

Commentary: Discovering brotherhood

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By **ANDY ESSARY**

I keep forgetting about Sam being black.

Sam Minter and I live in the suburbs and commute to UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas where we work in the business office of the Department of Pathology. We're in our mid-50s and married. I have a daughter and Sam has a daughter and three sons.

We are college graduates, and we each worked for large corporations prior to seeking careers at the medical school. We are both Christians and share similar moral and ethical ideas. When you get down to the real nitty-gritty, there isn't much real difference between Sam and me. We think a whole lot alike.

Both of us had someone of a different race play a significant role in our early lives. Sam had Ward, who cared about a neighborhood kid regardless of the color of his skin. Ward encouraged and nourished the confidence Sam would need to become the success he is today. I had Beatrice, who watched my younger brother and me at home while mom worked. She rode the bus to my part of town to provide my first glimpse of someone seemingly different. She was the first to show me warmth and care needn't depend on the color of my skin. I miss her lovely heart.

With all the similarities between us two Southern boys you'd think American society would leave us alone and let us enjoy our friendship. But, no!

Too many are dead set on putting a different label on each of us. Instead of celebrating our equality, too many folks look at us differently.

Most people would say Sam is a black guy. But that confuses me. They might as well call him a green man because his skin is about as green as it is black. The laptop on which I'm typing this column is black, and Sam's skin looks nothing like my computer. As a matter of fact, he isn't black at all – his skin is a shade of brown.

Most people would call me a white guy, but that confuses me as well. My Toyota is white and my skin color is nowhere near being white. As a matter of fact, my skin isn't white at all – it's a shade of brown.

Even with all the similarities Sam and I share, there are some differences.

One huge difference is the way we were raised. Sam was raised as a black kid in Arkansas and I as a white kid in Dallas. Sam had to overcome irrational prejudices that I didn't. The toughest crisis I had to overcome was wearing glasses and being called "four-eyes" until I got contacts in the seventh grade. My plight went away with two tiny pieces of plastic – Sam's didn't. I doubt growing up in the 1950s in the South was easy for any black kid.

I grew up in an Oak Cliff neighborhood where segregated life was normal. It seemed OK until folks like Sam started buying houses closer and closer to my house. It wasn't long before "they" bought a house on our street. All the kids with whom I'd grown up were gone within 18 months. It simply wouldn't do to have us grow up with "those people." My family moved as well.

It would be another 35 years before I truly appreciated the insanity behind racism. It's one thing to believe we shouldn't discriminate based on the color or hue of a person's skin. You give it lip service and attend a couple of unity functions and believe racism is a thing of the past. It isn't that easy.

You have to critically question why racism is wrong before you are able to ultimately realize how all involved in irrational behavior suffer. People who hate suffer as much as those they unfairly despise.

Sam helped me realize true brotherhood has nothing to do with one's skin color. It has everything to do with our hearts and souls. It's how and what we think and believe that binds us together. Or, as my wife so wisely puts it, "It's seeing the color of a person's heart rather than the color of their skin." That insight is what makes Sam my brother.

My prayer is for every American to realize that being American is far more important than believing ourselves black, white or brown; Asian, African, Hispanic or European. I pray everyone will someday only notice the color of a person's heart and forget the color of their skin.

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