, and that's what allows you to disconnect from the humanity that is in what you see on the news. And, and what

happens

when you have that encounter, right, is you then are forced, you either bury it deep inside you and you move on with life because if we were to unearth and interrogate what we've been taught to think and believe, it is very overwhelming. It's very overwhelming. Um, but when you, at, again, I keep reinforcing this, right? I sound like a broken record. When you attach a human being or a human experience to the end of the story that you're reading or the statistic, you, you're forced, like I, again, when I woke up and couldn't walk, I was forced to, to interrogate everything that I believed about how people with disabilities were treated in this country. I was, I was forced to reckon with that, and it was overwhelming.

I spent many days just weeping, sitting, sitting there, unable to go anywhere, Alexis. Sitting there just like, I can't believe this is folks' reality every day. Every day for years and years and decades and decades and decades of their lives. And, when people get that, it is overwhelming, but it's, they start to move through the world differently. And then, you find these blessed communities of humanists or, um, humanitarians that are able to see beyond their political party or their, uh, neighborhood or their, their, uh, religion. I grew up believing that Muslims were evil and were going to hell. I was taught that directly. And I remember the first time I became friends with a Muslim, everything that I had been taught was all of a sudden wrong. All of a sudden, all of a sudden, I had to interrogate what I had been taught to believe, and I had to make the conscious choice to set it aside and say, I no longer believe this and I will no longer live this way, right? And that's what, getting us to that beloved, that beloved circle of humanity is what this book is about.

Sam Fuqua: One thing you said a bit ago, you talked about, uh, insulting or offending someone without realizing you did that. And the phrase, the phrase that we used the last few years for, that I think is microaggression. When that happens, do you, do you try to respond in a way that is authentic and creates an understanding, or is it more like, uh, this isn't worth my time?

Kimberlee Williams: Depends on the situation. And, and most of the time when we use, when we throw around these buzzwords like microaggression and racism and sexism and homophobia, and I'm all for using those words in, um, teaching settings, right? Um, you're learning, you're learning about what's happening on a national and a global stage. I'm all for using that vocabulary. But, when I get into workshops and healing circles with organizations or, um, when folks bring me in to spend time with the people in their organization, we are in circles of healing. And so, this is what I say, a microaggression, right, generally is an outward reflection of inward bias. Whether that's something that's being said or something that's done. And most of the time, by its very nature, we are not aware of our biases. We just aren't. It's the car that's in your blind spot, right? And thankfully, cars have gotten to a place where they can put a little light in your mirror that shows that someone's in your blind spot, right? But we still don't have that. We still don't have that as human beings. So we, the way we find out is we often make mistakes.

And so, here's what I say about microaggressions. When that which is normal to me, and I, and I want to focus on the word normal, when that which is normal to me lands poorly on that which is normal to you, you and I end up in conflict. And, we can reverse that, right? When that which is normal to you, lands poorly on that which is normal to me, you and I end up in conflict. And, a great example of this is, um, uh, I always, I often share that if I drive into a neighborhood where I grew up in, I spent half of, most of my time in the black community, a lot of my time in the Latinx community, and both communities enjoy loud music, traditionally. Um, but if I drive my car into a neighborhood where I know mostly white people live there, I turn my music down. Because that which is normal, something as simple as the way I like to listen to my music, that which is normal to me, lands poorly on that which is normal to you. You and I end up in conflict. And so, the, the, the decision to, um, address a microaggression for me comes from how much value do I have, value and investment do I have in the relationship, right? So, if it's someone that I am already in

relationship with, I'm close to, they probably are not gonna respond with defensiveness, right? But, if it's someone that I'm running into in a grocery store, it's an automatic, like I'm throwing my hands in the air, you're trying to call me racist, you're trying to call me sexist, you know? And that's not me. I don't have a racist bone in my body.

And, that's why I say I'm not talking about racism. I'm talking about the fact that that which is normal to you, landing poorly on that which is normal to me. And that's because you and I, whether we wanna pretend on the 4th of July, waving these flags, that we're all the same, you and I come from different cultures. And I say culture because you can have a black person raised in a white family that has no idea what black culture is, right? So it's, this is not so, it's not a blanket that we can put on all people who look this way. It's people who live this way. It's a huge difference. Huge difference. And so sometimes I will, in a moment where there, I've been micro aggressed, I will say, wow, you, hey, you went all the way, you went all the way over here on me on that one. You know, like, oh my gosh, Kim, thank you for pointing that out. And then if, like I said, if it's a stranger, it's the flip of a coin. Do I have the time? Do I have the energy? Do I feel like, do I feel like dealing with the potential that this person could throw their hands up and scream, "I'm being attacked?" Right? And that does happen. That, that does happen.

Alexis Miles: And, and that points to the fact I believe that there are consequences...

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: ...for that decision.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: And being able to weigh...

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: ...the potential consequences before making that decision to respond are not...

Kimberlee Williams: Absolutely.

Alexis Miles: ...respond.

Kimberlee Williams: Uh, because you could, you could make a correction to a microaggression and you could lose your life, right? Like I, I will tell you, and I hate to admit this, um, while I'm being recorded, but I, my spirit, my heart and my soul, could not take watching the Sandra Bland video. So, for a long time I did not know what her police interaction was. Um, and when I finally watched it, um, I wanna say, it might have been just two years ago that I watched it. I sat on my couch crying because she is demanding her rights. She knows her rights, right? You hear her say, "I have the right to smoke this cigarette. I don't have to put my cigarette out," right? That I have the right to smoke. And I'm like, uh, and I'm cringing because I know that with every correction that she gave, you know, I don't have to do this. The law says I have the right to do this. I knew that she was pissing this cop off more and more and more. Um, and I thought, and I just sat there with tears rolling down my face and I'm thinking, no, you're li, your life, your life, your family, your... And I'm thinking that. Um, and so, and that, Sandra Bland again, is an extreme example of our day-to-day. I

mean, I had something happen to me publicly yesterday that was nothing like what Sandra Bland went through, and I said to myself, am I willing to correct this person publicly? No, I am not. Because I have to protect, I have to protect my physical safety, my mental and emotional, um, health, my uh, my income for my family, and, um, my reputation, right? My, I have a public, I'm, my life is very outward facing, so I have to protect my reputation. I made the, I made the decision not to correct the person.

Alexis Miles: So, calling out and calling in.

Kimberlee Williams: Mmm. Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: So, in your book, it's chapter four, I think, *The King's English*.

Kimberlee Williams: Mmm.

Alexis Miles: You wrote, you're writing to this sister, this white sister who's been kidnapped.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: You say, you have to know we are doing everything in our power to find you and that we will never give up.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: So to me, that's one of the most powerful call-ins...

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: ...that you could ever have.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: Somebody who values you so much that you, you won't give up on them.

Kimberlee Williams: Mm-hmm.

Alexis Miles: So, can you talk about the difference in calling out and calling in, and the power of calling in?

Kimberlee Williams: Yeah, I think, so here's, here's my heart's response to that question. I, calling out feels like what's most important to me is correcting you, right? Correcting the semantics. Correcting the behavior. What's most important is correcting you, and maybe even we're gonna add a little sprinkle here, maybe even shaming you. Shaming you so much so that I think you will learn your lesson. But that's, but that's not actually what happens. Like when I think about the people that killed Ahmad Aubery, and I think about them sitting in a jail cell day after day, their hearts have not changed. Their minds have not changed. They haven't written, reached out to their family and friends back home or, and their communities and

said, wow, my heart was filled with hatred when I did this. I was filled with panic and fear when I did this, right? There's, they're sitting there because that's the consequence for their actions. And so, I get mad when I see things like this because I'd rather somebody pay someone to go into that cell every day and talk about humanity and race and class and safety and dignity, right? Every single day. And so, when you call somebody in, you're saying, what I value most is my relationship with you. I value my connection to you. I value you learning more about me. Because if you have offended me and you're not, and again, I am, I don't do this work because of the people with the torches and chanting, like, you know, all these, all these, uh, the, these epithets, right? I do this because I want to connect human beings to other human beings.

So, when you have offended me and there is value and investment in a relationship with you, the fact that you've offended me says, wow, we're not as close as I thought we were. Or, wow, there's something about my story that you don't know. And that gives me the opportunity to sit down and say, here, you know, I think of an, I say extreme, Alexis, but this is really, it just was a normal day, I think about sitting in the Target parking lot and I was sitting in the handicapped space waiting on my partner to come out and a white woman came out of the Target with her husband and they were also in a handicapped parking space. And, and as she approached the car, and it was a beautiful sunny day, I had my windows cracked, I had my moon roof open, I had my sun shades on, and I was just sitting there taking the sun in. And it was just beautiful. And as she approached the car, she said, "Well, huh, she certainly isn't handicapped." And I started weeping. I said, "How do you know from looking at somebody from the collarbone up that they're not handicapped? How do you know? And given that you made this judgment, you also felt entitled to say that out loud. Like you, not only did you think it, you said it out loud."

And so, I was, so, and I have a lot of practice. I have a lot of practice, years and decades of practice of being, um, black. So, I'm used to the things that come at me that have to do with race. I've only been, um, in a body that has a disability for six years. So, I have very little experience. Um, and so that moment just set my heart on fire in the worst way, um, that someone, another human being who's clearly struggling, right, like they're in a handicapped parking space, would look at someone that's just sitting in their car. They're just sitting in their car, and make such a strong judgment about them. Um, and so that I'm not talking about those moments, right? I didn't have a chance to jump out of the car and show her that I had to be cut in five different places, and screws and staples are in my foot and plates, right? I didn't have the opportunity to, to share more of my story with her. Those are not the instances I'm talking about. But the ones where you have the opportunity to say, "Uh oh! There's something about my story that you don't know because you wouldn't have said or done that, um, had you known."

Sam Fuqua: I wanna ask you about your, your DEI work, uh, the workshops you do, and in workshops that I've been in, uh, typically in workplaces or with organizations I volunteer for, there's sometimes a sense, uh, from the white people and myself included at one point, um, that, oh, I'm really uncomfortable here, but I'm gonna do this workshop and then I'm gonna be comfortable again, you know. And I've learned from, from reading some of your work and talking with other folks on the podcast, that's really about being comfortable in your discomfort. Is that an accurate way to say it? Because it's not, it's not necessarily going to resolve as much as we would like it to. Can you say a little more about that?

Kimberlee Williams: Sure. And it always, for me, um, I was just sharing this a little bit with Alexis, is that it, for me, it always goes back to culture, right? And, um, I will tell you, I don't, I can probably count on both my hands here, how many white people I've talked to that know what the collective white culture is about. Like, I feel, I feel super safe saying to you, Sam, that, that a lot of black people like listening to loud music. I feel super safe saying that. And, and I'm not, I'm not safe saying all black people like to li, right? But white

people

struggle to, to name the things whether they seem positive or negative, right, that, um, they have in common with other white people, right? I, listen, the more creative your hairstyle can get, the better you feel as a black person. That's something I can say safely. I can safely say that about a lot of black people, right? And so when we talk about white culture, we don't realize that, and we don't have to talk about race. We can talk about anything. That as a culture, a lot of white people are practiced and well-rehearsed in not being uncomfortable at all costs, doing whatever you have to do to maintain a sense of comfort, whatever that is, right?

Like I've literally watched, I mean, the most, greatest example I can give, um, Sam, of this was I was, we were watching the news and, and I hate that I'm giggling to myself, but I was, I'm giggling out of shock that I'm still shocked that I heard this. Um, we were watching the news years ago after the country music festival shootings in, I think, Las Vegas. And, a woman's husband, a white woman's husband was murdered. Like someone she had been married to for over, I think, 40 years. And, and they said, you know, "How will you, how will, how are you doing? And how will you get past this? How will you heal?" And she said, "Well, tomorrow's a new day, you know. He, he's no longer with us and tomorrow's a new day." So, and, and I remember thinking to myself, I remember, I remember jumping off the couch, like, what did she just say? Like, I remember thinking even in the face of the death of your spouse, you are willing at all costs to make sure that I seem fine. Your, Sam is fine, Alexis is fine. We're all fine. The, there's nothing wrong. We're all comfortable. Life is okay. And I'm like, your husband was just murdered. And, when y'all woke up yesterday, that was not in your plan. And, and, and the only thing you came up with was tomorrow's a new day. He's gone. Like, what? Wait a minute. What I want, I wanted to pause and reach into the screen and say, excuse me lady, I wanna give you permission to be human right now. It is okay that you might be sad or upset or, or anything neg, fill in the blank with negative emotion, anything negative because your spouse of 40-something years has, has been murdered. It's okay for you to not be okay, right?

And so, I, so when you then talk about things that have literally been made out to be topics that are off limits, race, sex, class, politics, et cetera, if your system has been trained that it's not safe to talk about these things, of course your system goes into fight or flight, right? And, a lot of times it comes off as fight. And so, people say and write and do things like, why don't you just get over it? Someone wrote to me, uh, just last week on LinkedIn and said, why don't you just get over it? You know, we're all Americans and it doesn't matter the color of your skin, and this person's white. Why don't you just get over it? I thought to myself, I wish I could. I wish there was a day where I didn't have to think about race. I really do. Um, and so I, so the, and what's unfortunate Sam, is by the time we reach adulthood and we have these practices formulated and, and hardened, like they're firm inside of us, it's really hard for us to change those. It's hard to feel comfortable doing something that you've been not only socialized to feel uncomfortable doing, but you've lit...

There are people, there are people, um, whether they're my coaching clients or people attending workshops that will say to me, Kim, my parents told me they use words and said, it's not okay to talk about race. It's racist to talk about race. So, how then can we ask employees where we're probably least comfortable, right? We're not sitting in with our best friend or our significant other. We're attending these workshops with our colleagues who we probably don't feel one hundred percent authentic around, and we're engaging in these deep conversations about something we've been told not to talk about. How can we expect... And then, and then what happens, Sam, going back to Alexis's point, the white folks in the room that are, uh, uncomfortable are judged for their discomfort. But again, and, and they're judged as racist, right? But again, when that which is normal to you lands poorly on that which is normal to me, you

and I end

up in conflict. It is normal for a lot of white folks to be uncomfortable talking about race. That's just normal, right?

When we say the word racism, we, if I can give you a short definition, we think of intentional meanness. Intentional meanness, right? We think of the Ku Klux Klan. They have intentionality and they're very mean, right? Um, but most of these interactions are in the subconscious and are not intentional. And so, we can move away to talking about that which is normal. It's powerful when you listen to a white person that's had an encounter, right? They married somebody of a different race, or their kid married somebody of a different race, and they got grandkids, you know, that are different races, you know. And, they talk and they start revealing their own story and they, it's so beautiful when they have the courage to say, I sat around the dinner table and my parents did not let us talk. I mean, they literally slapped us if we talked about X, Y, and Z. That is a powerful and vulnerable place. And if, if someone is willing to share that with you, that is a gift. That is a gift that builds a bridge between you and me that bring us into authentic relationship. And that's, that's the goal. That's the goal.

Sam Fuqua: Kimberlee Yolanda Williams, thank you so much for your time.

Kimberlee Williams: Thank you so much, Sam and Alexis, for having me. This is beautiful.

Alexis Miles: It was wonderful talking with you.

Sam Fuqua: That's Kimberlee Yolanda Williams. She's an educator, a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion administrator and consultant, and the author of the book, *Dear White Woman, Please Come Home*. You can find out more about her book and her workshops on her website, engagingacrossdifference.com. That's engagingacrossdifference.com.

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