

# So I Was at This Dinner Party...

Category: Speaking Up

written by Betsy Kates | July 6, 2020

Atlanta, 2004. I'm seated next to a stranger at a large table at my brother's home; I know no one there except my brother and his family. My son stayed back in New York with his dad, and my daughter was playing in another room. When the woman next to me hears where I am from, she mentions that she had once lived across the river from me. I knew her town well.

"It was nice there," she said. "But'"—she lowered her voice—"we had to move."

I knew why right away, but I had to hear it from her. "Oh?" I asked innocently. "Why?"

"Oh, you know," she leaned in and whispered. "The Blacks."

Here was my chance, and I didn't miss a beat. "Oh, I know," I replied. "They're so noisy, and they make such a mess. I have two of them living downstairs in my house. They drive me crazy sometimes."

She looked confused.

"My children are biracial," I smiled at her. And I immediately felt terrible for embarrassing her, as she fell over herself apologizing.

But another part of me didn't feel terrible. "I'm sorry," I said, "but it just goes to show you: you never know who you're talking to."

I have thought about this episode many times, along with the moments that followed. When my daughter skipped in to give me a hug and steal a bite from my plate, my seat mate was barely able to pull herself together for me to introduce them. I often wonder what she took from that short conversation. How did she retell it, or did she ever?

I know what my takeaway was, and I have never once regretted my response.

*Betsy Kates*

*Montrose, New York*