

KOF 2022.

Do you remember spin the bottle? When I was a kid, if the girl didn't want to kiss you, she had to give you a nickel...when I was 14, I bought my own house!

Music cue (22 seconds):



We are all ZOOMED out! In fact, ZOOMING has gone overboard with, now, telehealth or telemedicine, whatever you call it. Imagine this, you're ZOOMING with your Dr and he tells you to stick your own finger up your ass, and it's then that you realize He's not your Dr and you're in the wrong meeting!! Yes, we've lost that human touch, that eye to eye contact. We need to get it back, we need to embrace and cherish our loved ones and friends before we lose them. We've all experienced loss... after which we start to think about what could have been. I'm going to tell you three stories embracing loss, connection, and conversation that relate to what we've been experiencing over the last few years. We've not only been losing our connections, but there has been a tsunami of divisiveness and hate in this country. I believe the pandemic has exacerbated this division. These stories are about loss, conversation, and connection:

Back in April, Noelle and I went to Hawaii and while there, we spent a day at Pearl Harbor.

It was emotional and inspirational. Everybody should go and get their heads around why these young service people were willing to give their lives for America. What America are we living in today? I don't think it's the same America for which those kids gave their lives. Can we re-imagine the United States as it should be? As the dream of our founding fathers? We can achieve that

dream one conversation at a time, one connection at a time. This is a true story about a black man that really made a difference through conversation that led to connection. This is from the book, “Think Again”, by Adam Grant.

One afternoon in Maryland in 1983, Daryl Davis arrived at a lounge to play the piano at a country music gig. It wasn't his first time being the only Black man in the room. Before the night was out it would be his first time having a conversation with a white supremacist.

After the show, an older white man in the audience walked up to Daryl and told him he was astonished to see a Black musician play like Jerry Lee Lewis. Daryl replied that he and Lewis were, in fact, friends, and that Lewis himself had acknowledged that his style was influenced by Black musicians. Although skeptical, the man invited Daryl to sit down for a drink.

Soon the man was admitting that he'd never had a drink with a Black man before. Eventually he explained why. He was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, the white supremacist hate group that had been murdering African Americans for over a century and had lynched a man just two years earlier.

If you found yourself sitting down with someone who hated you and all people who shared your skin color, your instinctive option might be fight, flight, or freeze...and rightfully so. Daryl had a different reaction: he burst out laughing. When the man pulled out his KKK membership card to show he wasn't joking, Daryl returned to a question that had been on his mind since he was 10 years old. In the late 60s, he was marching in a Cub Scout parade when white spectators started throwing cans, rocks, and bottles at him. It was his first time facing overt racism,

and although he could justifiably have gotten angry, he was bewildered, he thought: "How can you hate me when you don't even know me?"

At the end of the conversation, the Klansman handed Daryl his phone number and asked if he would call him whenever he was playing locally. Daryl followed up and the next month the man showed up with a bunch of friends to see Daryl perform.

Over time, the friendship grew, and the man ended up leaving the KKK. That was a turning point in Daryl's life, too. It wasn't long before Daryl was sitting down with Imperial Wizards and Grand Dragons—the Klan's highest officers—to ask his question, "How can you hate me when you don't even know me?"

One day Daryl was driving his car with the chief officer of a KKK chapter, whose title was, Exalted Cyclops. Before long the Cyclops was sharing his stereotypes of Black people. They were an inferior species, he said,—they had smaller brains which made them unintelligent, and had a genetic predisposition toward violence. When Daryl pointed out that he was black but had never shot anyone or stolen a car, the Cyclops told him his criminal gene must be latent...It hadn't come out yet.

Daryl decided to beat the Cyclops at his own game. he challenged him to name three Black serial killers. The Cyclops could not name any, so Daryl rattled off a long list of well known white serial killers and told the Cyclops that he must be one. When the Cyclops protested that he'd never killed anybody, Daryl turned his own argument against him and said that his serial killer gene must be latent.

“Well, that’s stupid,” the flustered Cyclops replied. “Well Duh!” Daryl agreed. “You’re right. What I said about you was stupid, but no more stupid than what you said about me.” The Cyclops got very quiet and changed the subject. Several months later, he told Daryl that he was still thinking about that conversation. Daryl had planted a seed of doubt and made him curious about his own beliefs. The Cyclops ended up quitting the KKK and giving his hood and his robe to Daryl. Conversation leading to connection.

This story is about loss and connection. I was nine years old when my father died. I remember that day as if it was yesterday. My dad had been in the hospital for a few days with a heart ailment. On December 16, 1952, I was sitting in my fourth grade class at The William B Mann School in Philadelphia and suddenly, in the late morning my, much older, cousin Myron is standing at our classroom door. He and my teacher Mrs Levy have a short whispered conversation and she looked at me with very soft eyes and said, “Richard, get your coat, you need to go with your cousin”. My brother Larry , who was in the 6th grade joined us and we walked the short block toward Myron’s Mom’s house, my beloved Aunt Emily, Dad’s sister. We had lunch across the street at Myron’s house and then Larry and I went to Aunt Emily’s. Arriving there we saw my Dad’s cousins Leon and Henry and Aunt Emily. Conversation was very subdued... we didn’t understand why we were there. We just sat there wondering. Suddenly there was a commotion at the backdoor and in walked Uncle Bud and my mother who was crying hysterically and stamping her feet saying, “Why, Why, Why...

She saw us sitting on the couch and told us that our father was dead, I can’t remember if she hugged us, I don’t think she did. I do remember not crying. The

rest of that day and the next few were a blur for me. I remember Mom convincing us that we did not need to go to Dad's funeral. I believe it was a misguided attempt to protect us. So, we never got to say goodbye...A few days later I went back to school and I remember feeling that I was different, I was the only one of my schoolmates that did not have a father. At home, we rarely spoke about my father after that and I unconsciously protected myself by blocking memories of him. I didn't know it then, but I began my lifelong battle with depression. I could not connect on an intimate level and destroyed one marriage and a few relationships as a result. In retrospect, I equated marriage to death, I even confused the words wedding and funeral.

Many years later, in my 30's I sought psychiatric help and one Saturday after a morning of group therapy and some discussion of my family, I went back to my apartment, I was single at the time. I was feeling a little melancholy and I laid down on the living room floor, closed my eyes,... and suddenly memories of dad came rushing back...I could see him...I could even smell him...I began to cry like I had never cried before...I was finally grieving after almost 30 years.

I remember going into the bathroom to wash my face and as I looked in the mirror a big happy, childlike smile came over me. I reconnected with my Dad after about 30 years of blocking his memory... Loss and Connection...

We need to connect again, we need to have conversations, we need to return to normal and get past this divisiveness in America, find our own inner self, embrace family and friends while they are still here.

So, this afternoon i invite you to create diads or triads and take a wisdom walk around Boulder. Listen to the birds and the beautiful noises of the streets as Neil Diamond proclaimed in a song. Notice the people, look at them, hear the conversations emanating from the streets.

Ask each other the following questions:

1. Who have you lost touch with?
2. Who do you want to re-connect with?
3. When and how will you do that?