

**Program Closing by
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Good morning/Buenos Dias.

I learned about Dr. King
the day he was assassinated
because I heard my mother scream.

She dropped to the floor -
the things she was carrying -
Was it her sewing?
Was it her homework?
That detail I cannot remember.

She first screamed
then sobbed
then stared at the radio
that was in her bedroom
on the nightstand
by her bed.

And her voice frightened me
sent a chill down my 10 year old spine...
and I wondered what was happening and why?

Today I realize that my mother was
NAMING Dr. King
through the vocal cords that provided the chimney to her heart
she was NAMING what he and his work meant to her
what he and his work represented to her
what he and his work signified for her
a Mexican American woman, born in Texas,
living in California
in 1968
what he was - I was soon to learn -
to represent to me
if I was to be a daughter
that she would be proud of

Today, however, is January 15 and it is the year 2001,
72 years after Dr. King was born
72 years after his first footprint on Mother Earth,
a footprint
that she welcomed...
that made a difference to the universal plan.

Some of our colleagues are back home
At the local breakfast
At the town ceremony
Colleagues we miss you
We are thinking of you
We understand that community work is noble and honorable

Some of our colleagues are preparing the band instruments
memorizing portions of Dr. King's speeches,
colleagues we applaud you
we are thinking of you
and we know that your voice will emanate
with grace
from the throat that is the chimney to your heart
we understand that community work is noble and honorable

Some of our colleagues are strangers in a new city or town
in the process of earning credibility within a new community
colleagues we applaud you
we encourage you
we advise you to always eat heartedly
when an invited guest
and express gratitude
to your new host
we understand that community work is noble and honorable

You and I
we have been working here
at Midwinter conference
in Washington DC

We study and review
the best of multicultural adult and children's literature

We advocate
for the civil right to intellectual freedom

We take a path of MOST resistance
as we advocate upstream

for the civil right to
accessibility
access
an open door
a phone line

We generate environments of mutual respect
diverse discourse
as we struggle to insist that diversity take on meaning for us
despite the discomfort

We welcome the Spectrum Scholars,
the Century Scholars,
and all recipients of the ALA scholarships
as we wanted to be welcomed

We study legislature and we learn to quickly mobilize
when we see that
equity of access, intellectual freedom, diversity are endangered

We work with our hearts, our hands, our minds, our spirits
here at Midwinter conference
for the values we as librarians and library workers share
We understand that national work can be noble and honorable.

But what matters for all of us
here at this moment
or back home
regardless of the town, city we are in
is that we rise to the occasion
we step up to the plate
we move forward on our responsibility
as we NAME Dr. King

Because if we don't NAME Dr. King
he is a storewide sale

If we don't NAME Dr. King
he is hero of the month

If we don't NAME Dr. King
he is a distortion of the media

I recently wrote an article
and in it
acknowledged Dr. Josey

Dr. Patterson
Dr. Chen
Mr. Marshall
Dr. Trejo
and the editor told me
that I needed to remove the "titles" -
one reason being -
that other names in the article
were not indicated in the same way.
I responded that the editor did not understand
It is not about ego
It is not about special treatment
It is not about favoritism or preferences
It is an issue of
NAMING their work
Who they are
What they are
And ACKNOWLEDGING the path they have cut for many of us
It is the way we speak, the way we NAME, to the outside world.
We don't address them
in the familiar way
until we are given permission
until we earn that right

The titles of respect were still edited
because of the rules
and it is not permissible to write
as we talk

You see, there is a great power in naming
some of us don't even reveal
our ceremonial names
traditional names
homeland names
but we do have given names, chosen names
that speak to the story that we
are a vessel for carrying
amidst a history
that we are contending with today
whether we like it or not
whether we came or we come
to this country
by choice
by force
by struggle
or whether we bore witness to those who took it

those who carved it up
whether we like it or not
we are vessels for the larger story of humanity
as we decide
as to whether
- after we learn our own story-
- after we follow its roots
back to India, Ireland, Kentucky,
Standing Rock, Arkansas, West Africa,
Zimbabwe, Mexico Puerto Rico,
Canyon de Chelly,
Taiwan, China, Brooklyn
or from where ever it is we are from -

Whether we decide to say that there is a larger story
that coincides with Dr. King's later and most in-depth
writings and speeches
before he was murdered

Whether the gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender story
Is our story?
Whether the African American/Black story
Is our story?
Whether the Asian American story
Is our story?
Whether the American Indian/Native American story
Is our story?
Whether the Latino/Hispanic story
Is our story?
Whether the story of people with disabilities
or as my colleague Ellen Perlow states
- people with differabilities
Is our story?
Whether the Euro-American story
Is our story?

But oh! Great grandfather!
But oh! Great grandmother!
What a privilege!
What an honor!
To be a librarian, a library worker
To preserve but not destroy the larger story
To collect but not culturally misappropriate the story
To disseminate but not withhold the story
or the NAMING

But oh! Great grandfather!
But oh! Great grandmother!
We understand that librarianship is noble and honorable work
We understand that in war the library is the first to be destroyed
The native language is the first to be suppressed
The storytellers and truthsayers are the first to be killed
Just as Dr. King was a truthsayer
A teller
Of a story
Much beyond himself

Oh! Great grandmother!
Oh! Great grandfather!
We NAME Dr. King this morning
We NAME Dr. King today
We NAME Dr. King
through
and by way of
and because of
our work in
and
with libraries.

Thank you.

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