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White Students on Race: A Look From Both Sides

A white college student touches on a personal experience that he has had growing up. The sound bite is from Greg Samuel, an African American who grew up in South Florida during the 1960's who has a similar experience adjusting to his new way of life.

Good day. This is Dane Taylor for Voices of Race and Change.

I was speaking with my mother on the phone recently and she recalled a time as a young man, when I was at the wrong end of racial comments and discrimination. I didn't think anything of it because I was only in middle school, age 13.

After basketball practice one day, my coach was dropping myself and others off at their homes when I experienced my first derogatory comment regarding my race.

"Man, are those all your cars? How many people live here, Dane? Rich, white boy! Are one of those cars waiting for you to turn 16?" These statements mumbled from all directions, including the only other Caucasian in the vehicle, my coach. I was one of three white males on the team while all the other players were African American. Being a white male at a predominately black school had its challenges, and I overcame them all, but this one was most difficult.

At this point in my life, my older brother and older sister in high school both drove cars that they had saved up to buy. My parents told us that whatever amount we had saved for a car, they

would match that total to help us out. My mother drove the family car, an SUV, and my father drove his work truck. My mother has been a waitress her whole career, and my father was a golf course developer. My father made good money but my mother struggled with strictly tips. I never assumed that having a car for each member of my household would result in racial remarks from my peers, but it did. I remember thinking of how three cars for a family of five really wasn't THAT noteworthy?

From this moment on, I was labeled the "rich, white boy" and would constantly hear those comments or similar jabs like it. It honestly shocked me because I had a great reputation among my peers and then out of no-where I started getting heckled for being "rich."

Greg Samuel, an African American, had a similar experience growing up in South Florida during the 1960's. Samuel went to a predominately white junior high school and used athletics to make the transition easier. Like myself, Samuel was on the receiving end of derogatory and demeaning comments which made him feel out of place.

**Sound bite: Greg Samuel talks about how he felt different and out of place because he was black at a white high school, with white friends while living in the black part of town.

I started to feel as if I was being looked at differently, because of the perception amongst peers of my family being well-off. By no means, were we a "rich" family by economic standards. If anything, we were "rich" in love and respect for others which helped me get passed this bump in the road that we call life.

I was bothered by the comments and could have taken these statements as hurtful or condescending but instead, I made something positive out of them. I took them and transformed them into respect for my peers and my coaches by keeping my head held high and never taking a shot back at them. Regardless of who said what or disrespected me, I was there to help them out whether it was an extra dollar for a hot-dog, or a ride to a game, they could count on the "rich white boy." My parents made sure that their kids would never shy away from someone in need, regardless of their skin color or where they're from.

To this day, I remember that early evening confrontation with my peers when they first called me "the rich white boy," and I realize some things haven't changed. I kept these kids close because it made me realize who I was and kept me honest. I never tried to be someone I wasn't.

Greg Samuel's interview is in the Race and Change Oral Histories archive in Special Collections at the African American Research Library and Cultural Center in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

Voices of Race and Change: The Younger Generation is produced by students in Dr. Kitty Oliver's Multimedia Practicum at Florida Atlantic University for the Race and Change Initiative multimedia project.

Until we meet again, this is Dane Taylor.