

## J.R. Reynolds column: New book offers 'safe' place to talk about race

Written by JR Reynolds

May 28, 2014 | [battlecreekenquirer.com](http://battlecreekenquirer.com)

---

I remember a few years ago having several intense discussions with a very close friend about social justice issues.

You know, racism, sexism, classism, etc. One of the underpinnings of our conversations related to her feeling safe as we talked.

Initially, I felt insulted by her concerns about safety. That's because I associated the word "safe" with the condition of being free of physical danger.

It took me more than a minute to realize how she was using the word. Safe to her described a level of comfort in order to speak on difficult topics without feeling like she might be verbally, emotionally or psychologically attacked.

So it was with great relief when racial healing professional Sharon E. Davis debuted and hosted the Internet radio program called, "A Safe Place to Talk About Race."

As a companion to her radio program, Davis has recently published a book of the same name. In it, there are 10 interesting and informative interviews on matters relating to the topic of race. Topics include racism and prejudice (there's a difference), as well as concepts many might find unfamiliar, like white privilege and internalized racial oppression.

A hallmark of the book (and radio show) is that professionals and nonprofessionals share and discuss issues related to race in a way that is "safe."

But that doesn't mean dialogue is always comfortable. It's a fact that conversations about race, if not conducted in a manner that promotes respect and curiosity, can easily devolve into hurtful, unproductive shouting matches.

However, in the caring hands of a racial healing specialist like Davis, even readers who most want to avoid conflict can usually find space in their head (if not their heart) to listen for understanding. It just takes willingness and an open mind.

That's the trouble with race conversations most of the time, isn't it? Folks come to the table

prepared to argue their position without really listening to another person's perspective.

The result is that strong emotions are experienced, like denial, guilt and shame. There also can be frustration, sadness and even anger.

Such high emotions end up shutting down the brain. That's no metaphor either. Science has proven that intense emotions can inhibit higher brain function.

It happens that when we've been emotionally aroused, the parts of our mind that guide our rational thinking are hijacked. In its place are mechanisms of the brain that govern our "fight or flight" behavior.

On all sides, there can be feelings of hopelessness that can lead many people to simply avoid the topic altogether — even when it's the most relevant issue in the room, be it the workplace, at school, in courtrooms or even the doctor's office.

That's why Davis' book is so important.

It offers safe, thought-provoking conversations on topics most of us only whisper about. It brings into the light subject matters that seem insurmountable. Yet in reality, they can and should be discussed rather than ignored.

As Davis writes in the book's preface, this collection of candid interviews includes "parts of a puzzle that, when gathered together help connects the dots for us." That said, don't think for a second these pages have all the answers concerning race. The topic is far too complex and personal.

Still, it can offer a platform on which to learn about and understand the various facts and fiction associated with race in an effort to promote deeper awareness.

Perhaps Davis explained it best when she wrote, "Realizing the distance between what I thought and how I felt, is where my racial healing began."

That's probably a lesson all of us can learn.

**Follow J.R. Reynolds on Twitter @4humansbeing or contact him at .**

**[4humansbeing@gmail.com](mailto:4humansbeing@gmail.com)**

<http://www.battlecreekenquirer.com/>