

# The Tears Streamed Down My Face

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“Get up against that wall, you n\*\*\*\*\*s! Boys on one side, girls on the other!” The first words I heard as I got off my bus in Selma, Alabama, at the Slavery and Civil War Museum. I was frightened, not knowing exactly what was going on; all I knew was that someone was calling me something that I did not like at all. I had been called this word before; however, there was never a lesson behind it.

I was screamed at and told I was the n-word repeatedly. Then this “master” told my friends and me that we were no good, lowly beings and needed to look at the ground; we were not worthy of looking “master” in the eyes. All of us were struck with fear, as if standing against a wall in 110 degree weather wasn’t bad enough, now we had to be yelled at too. Some of my friends were told to step up to the curb but keep their eyes down. I didn’t know when I would see them again. After this, the “master” screamed at us, “Get inside and put your face against the wall! Don’t talk.” I am not used to being told what to do in such a manner, or at all. Who is this person? Why should I listen? I did, though. I was struck with fear and could only obey my “master.”

Once in a room, bright and hot, it didn’t seem like it would be bad. After all, we were in Alabama and beginning to get used to bright and hot. Then we heard someone banging on the door; we weren’t sure if we were to open it or not. When the banging stopped, our “master” came in and told us to run into another room, pitch black, muggy, and frightening. “Master” closed the door and yelled at us not to move. “Master” said, “Imagine your ancestors in a room like this, where they could be raped, beaten and pulled away from the only family they had.” We were told not to move no matter how scared we got, don’t move. Then we heard terrifying screams of women saying, “No, please, no.” Immediately hot tears sprang in my eyes; I tried to brush them away, but I was too scared. The voices went away, and I thought maybe this was all close to over.

Next, I was rushed into a room and told to get in a very tiny boat with 30 other people by the time “master” counted to five or else. We all rushed the best we could; we barely made it. A screen depicted an ocean rolling along and sounds came, so realistic I was almost sea sick. Packed on this boat with no breathing room, I wasn’t quite sure whose hand I was holding or who was clutching my arm. I just knew it was dark, scary and I needed my friends.

“Fifteen seconds to get through this hole and stand on the black line you d\*\*\* n\*\*\*\*\*s!” “Master” screamed at us. How were we supposed to get through this small hole in fifteen seconds and then get on the black line? This room was so incredibly dark I could hardly see my hand in front of my face, much less a black line on the floor. I rushed to get there; once again we barely made it.

“Master” selected five good n\*\*\*\*\*s; they were told to pick one bad n\*\*\*\*\* each. They selected a person because they had to but feared for what would happen to them. Other people pulled those chosen from our room and put them behind a door; I didn’t know where my friends were going. Then I heard them scream. Tears welled in my eyes again, but I pushed them down and swallowed as if it would help to prevent the tears.

The next thing I knew I was put into another room and told to stand on one side. Dark as night, once again I was unsure of who was clutching my hand. The door opened, and all I could see was a silhouette of “master” coming in.

“N\*\*\*\*\*s for sale! N\*\*\*\*\*s for sale!” I was pulled out of line and pushed into the middle of the room; my friend who was clutching my hand did not let go until her hand was ripped from mine.

I heard the sounds of a woman screaming for a baby. “Are you my baby? Where’s my baby?” I felt a hand on my arm. It was warm and sticky; I did not know whose it was. It felt as if it were the embrace of a mother, a mother separated from her children, a mother who thought she found her baby. She asked me, “Are you my baby? Be my baby, please will you be my baby?” I could not hold it in any more. The tears streamed down my face. These were hot tears that burnt as they touched my cheeks. I tried to make them stop, but they kept flowing.

Then, incredibly everything stopped. The lights came on, the tears stopped rolling, and a feeling of safety swept over the room. Our former “master” came to each of us. The same woman who had been screaming orders at us was now our friend. This African-American woman grabbed my face and told me to look her in the eyes, for mine were beautiful eyes that belonged to a strong woman. Her statement made a strange feeling go through me, something I had felt, yet it was so much more. Self-gratification. I was really proud of myself. I knew she was right and that I was strong. She had a powerful hold on me; this woman taught me more in fifteen minutes than I ever thought I could learn in a lifetime.

After a minute of reflection, the woman introduced herself as Afriye *We-Kandodis*, a name she gave herself when she dedicated her life to teaching people the truth about slavery. On this day in Selma, Alabama, with my friends from Cultural Leadership, I experienced 15 minutes of what my ancestors went through for hundreds of years. I will remember this day for the rest of my life. That day I learnt what it would have been like to go through something this terrifying. I learnt to appreciate what my ancestors struggled through. More than anything I learnt that I am a strong, determined woman and that I can do anything I set my mind to. I will never forget that day; my empathy for all those poor people will stay in my heart forever. While I cannot change the past and the horrifying things that happened, I can work to make a better future in which nothing this atrocious ever happens again.