My TEDx Talk

By Niya Picket-Miller, PhD

I am an academic. As such, giving a TED or TEDx talk about a complex theory I developed or expanded upon is a reasonable fantasy to have. Yet, I never imagined giving a TEDx talk only two years into my post-doctorate studies on a topic having nothing to do with my research. I was to talk about my heart; and I don’t mean my major blood-pumping organ. I am referring to my children and my God-gifted calling for albinism advocacy.

Through a thread of vulnerable narratives about raising my seven-year-old albinic son and non-albinic twelve-year-old daughter, I spoke about my coming-of-age (of sorts) with understanding albinism and learning how to communicate about it with my children and others. Moreover, I talked of my wrestling with the complexities of the condition and teaching my son to understand his dual identities of otherness, being an albinic black male and vision impaired.

My talk was not the academic achievement I once imagined. It was more. While speaking, I felt vulnerable and empowered at the same time. Saying aloud—publicly—how hurtful comments and stares at my blonde-haired, blue-eye black son made me feel was cathartic. From the iconic red dot, I explained how stereotypes and assumptions about the meaning of pigmented black skin are damaging. I also spoke about widely held negative ideas about albinism and the feelings of insecurities once growing in me as a mother of an albinic child.

I prepared for five months. I needed to be comfortable with hearing my voice tell the stories on May 4, 2019. Honestly, I was nervous about my honesty. I fathomed those (family and friends) who commented on my son’s appearance (in the early days) would find the narratives tough to hear in the present day. Nevertheless, I talked for thirteen minutes or so.

I was and continue to be challenged by albinism. But, there is in me a burgeoning resolve to raise well-adjusted and tenacious children that empower me. While I don’t have albinism, it is still a part of my purpose. It makes me think more creatively, and speak more inclusively and publicly.

I have told my kids that I would climb mountains for them. I hope they perceive the TEDx stage as one that I’ve scaled and feel inspired to know they too can climb higher.

Watch my TEDx talk here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ0u5AOIuII&feature=youtu.be