

# The Color of Tears

Category: Race

written by Shapir Rosenberg | August 8, 2016

*"Hey Doctor Curly!"*

*"Hey Hungry Hippo!"*

*"You still haven't gotten a haircut? Have you had one since your Bar Mitzvah?! What nice Jewish girl's gonna go on a date with you with your hair that long?!"*

*"Been working long hours in the hospital, Linda. Haven't had a chance yet—I will! How are you feeling? Are the steroids still helping your appetite?"*

*"Ooohh weee, don't you know it! I'm eatin' everything in sight! Now tell me doc, is there cancer in my brain? If there is, I don't wanna know. We're gonna run that half-block marathon next year, aren't we, Doctor Curly?"*

My mom bought a house in Aurora, Colorado, when I started first grade. Growing up without siblings or a dad, I was the only Jewish boy in a neighborhood of white Mormons, black Baptists and Hispanic Protestants. I was eleven when mom received a metastatic breast-cancer diagnosis. Upon hearing the news, one of her first phone calls was to Jackie, a dear friend, and black woman, whom she met when they worked together as clerks at a Denver bank soon after high school. She inquired whether Jackie's daughter Rhonda, then twenty-two and home after graduating from a Christian college out of state, might be interested in earning a few extra dollars by driving me daily to my Jewish elementary school, accompanying my mom to doctor's appointments and helping around the house with laundry and cooking.

Weeks turned to months as Rhonda and I played basketball together at a nearby park, talked about friendship among people of different races and bore witness to my mom's struggle for life.

The night my mom died, a year later, it was Rhonda who ordered in my favorite pizza and hugged me tight as I sat on my bed, afraid and suddenly so alone, until I cried myself to sleep.

Decades later, at my patient Linda's funeral service in a church on Chicago's South Side, I was one of the few white folks within miles, and surely the only Jewish one. I stood in line with the other guests—including many of Linda's former Chicago Police Department colleagues—to greet the bereaved family sitting in the front row. When Linda's husband and grown son stood up from their seats—as did a few of Linda's extended family and a close childhood friend—to embrace me, to cry together, I felt among family.

To doctor is to be for others, and with others, amidst their suffering. To be there for Linda—as she lived and died—and her family, was only giving back what was gifted to me years before—a lesson in caring, no matter one's dermatologic or ethnic heritage. As at the church in Chicago, and decades

prior in Aurora, colors and creeds dissolve in humanity's shared tears.

*Shapir Rosenberg*  
*Denver, Colorado*