

Lee Mun Wah: I think today, what passes for healthy communication, that's been legitimized by our former president, is attacking, blaming, being defensive, in denial, and then not saying anything. And that's passing for healthy communication instead of self-reflection, curiosity, taking responsibility, and the willingness to change. That's healthy communication.

Sam Fuqua: And that's Lee Mun Wah. 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 Lee Mun Wah about understanding conflict and improving cross-cultural communication and awareness. He is a master diversity trainer, a community therapist, a teacher storyteller, and an award-winning documentary filmmaker. Over 15 million people around the world have seen his best known film, *The Color of Fear*. I'm Sam Fuqua co-host of the program with Alexis Miles. Hello Alexis.

Alexis Miles: Hi Sam.

Sam Fuqua: And we are so pleased to have as our guest for this episode of Well, That Went Sideways! Lee Mun Wah. Hello and welcome.

Lee Mun Wah: Oh, thank you, Sam. Thank you, Alexis. Good to be here.

Sam Fuqua: I'd like to start at, at something that I think is at the root of conflict for many people, and that's how, how we react physically and mentally to it. Uh, and my reaction as a white man may be different than, than yours. So talk a little bit about fear of conflict and where that comes from.

Lee Mun Wah: Well, ah, even as you were introducing, I was thinking that, you said conflict is often times, um, a fear of conflict and, and, and the physical fear, but I think it's also emotional. Um, so all three work together to me. I think a white man's fear of conflict is very different than a person of color, are of a woman. And I think the fear of whites around conflict, around the fear that it'll get really emotional. And I often share with folks that I think that there are two emotions in this country, the United States, is definitely afraid of, and that's anger and grief. I think it doesn't know what to do with that. And then along with that, I think it's also the fear of being labeled a racist.

For people of color, I think it was more of a experiential one, which is the fear of repercussions if we get angry. The fear of stereotypes and being labeled. And then I think also the familiarity of conflict for me on, on a every day, historical way is also this sense of being constantly and daily invalidated, um, trivialized, um, attacked, um, blamed, people being in denial. And so I think often times, that's why people of color when it comes to conflict, are very general about it. For instance, like, oh, I experienced so much racism when I was in, in, you know, in, in say Connecticut, but what's missing is, is specifically what happened. And then along with that is, is how it affected me.

And so I think that what we're waiting for is someone to ask us those questions. Specifically, what happened to you? Why do you think it happened to you and how did it affect you? You know, those, those three simple questions, uh, are rarely ever asked. So what ends up is the person starts going onto the next question. And you can, and I think that that's why you sit there because I think, I was telling someone who

was white, I said for me to be able to trust you is to feel that you come outside of yourself to become curious as to what my experience is, and why, and how it affects me, and how the sum of both of those or all of those affect how I trust you in our relationship.

So I think very much that, uh, when I was talking to folks that I think that whites feel like they deserve our respect, whereas for people of color strongly feel that a person needs to earn someone's respect. So I think often times when people take diversity workshops that just want to skip right over the relationship and the time it takes to develop that and go right to, but I'm a nice person, I'm a good person, I've been studying racism and data and books for a long time, and I've gone to a lot of workshops. And I remembered someone just recently telling me this and, and then really struggled with how to talk to this black man. And I said, so you had all these years of experience, about 15, what happened? He goes, well, I read all these books about people of color. I watched films and I, and I listened to videos. But I don't think I ever really had a discussion with a person of color. And I think that there's kind of a vicarious witnessing something, but never quite being part of something.

And I think that that's what everyday relationships require. I also think that sometimes when there was, a question was once asked, um, how many white folks actually had a person of color as a friend. So then like 70 percent did not. And of the 30 percent that did have a person of color as a friend, they never brought up the issue of racism or their whiteness. I think that that's a, that's a very, um, important thing to look at, uh, because I think we often say that, you know, I love everybody, but I don't necessarily have any close friendships with a person of color. But we forget that part, talk about that part. Yeah. I remember somebody once said not knowing how white privilege works is how white privilege works. I thought that was a great statement.

Alexis Miles: That reminds me of something that I noticed when I was watching you facilitate a workshop...

Lee Mun Wah: Oh really?

Alexis Miles: And... yes, and that's that you started immediately with experience. So rather than providing a big conceptual framework, you start it with experience. Related to what you just said, it seems to me that you're stressing the importance of connecting from a heart level. That that has to be the basis of the relationship. And it also reminds me of what you said about conflict, and I took a note here. You said most conflicts are based on three major needs: to be accepted, to be acknowledged, and to be understood. And, so when you talk about the gentleman who spent all those years studying, but not actually having a connection with someone, that really resonated with me.

Lee Mun Wah: Yeah. You know, I think that that when I've gone to many workshops, I agree, totally agree with you that I think when white people present, uh, it's their credentials, it's their intelligence that they put forth, uh, their knowledge. I, I've been on many panels. I think I was just, I was just working with a, um, uh, a tribe. I forget where it is in Arizona or something like this. And I was working with, with a number of folks there, indigenous folks, and I said, every time I was on a panel, um, with whites and then an indigenous person, usually they just have like one of every major food group, but they have always, have always seemed to have more than one white person. And what happened with, the white people would just talk immediately. Okay. Then after they'd get like 10 minutes on the panel, another one talk immediately.

But then every time I was on a panel with an indigenous person, they would always begin like this. Well, first of all, I'm very grateful for the committee to have chosen for me to be on the panel today. And then Michael, I was very moved when you were talking about this, and then Maria, when you were talking about this, I was thinking about... you brought up a lot of points I've never thought about. In other words, they acknowledged everybody who was on the panel and then they would speak. And it, it's very heartfelt. It's, it's like what I was just talking to both of you about. Often times when I do these kind of interviews and talks, I always would like people to show me how they feel about what I just said and not just go to the next question, because, because it's a way of building our relationship, but I have no idea what it means to you if you don't tell me, if I don't see it viscerally, emotionally.

And I, and I think I'm a lot like my mom, everything is like, it has to be from the heart place first. I was just keynoting the American Psychological Association and the marriage and family. And what I said is, I really get that all of you always come with models and concepts, and I think you almost come out having to show us how complicated anything is, but not only that, you create a model that we all have to memorize your terms, and then you get to write a book and sell it to us, and then you get to come to this conference. And I said, when I was getting ready to talk with you and I was sharing some of my ideas and concepts that I had, I know words in terms of just from a heart place, uh, and they were very simple six things that I was working with and the person looked at me, he's a therapist and said, it's too simple Mun Wah. You need to make it more complex.

And that's what stimulated me to talk about that, that day. What's wrong with it coming from a simplistic, simplistic way? Just like I was telling somebody a traumatic story and the woman looked at me and said, well, actually, it's this part of your brain that's being stimulated. And the truth of it is that the window of tolerance just got, uh, stimulated, and that's why you closed it. And I said, well, actually in the last 20 seconds, you have the incredible ability of just shutting me down and making me feel incredibly disconnected from you when I just told you a very heartfelt story. And I want you to think about that as you were thinking, what you were really doing relating to me was trying to take what I said and fit it within the framework so that you could understand it rather than coming from a place where you were curious and wanting to know where I came from, which I think sometimes passes for communication in this country.

Alexis Miles: As you were talking, I was sitting there actually taking in what you were saying, and it was a different experience than I normally have when Sam and I do this show, because usually I'm more in my head. And as you're talking about your heart and being vulnerable and the simplicity, um, I felt myself settle into that heart space. So thank you for that moment. And I, it made me feel more connected to you. And I'm thinking that's what you mean. That it's that level, that beginnings of connection that allows us to, what you call, stay in the room together even when things get hard.

Lee Mun Wah: Yeah. And so, many times when you see me doing work, I will tell a personal story, something that touches me either along the way or someone I heard say something and how it affected me. What's really fascinating when I'm doing that, like keynotes and workshops, is that I look around the room and people are looking around the room when I'm telling those stories to see what their supervisors, directors, and how they're reacting to me. Because I think that that what happens is in corporations, government agencies, agencies, educational institutions, businesses that we're taught that there are two ways of speaking, a professional way and a personal one. And the personal one is to be left outside the door.

And yet when you think about it, why do we have such a difficulty with Black Lives Matter and Me Too is because I think that we, that folks don't know what to do with the emotional rage, the hurt, the microcosms of the stories that they're trying to tell them of what happened. And maybe even for the first time, starting to tell them that it's you, it's over here, it's been going on for years. Even the ACLU just recently having someone step down and, and even then said, you know, they wouldn't admit that there was anything wrong there, but people have for years been trying to share the sexism, the racism, the discrimination, being shut down. And I think that that sometimes institutions are afraid to take a good look at themselves. And yet when you ask the indigenous people, what they say is that it's very important for our tribe, for our people, every two months to check in, are we headed in the right direction? Isn't that beautiful? Are we headed in the right direction? And what that means is also not only we, but am I still in the right direction?

And, and what I think is interesting is I did this one with a major corporation. I said, how about every Monday or Friday that people get together and they get to share as a whatever your ethnicity, gender, class, whatever that might be, how do you feel supported or unsupported at this agency? And that managers have to sit there and hear it, not defend or attack or blame, but actually take it in. And then the last question that managers need to ask is, am I part of the problem? Am I who you're talking about? I'd like to know. And then when they get to find out these, how these feelings are, and then maybe even asking, so tell me what you need or want for it to be different. And then when you do find that out, to make those changes and to give the person who gave that suggestion credit for it, instead of you getting credit for it. And that every CEO of every single company on a monthly basis has their directors, uh, supervisors come in to share what they learned when they met together with the people in their department.

So you don't have to wait for a lawsuit. You don't have to wait for someone to come in and shoot you before you feel like there's a, needs support or someone quits. But that you actually find out on a weekly basis because you actually care. And to me, that is, is diversity where it's practical, it's useful, and it's something that connects people to become a community.

Sam Fuqua: I have had the experience as a white man, uh, listening to people of color, both in my workplace as a supervisor, and I was on my local school board for eight years, and I had to really put aside a sort of defensiveness that just would somehow appear in my head when listening to these critiques and, and completely, uh, put that aside and, and open my heart to what the person was saying. And it was, you know, it's challenging. But, uh, when you were talking about that, I was flashing back to some of the experiences I had had being in that position of receiving and listening.

Lee Mun Wah: Someone got really mad at me at, uh, uh, um, we did a three-day thing and was really mad at my agenda, some things I was doing, and then feeling that one of my facilitators wasn't doing very well. And I said, you know, my first instinct is to be defensive. Like I should know I should be doing better at this. So I just want you to notice, just to know that I was feeling defensive and then also scared and, and some shame and, and, but I'm going to try and really stay in the room to hear you because it's important. So, can you hear that Sam? To that also that extra part, because I want you to think about how few times, uh, underrepresented groups have ever heard of white male say what you just did, but say it out loud. Not just that you bit your lip, but that you share being scared, uh, needing to listen, wanting to defend yourself so that it becomes very humane, human as to what your process is going on.

I think as adults, we learn how to hide, uh, and to be very subversive. Whereas children are very honest. They'll just tell you, would you shut up, I want to hear you. I want to hear, like a little kid was listening to me, is he had his mom, he was on his lap, mother's lap when we were doing my workshop and I, and I was sharing a piece where, where a, a white man really, uh, hurt and invalidated a person of color and then the little, and I said, any of you have any idea what you would have said to the white male? And then the little boy raises his hands. So everybody didn't want to pay attention, and I said, no, tell us what you would have said. He goes, that's a bunch of poop, and everybody just laughed, and I said, that's a new intervention I'm going to add to my list. We see little kids is going to say it right out, you know? I mean the most visceral thing that they know, um, uh, I don't like that, don't want to do that. You know, whereas we go round and round in circles before we are direct with each other.

And I think that's some things that we, we admire about children until children learn how to edit themselves, censor themselves. And I think that's very sad. Like I said, that unlearning racism is unlearning it because we learn racism. We learn how to see people different. There's like some people say that children don't see differences. They don't see color. And I said, they damn well do unless they're blind and deaf, except the difference is, is they find it a positive attraction, a positive thing. They run towards it until they learn how to be afraid, to step back, to be cautious.

Alexis Miles: I think of the many ways that we learn things from our families, from our friend, from media and all of that.

Lee Mun Wah: Yes.

Alexis Miles: So it seems that it's impossible to escape conditioning, negative conditioning...

Lee Mun Wah: Exactly.

Alexis Miles: other people. And I would like to read something because I want to follow it up with a question.

Lee Mun Wah: Okay.

Alexis Miles: This is something you wrote in the Art of Mindful Facilitation and it was in the acknowledgements. You said, "To my mother, I wish to thank you for changing the course of my life by giving up yours, and for impressing upon me the importance of family and giving back to others." And I know from your talks that your mother was killed in 1985 by an African-American man. And so I believe that you were thanking her for that gift that she imparted to you related to her death and all this. So my question from that is, because we're bombarded by all of these negative stereotypes about each other, how is it that you came to do this work you're doing and not be filled with hatred toward all African-American people or all African-American men?

Lee Mun Wah: There's a lot of feelings that came up when you were sharing this with me is, um, right now I'm actually finishing up my life story, which should come out this summer and, called River Jade, and, in which I actually have a large part of the book is, is my diary excerpts from that period of time my mom was murdered. The context people don't know all the time is that it was a student at our school that killed my mom and 50, 50 years before I became a teacher there. But also during that time, predominantly my

classes were filled. I was a special ed teacher, resource specialist in San Francisco for about 25 years. And so, my classes were predominantly children of color and predominantly black too. And I was, was a student and parent advocate in the community and I often went into their homes. And so I was very close to the bi-pod community.

And I, and I, I always put it into context that my father said never bring any black people over our house or date one because they'll rape your sisters and they're no good. And they're up to always no good. And they're uneducated and live off welfare, in which I didn't know, I did not believe that because most, many of my friends were people of color and blacks. But along with that was also how white people reinforced my father to tell us that by, by telling them all these things, but also as you said, on the media, but the media was not just the depictions of people of color. In the media it was also what we did not see in the media, which was people of color and particularly blacks in leadership, presidents, CEOs, teachers, etcetera. So we, and what we saw instead were mostly white people. And so, hence that omission also was very racist. And it's why women didn't think of going into other professions because we didn't show them as lawyers, we didn't show them as presidents, CEOs, just as teachers and nurses.

And so, so all those ways in a way, kind of predestined us to certain professions and certain ones that we would probably never get to do. And so when, when, when he shot my mom, of course, it was just devastating for years. From your three years, I think I was just traumatized and went into therapy, and one of the things I did in therapy was decide that I wanted to find out about him. And then I found out, you know, a bit more about him. And one day when I did *The Color of Fear*, the premier for my film, *The Color of Fear*, which I hope you've seen, is that I shared, I shared the story of my mom's murder in Sacramento in front of 600 people, standing room only in the National Guard Armory, and as I shared my story, a woman yelled out, out of the audience, oh my God, it was my son who killed your mother. And we both went across the audience as we cried in each other's arms.

I don't know what happened. I got her address and everything and lost it. So then I went to look for him. And, and then I told the story when I came back to the school about meeting, you know, his mom, and the school secretary walked up to me and said, you know, I got, I hate to tell you this but he was a student here and I knew him. And I said, what happened? And she said he was caught in the bathroom gambling. And in those days, she said, we didn't know what to do with young black boys. And so we decided to transfer him. And he grabbed a hold of the bathroom door and screamed and cried and said, please don't transfer me. My friends and my family are here. But they went ahead and transferred him. And so what I often tell people is 15 years later I wonder what happened. I wonder if that moment he was transferred, that he had a feeling that he wasn't important and how he felt about himself. And then one day he found his way to my mother's door.

And I think that that, what I think about is what if one teacher, one hall guard, one secretary, one teacher's aid, had just said, no, we're not going to transfer you, transfer you, Anthony. Come here, I want to, I want to find out about your life. I want to find out how we might have failed you. Perhaps my life would have been different. I think that when something like this happens, it's easy to go into generalizing about a whole group. But I know more light when people stereotyped me and our family and our being poor. And I hated when people stereotyped the students in my class. And so when this came up, I didn't generalize there was black folks. It was simply Anthony who had a story. And I think that that's really an important part to remember.

And that's why I try and do in my workshops is, I remember Victor Lewis played a big part in my film, *The Color of Fear*, and he, one day, he's African-American, he followed me to New York to do a film showing. And then I was pairing everybody up and Victor said, I said, do you want to join the group? And everybody was pairing up. And then this Asian woman said, No! she ran back to her seat and she was not going to pair it with Victor. And Victor of course was quite upset. And so I had them both come back up to the front. I asked Victor to ask her, why did you do that? And then she paused for quite a while and then finally said, well, because I was just attacked in the park yesterday and this black man beat me to the ground and kicked me and took my purse, and she started crying and she said, I'm still so scared.

And I said, so now you can see why the context might've happened. And now the reason why I want you to meet Victor, because if you don't get to meet him, you're going to tell your whole family. And then soon they will be all afraid of blacks if not already. But I would like you to ask Victor what came up for him when you ran away. And then he shared his experiences. Black men, often having Asian women particularly pull their bags away, scared, move away, look frightened, run, and how it affected him. See, both had a story. Both were just as real. But both had to put some context, some reality to it in the moment. Both were important otherwise Victor would have left going Asian people, you know, feel this way all the time. And she would leave that all black men are like this.

If we don't deal with those situations then it ripples across everywhere. I think it was Martin Luther King who said that if you can work with one person, you could work with yourself and the other person, perhaps that in doing that, you change the world. So it doesn't have to be all at once, it begins with both. Just as I said into my, my last film, I said to my son, the secret to changing the world is always a mirror and the dream of a better world.

Alexis Miles: If you don't mind sharing this, would you tell me your mother's name?

Lee Mun Wah: Oh, that's really sweet of you. That, her name is Doris Wong. You know, I, I remembered once, um, I was at a school once and every time I go places, they always want to introduce themselves by the departments. So one day I said, I'd like to learn something about yourself. And then this one woman shared, okay, my husband died. We've been married for 40 years and it was just months ago, and I still miss him, and I could barely make it to school every day. And then I said, what was his name? And she said, Frank, and I said, I could really tell how much you loved him. Tell me what you loved about him. And I think that, what I tell folks is, instead of asking them, well, what, how did he die or how my mother died, but rather what I loved about my mom, what was so special about her? She was always very giving.

My father was, was a very wealthy man and we'd have these huge parties, you know, and he had a hard time spending time with people getting to know them. So it was just, you know, sort of superficial talk. But my mother would always do this, sit with somebody and get to know them no matter how many people were in the room. And I think my mother taught me that too, to be present with people. And when my mother died, and when my father died, there's a Chinese ceremony, which you, you bow to the coffin. And when people came to bow at my mom's coffin, when they bowed, I could tell how much they loved her. When people bowed to my father's coffin, I could tell that they didn't love him, they respected him, but they didn't love him, which was very different. And so even when I say Doris Wong, there was something very warm, very real about her. She didn't care how much money you had, that wasn't important to our position, but just being, getting to know you. I think that's what my mom, your gift was to me. Yeah.

Alexis Miles: Thank you for sharing that. Um, you noted that in the acknowledgement, her impact on your life and the fact that she actually changed the course of your life.

Lee Mun Wah: Yeah.

Alexis Miles: And, um, yeah, so I was interested in knowing what that impact was and you've just described it.

Lee Mun Wah: Well, you know, the, the, the, the, the more professional impact was that I went and I had to go into therapy because I was so traumatized, but in there I also had to explore in therapy my father's physical and emotional abuse, which I had hidden. And then along with that was also, um, just the trauma that I went through because of it. And I was afraid of very powerful, big men. And, um, that's why most of my friends were women. And so that was a journey I had to go through. And then I was so enamored that I went into counseling, became a therapist and, um, worked with men who were violent and eventually onto the issues of race. So she did change the course of my life.

I think that I, I would have probably always worked with issues of race because of my students in my class. I think this simply gave me a larger forum, platform. And also I think I was able to bring all my humanness, and emotions out into the corporate world, which was not used to people talking like myself, or crying, or be telling personal stories. I think everything in my life prepared me to come to that one place. And I shared with folks that I felt like my dreams that I had didn't belong to me, they belong to the world, because it was for me to, to come to do this work. Because if I hadn't done it, I would probably never have gotten this interview either. So it's, you know, it's, you know, so I think that is the accumulations of our lives. But I still miss teaching greatly. I miss it because of the children and I miss it because of the connection that I get to have for years with them instead of just one day or four hours and I'm gone.

Sam Fuqua: When you, uh, made the comment about the mirror a few minutes ago and, and then talking about *The Color of Fear*, your excellent documentary, uh, that I watched in preparation for this conversation, I, I wrote down something that Victor, the man you were just speaking of said, uh, he's speaking to a white man, who's also in this circle of men, uh, in a color of fear. And he says to this guy, uh, I'm not going to trust you until you're as willing to be changed and affected by my experience and transformed by my experience as I am every day by yours. That really stuck with me, the daily experience of being a person of color in this world. And Victor's very direct statement to this white man whose name I didn't write down, uh, about...

Lee Mun Wah: David.

Sam Fuqua: David, to David, about that's what really needs to come back to Victor is a willingness to change and to feel deeply and be transformed by his experience.

Lee Mun Wah: Yeah. And I think what that requires is exactly what I just shared. What I wanted people to do on Monday or Friday is how do you feel unsupported or supported in this company? And I think that, that whites can successfully, if they choose to, not have to intersect with a person of color, personally or professionally, if they choose. Whereas people of color and women have no choice because of the power differentials between people of color and, and, and whites. And what that requires isn't just simply going to a party or having them in their company, but actually having really deep, personal, authentic

conversations about what hurts, what has happened. To sit there and take a look at themselves, uh, to be honest, to be real, to have conflict and stay in there and still have it.

In my film, *If These Halls Could Talk*, the black student says, I want nothing to do with you. And then I still keep talking to the white student. Vani jumps in, I say, so what would it take for you to, to really trust, to get to know this white person? He says, if I knew that you were going to, willing to work on racism every day, and even when you get knocked down, even when you get rejected, even when you get called names, even whatever, and you stay in there, and that you're not just making one film or one workshop, but you could decide to work on it for the rest of your life, and it's not going to be easy, and it's not going to be fun, and it's going to be tiring, and you're going to have lots of criticism, and you still stay at it. Because I often tell people, imagine that we, as people of color, and women, still vote in this country, and yet we've only had one person of color as the president of the United States. And I challenge white people, that if I were to tell you for the next 50 years, the next president of the United States will only be a person of color, would they still vote? They can't even stand the idea that Joe Biden wants to have a black woman for supreme court justice. Because their very idea is, well, we still want a white person. You see?

Affirmative action did not benefit primarily people of color. Affirmative action benefited primarily white women. That was the compromise that white people got. And so we're still left out. And I think that, that what I often tell people, if Trump had won the election, and people of color had decided to attack the Congress, would they have been seen as patriots? And if not, why not? That whites could actually crash and kill and injure people, and they were just told that they were just on a tour. They were Patriots. They were just expressed, you know, exercising their free speech.

But isn't that true when people of color protest? The vehemence and the anger of police when we are doing a march. And then as violent as the one that was at the Capitol, where was the response equally as, as violent towards them. Now as one Bob rioter said to a police officer, hey, we're on your side. We're white. It was like, it was a ticket. Whereas one white woman said I've got a job, this is what I do, and she had no fear because she thought she would not get arrested because simply of her position in life. And I thought to myself, wow. And also the black police officer, why he didn't shoot. You know, you know, what would happen to a white, a black person in America who shoots a white person? Not the same as another white guy who shot the woman. That's why he didn't, he, why he ran rather than stand.

Alexis Miles: As I listen to you, I'm hearing that some people, white people, don't believe people of color when they talk about their experiences. So the response can be something like, well, if I don't you just, you know, do this, why don't you just do that, or just not believing it at all. So, if we are moving toward resolving conflict, transforming conflict, uh, becoming intimate with each other, you know, as humans, how do we get over that barrier of disbelief?

Lee Mun Wah: Well, first of all, is you won't get over that disbelief. We'll have to work with it. Can you hear that? So yesterday when I was working with the indigenous folks, uh, and it was, it was an example, actually it came from them reacting to a role-play that actually did happen to me, okay, where I came in the room and it's the first time I lied that I'd never been threatened. And what happened was, uh, they had to check everybody at the door because they were going to kill me, he said. So everybody had to get, go through, uh, you know, gun surveillance. And then when I started the workshop, this man with sunglasses, he was white, and he turns to my co-facilitator and says, do you have a license in diversity? And he goes at her 'cause there is no license in diversity, by the way. And then he just humiliates her and then he goes at me.

And then I said to the audience, you know, the indigenous audience, I said, how many of you know what I went through? How many of you've gone through that? And an indigenous woman said yes, just the other day, I was the keynote speaker at a conference and a white man interrupted me and started questioning my credentials. And I didn't know what to do Lee Wah, she said. I felt so humiliated. So invalidated. What could I have done? And so I shared with her, number one is that must have been so difficult, but also how familiar. And I said that often times when you feel it, more than likely you could feel it in the room. And so I said, what you could have done, one of our advanced interventions that we teach in our mindful techniques, and this is just simply one of them, okay, and I could share two or three that you could use in these scenarios. So it might be turning to the audience, anybody noticed what just happened here? All these people raise their hands. Raise your hand if this is familiar to you.

Another one might be to say, this person's name is Michael. Who does that to you? Alexis. Okay. So you might turn to Michael and say, so Michael, as you were saying, what you were doing about, uh, invalidating Alexis is that, you know, things like this. Did you notice Alexis's reaction when you did that? He goes, well, no. Well, what could you ask Alexis so if you wanted to find out, so it might be a, so Alexis, what came up when I said, what I did, then I was turned to you Alexis and said, Alexis, tell him what came up for you when he said that to you. But then I'd go a little further because this part is revolutionary so that you don't have to eat it. As a person of color and as women we've been taught how to eat it, or as one Latina said, every day when it comes to white people have to eat glass. In other words, eat my anger, eat my hurt, eat my anguish. And so I created this new model of, that I would turn to you, and so Alexis tell, tell Michael, what angered you about what he shared, said to you? What hurt you about it? What's familiar about the way he talked to you? And then this last one is really, now tell Michael how he could have responded to you differently. So you would have felt heard, believed and understood.

So this, what this model does is several things. It breaks the Western therapeutic model and facilitator set or model that you as the facilitator has to educate the perpetrator or the confronter and that you all, you have to go over and protect the victim or the people who've been victimized, but rather you re-engage them within seconds, so that you get to be in your powerful voice, share how you felt. I don't have to speak for you. And I don't have to go over there and educate this person over here, but rather teaching them to come from a place of curiosity and empathy.

I think today, what passes for healthy communication that's been legitimized by our former president is attacking, blaming, being defensive, in denial, and then not saying anything. And that's passing for healthy communication instead of self-reflection, curiosity, taking responsibility, and the willingness to change. That's healthy communication. And that's how I talk to people when Black Lives Matter comes or Me Too, is that the reason why they're so angry is because they've held it in for so long. Well, when the Civil Rights Commission wanted to work with me, I said, why are you calling me now? And they said, because of Black Lives Matter and because of Me Too. Our employees are just coming out of the woodwork, telling us about the microaggressions, because now they feel like they got permission. And now we don't know what to do with all that anguish and emotion. Then along with it is it's also some of the people we work with and ourselves. So what do we do? How do we engage that and still be able to come together?

And so I always tell people to come together isn't just a concept, it isn't simply about inclusion or being one. It's also looking at exclusion, how you aren't one, how you're separated. I think the only way this country will ever come back together again, is to realize that there is not only more than one America, but there are separate Americas and there are separate justice, justice, and judicial systems. There are separateness in every phase of this country. We need education, therapy, government, you name it. There

are separate ways that people value you. I remember Virginia Wolfe once said that I know that we are all different, but what divides or brings us together is the value that we place on those differences.

Alexis Miles: You talk about mindfulness, and like, using what's in front of you right now. And earlier in the conversation you were talking about that that's hard for, for many people to do. Like, if, if, if right now it's anger in front of you, it's hard to use that. So for people in a situation where somebody is being invalidated or something, if there's not a facilitator, a skillful facilitator around, what can the person who might in that moment have a little bit more mindfulness do? So, is it enough to start asking those questions?

Lee Mun Wah: No, I think the first thing I always say is reflect. Because, when you're really angry, and I come from a, from a therapeutic and Buddhist approach, is that I don't believe that anger is a primary emotion, I think hurt is. When hurt is unacknowledged or invalidated, it becomes anger. But you'll never get to the hurt unless you're willing to stand in there and hear the anger. Remember earlier on in the program when I said it was the two most, I think this country struggles with is anger and hurt. I think we're very scared of hurt. I think we're even more scared of hurt when it comes to the black man, a black person. And so I think that, that we need to look at that, that that's part of our problem. It's not the problem with the black person to lower their tone. It's not that, it's not their problem. It's rather, it's our will, unwillingness.

So when you, when you are curious and you reflect back, so you might say it's, it's just like recently I had a black woman share, I tried your techniques Mun Wah and a black man said, no, I will not be silenced. And he just kept going. She says, I tried everything. And I said, so you were trying to calm it down. You were trying to move on. And I said, so he says, I will not be silenced, which means he's been silenced. So I would have simply turned to the group, I want to thank you, Jonathan, because ladies and gentlemen and folks in the audience, this is what happens when you silence people when they're trying to tell you the truth. This is what happens when you silence people when they're trying to tell, tell you what it's like to be a black man in this country. We are lucky he didn't hurt himself. We are lucky he didn't want to hurt someone else. We are lucky he didn't leave this conference, our agency, because I think the reason why he's still here is several reasons because he cares for the institution to get better. He does it for his children. Or as one person of color once said to me, why the hell would I leave? You think it'd be different someplace else?

You see, those are things that whites don't think about. And so, and she said, wow, because that's exactly what I feel sometimes, silenced. And I see, so at one moment, your anger, anger scared you, and it's okay to tell them. It's scary, but it's important. And I think also I carry that same anger, that same anger you saw Sam in Victor Lewis. Do you know how many people across the country, no matter how quiet or are passive, everybody thought they were, I'm Victor Lewis inside. He gave me permission and also that I wasn't going crazy. Do you know how many people, when they listen to Victor Lewis, when he was so beautifully share his anguish, do you know how many white people said, I could have heard Victor if he lowered his voice, if he hadn't got up and he hadn't gone dog toward the white guy? Well, a couple of little things. He never got up. And they don't even remember a single thing he says. And yet when you go back word for word, it's so educational, the points he brought up. And I think that's exactly what police officers see.

But it's funny, Donald Trump could have the same voice tone and he's concerned, he's upset, he's patriotic. And if a woman does that voice tone, she's a bitch. Or if you're a black woman, you're an out of control, angry black woman. So we have all these titles for people who are non-white and are not men. And I think that that is the two Americas. And so when you see a Clarence Thomas, uh, all I can say is you get to see

what happens when one becomes ashamed of being black, of their own people. Because he got ahead, didn't he? So in America you get, get to be on Fox News and you get promoted if you put down people of color.

Alexis Miles: In terms of people listening to this podcast, what would you recommend to a person who's not going to be able to take a workshop with you, who probably will not be in a situation where there's good facilitation. What would you recommend to a, to that kind of person who wants to enter into a relationship with someone who's different than they are?

Lee Mun Wah: Well, there's a, there's a book I have, which is called Let's Get Real, and it comes out of about a thousand questions, 500 questions that white people are scared out of their minds to ask people of color. Also in here is 500 questions that people of color are scared out of their minds to ask white people. In here is also 200 questions that white people wished people of color would ask them, and 200 questions that people of color wished white people would ask them. And then, two years later, 150 whites and people of color answered those questions. It's incredible. And for every question that a white person asked a person of color, five people of color answered that question. So you get a different perspective. For every question that a person of color asked a white person, five white people answered them, and then you get a different perspective.

The, in this book, are things that white people say to each other that they don't tell anybody else. In here are things that people of color tell each other, but would never tell white people. And so what, this is a great conversation starter to read a question and then read the answers and then everybody gets to talk about it. Or even what comes up for you. Diversity counsels people all over the country who use this scope, my God, and I remember the University of California took one of these out. Two and a half months they couldn't stop talking, they were still only on that one question. I also think that, um, see my films, they stream for ten dollars, good for 24 hours. It'll get you talking. It'll get any Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner talking. People really, rather than waiting for a crisis to happen in this country before you talk. Also, my workshops are very inexpensive. I have one called Tea Time for \$25. It's for 90 minutes, you get to have a chance to talk with me. But somebody once said to me, I don't know if we could afford you. And what I simply said is I think you cannot afford not to have this conversation because I think if someone shoots up your place, if someone leaves, files a lawsuit, you'll wish you did have this workshop. So you could have had this conversation.

Sam Fuqua: You've been doing this work for many decades now. You shared how it began. And of course The Color of Fear was your first film. You've done others, but that was in the 1990s. Have we made any progress?

Lee Mun Wah: Of course we have. Well, first of all, what's going on today is nothing new. It's just becoming more public. So first of all, it was always there. I think that, uh, the media has a tendency to only report what's sensational. I think that there are so many folks in the world and this next generation that are really working towards social justice. As Jonathan says, there are more of us than you know, there are many more of us, but they don't always get the same press. Someone then once asked me about that. Do you think that after all these years that you've made any progress? And I said, well, when you're only thinking about it in terms of global, institutional, I don't know. I do know that every single time I've talked even like today with YouTube, for the first time, with the people who are listening, I think that when you hear something different, when you hear something from the heart, when you hear something that gives you hope, I think that it changes you.

When you were watching me in a workshop in Connecticut, I think that you get to witness another way of speaking, another way of relating. I went through the sixties and oh God, was an incredible time. And it changed me profoundly in that I wanted that again. Can you hear that? I wanted that again. And I think that that's my belief, that you'll want this again. You'll know now what looks superficial. You now know what part you play. It's almost like you, you can't look away, you can't put Black Lives and Me Too back in the box. It's out now. It's here. And so the heart knows, like I just said to somebody, I just said, I guess it was in, um, I forget the name of the film, it's a really good one with, um, anyway, it was, it was about the idea that, that no good dream ever dies. It just waits for the moment to be reawakened. And I think that, that the dream I had in the sixties, the people that come to my workshop, people just say, this is like transforming my life. I just, now I want this conversation. And just like for yourself, when you see The Color of Fear, I want to take a good look at myself.

You see you can't, uh, pretend you're blind. You can't pretend you're deaf. Like when people come to me and they go, I don't know what I would say on the airplane if someone did this, I don't, I really don't know. You know, and I wish I did. And I said, well, I would, if I told you that I don't know is a privilege and they would look at me and go, what do you mean by that? So if I told you that your daughter, your grandmother, your grandfather, your mom, or dad, your sister, or your brother, was being berated and yelled at, and insulted and humiliated, you think you'd know what to say? Even if you didn't know, you'd go up and the words would come to you because you can feel the wrongness of what they did. Why can't you do that to someone you don't know? Because, in your heart you know it's wrong.

So when I did a famous workshop was for NCORE, this, this famous conference, and we only had 175 allowed, and it was like 400 people out the door, and what I said was, I want you to imagine, 'cause we just heard about a racial incident on Southwest Airlines, sorry Southwest Airlines but it really did happen. It happened on Delta and all these other ones too. And this person did all these racial epitaphs and people heard about it, that I said, so what would you say and people, I don't know. So I said, what I'd like you to do is get, everybody get in a group of four and each of you are going to write down what you would have said. Then when you're in your group, you're going to sail in all the fires inside of you. And then people can, if they don't feel like they hear you, they don't believe you, they're going to say, come on, do it again, do it again. Come on. Let's go for it. Everybody struggled. But then all of a sudden, everyone was just yelling and screaming. Some of the sponsors came in, what's going on here. And I said, don't worry. They're just practicing.

And when I told them, I asked people then, when they came back and I said, what happened? They said, God, I really can't do it. I didn't believe that voice was inside of me. And I said, now that you know, you have that voice, now you can use it because your body remembers, your heart remembers, and the people in your group supported you, and remembered, and were touched. And if you happen to be white, what it would mean if you stood up and said something, because now, you know, you can, you don't have to wait for someone else to do it. You see, that to me is life-changing or as Gandhi says, begins the tide. It begins the ripple. I loved it when my, when Bruce Lee started his first martial arts center, he told his girlfriend to put out your hand, he had a pebble and he dropped it in her hand and he goes, now the ripple begins. Now my destiny begins.

What I'd like to do is to read you something to help close. By the way, there's two things I always do when I do my workshops. One is I always tell a story at the end, and I always have a quote at the end, something like, I don't know, it's kind of my storytelling inside of me. But I wanted to read you this because it just was a stream of thought that came to me, but also it came to me when I was watching what was happening to George Floyd in the very beginning. And, and so I wrote this, "I believe that we are all tested, maybe not in

the way we planned or wanted, but when the time comes, we will either act with courage and goodness, or with fear in silence, for each of us deep down knows what is right and what is wrong. And it is at that moment when each of us are tested, that our history is written, to be remembered, hard to be looked back on with regret. It is a choice that we each must make for ourselves and for those not yet born. Every time we do not speak up, someone always pays a price for our silence. And that same price is also exacted on who we become and who we do not. So you see it is where the road ends, that our path begins."

Sam Fuqua: Lee Mun Wah, thank you so much for spending this time with us. We're grateful.

Lee Mun Wah: You're so welcome. And Alexis it's an honor to meet you, and you and Sam, and, uh, I really enjoyed today.

Sam Fuqua: For more information about Lee Mun Wah's workshops, books, and films, visit his website, stirfryseminars.com. Thanks for listening to Well, That Went Sideways! We produce new episodes twice a month. You can find them wherever you get your podcasts and on our website, sidewayspod.org. We also have information on our guests and links to more conflict resolution resources at the website. That's sidewayspod.org.

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