

From the PES' Ending Racism Task Force:

### ***Traveling With the Wind at My Back***

By Sylvia Metzler

A biker friend told me recently that he prided himself with how fast and far he had just ridden on his bicycle. It wasn't till much later that he realized how much of a tail wind he had had. That reminds me of the story of two fish talking. "Don't you like the quality of the water today?" asks one. "What's water?" replied the other. Both stories remind me of white privilege. Most of us white folks are so immersed in it that we don't even recognize or appreciate it. In my opinion, that also could apply to our unconscious or implicit bias towards people of color. I still surprise myself with thoughts of intellectual superiority of whites over Blacks. I recently thought of a way to make me more aware of the water I am swimming in. I framed and hung a picture of a group of Black women marching down the hallway from the film *Hidden Figures*. They were all brilliant engineers and mathematicians who worked for our space program. I look at it every day to help root out my stubborn prejudices.

A few Sundays ago, I decided to bring my "Hidden Figures" wall hanging to our platform at the Ethical Society and show it during the weekly announcement of the Ending Racism Task Force (ERTF). I took a few minutes to talk about how common implicit bias\racism is in so many white people. I talked about the difference between prejudice and racism. In our white dominated society, power is often added to prejudice against people of color. This can happen on both a personal and an institutional level. That means that many people of color are denied jobs, raises, admission to schools, and receive negative judgments in courts and maltreatment by police.

Now we come to the hard part. I had quite a few responses and reactions to what I said that Sunday morning. A white woman approached me and told me that she was very appreciative of both what I had said and of how I said it. I then approached a Black woman and asked for her feedback. She told me that it meant so much to her that she cried and then thanked me for what I had shared. Yet another white woman told me that she also appreciated my message. Then I received some feedback from four white men. "You made me furious with what you said this morning." "I think you are too hard on yourself." "It sounded like you were scolding us." "I don't agree that the way to combat racism is to make people feel guilty."

Maybe white women, most of whom have experienced some form of sexism, are more able to "feel the water" or the wind at our backs. That does not mean we are free of racist thoughts and feelings sometimes, but that we can be more aware. It may be difficult for many white men to understand the privilege that they have since they rarely experience oppression and discrimination because of their whiteness. On the other hand, women of color, both gay and straight, have long been in the forefront of working to end oppression.

I wonder too about our reactions to the very words "racist and racism". They conjure up the KKK, and the use of the "N" word and sheer hatred. I have never encountered any of that at PES. But I have heard many things said that I consider racist. I wonder what our readers think

of the mission statement of the ERTF, which is a subcommittee of the Ethical Action Committee:

*The goals of the ending racism task force include understanding and admitting to white privilege and ending racism, be it individual, group and/or systemic, by motivating ourselves and our congregation to unlearn personal biases and work to undo racism throughout society.*

The ERTF has a resource list that we would be happy to share with anyone who is interested. I just heard about and read a pertinent article from the Washington Post of 11-3-17 entitled “ I’m the Descendant of a Founding Father and I have Two Black Daughters and I am Racist.” Some of our readers may be interested in the Harvard Implicit Bias Test.

I thought a lot about what my goal would be in writing this particular story. I do not want to “be too hard on myself” or anyone else and I certainly do not want to be running guilt trips. Instead I hope it will provoke some discussions about race, racism and privilege ; that we will all take a more honest and deep look into the water we are swimming in; that we will take some actions in 2018 to end racism in ourselves and society. Wouldn’t it be great if we all traveled with the wind at our backs?