

## Telling tale is touchy subject

I learned throughout my childhood that every person had a story to tell — some happy and some sad, but each was their own. I also learned at a young age to keep my story to myself. It was my father who explained that to me one night when he had overheard me boasting about my family's Catholic traditions to one of my little girlfriends, who happened to come from a very Jewish background.

He said to me softly, "Lara, there are some things you need to just keep to yourself."

So, because of those echoing words of advice, one day in class during my freshman year of high school I had a difficult time deciding whether I should keep some things to myself.

I grew up in the northern suburbs of Chicago, where I learned a lot about different cultures, especially outside the classroom.

This particular day in my Political Thought class, we were discussing ethnicity. We were supposed to have brought in a story of our family heritage by interviewing our grandparents about their most prominent ethnically related childhood memory.

I interviewed my father's mother, my "oma," which I called her for her Austrian heritage and because it made it easier to differentiate between my two grandmothers.

She had never been the sort of grandmother to share the less-traveled road of her childhood, so I knew whatever she would share with me would be a treasure.

This particular evening she untied a tale I would never forget.

In 1943 my oma graduated from the University of Vienna in Austria. She was living with her family during the time of World War II,



**Lara Duda**

which was about the time when the city was anticipating a Russian invasion. As my oma described the city's atmosphere, I could see the expression on her face change as her thoughts quickly became vivid pictures in her mind.

She had a girlfriend in college who lived with my oma's family throughout college. When the invasion grew nearer, my oma's parents wouldn't risk taking responsibility for her girlfriend. She would have to return to her family in a small village in western Austria, and it was expected that my oma would go with her. It was obviously safer for both of the young women to leave the city.

In less than 24 hours, the two young women were to pack all their belongings onto two bicycles and travel east the next morning. They later learned that only two hours after they crossed the Viennese border, the Russians had surrounded the city.

She described the hundreds of children and older people traveling hundreds of miles by foot. Their journey ended safely and my oma remained with her friend's family for two years. She later found out that her only brother had died during the last year of the war.

In the meantime she fell in love with an American soldier she met while working at a village court-

house occupied by American soldiers. His name was Charles Duda, and the rest is history.

My history. It's the history I was supposed to share with the rest of my class.

So why did I hesitate? I didn't feel ashamed, but I was unsure of the reaction I would get from my classmates, since the majority of the students in my high school were of Jewish descent and may have had grandparents who died in the Holocaust or still had numbers carved into their flesh. I didn't know whether they would resent me or my family for being "on the murderer's side."

And I didn't know if I should say that my grandparent's family had two Jewish families hiding in the cellar of their tiny apartment. I didn't know if I should say how my oma's father blamed Hitler's madness for the death of his only son. And I didn't think they'd care.

But I told my oma's story because it was the truth, and I left it at that. At the same time, my father's words echoed in my mind. As honest and meaningful as something may sound to one person, it may mean something entirely different to someone else.

I have since spoken with my oma many times about my Austrian heritage, because as I've grown older, my heritage has become very important to me.

However, I have also realized that we cannot see through other people's pasts or through their hearts. And sometimes, there will be those things that I will keep to myself.

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## Death's cause lost in pilot's PC wake

So it was the engine after all. Not the pilot. Lt. Kara Hultgreen did not die on the altar of "political correctness" or "preferential treatment" or "reverse discrimination." She died because the F-14A Tomcat stalled as it approached the aircraft carrier.

The Navy brass played the videotape of the crash over and over again. The officers relayed the findings of their investigation succinctly: It wasn't her fault. It wasn't her sex.

Kara Hultgreen had grown up fearless, a daredevil who believed she could do anything. At 10, she deliberately ran through a glass door. At 28, she broke the glass ceiling.

When the Navy finally lifted its ban against women fighter pilots in 1993, this gung-ho pilot who knew all the lines from "Top Gun" was the first to join an air-combat squadron. Last October she became the first to die.

But before Kara Hultgreen's body had even been recovered from the sea, 4,000 feet deep, strapped to her ejection seat, the anonymous phone calls, the fax attacks, the rumors had all begun. She was only a pilot because the Navy was trying to be "politically correct" in the wake of the Tailhook scandal. She was unqualified. She was given preferential treatment. She was, in the modern slang, an affirmative-action baby.

In her too-brief career, Kara Hultgreen had flown across the whole trajectory of prejudice. At the beginning, she was banned from her job because she was a woman. At the end, it was said that she only got the job because she was a woman. One double standard was twisted into another.

Even Ted Koppel on "Nightline," probing her qualifications, asked if she had received a "kind of affirmative action."

Maybe this is Lt. Hultgreen's last, unwitting service. The people who cast a shadow on her reputation have thrown some light on the debate about discrimination and affirmative action.

In today's language and climate, affirmative action has become synonymous in the public mind with lowering standards. The remedy for discrimination has become a code word for it.

Those who oppose affirmative action will say Kara Hultgreen's story proves how much these programs tarnish every successful woman or minority, even one who rose by the most rigorous of single standards.

Those who favor affirmative action will say the story proves how far we still are from a race-



**Ellen Goodman**

blind, gender-neutral society. The people who want to keep the outsiders where they belong — down — have found a new way of expressing an old prejudice.

But either way you look it, affirmative action is now tainted. It's become a fighting term.

Affirmative action plans, the goals and goals designed to remedy past discrimination, have made a difference in the lives of women and minorities.

The plans have also created antagonism between men and women, whites and blacks.

This antagonism is stirred every time an employer tries to let a white man down, falsely but easily, by saying that "we have to hire a woman." It's stirred every time a politician wants people to believe that a black American has taken "their" job, not a Sri Lankan or a Mexican.

Those who have favored affirmative action — as I have — have been too busy fighting opponents to confront our own conflicts. We haven't squarely faced the dilemma of fostering group rights to promote individual rights. Nor have we fairly computed the competing disadvantages of race and class, gender and poverty.

It's late in the day, and we haven't laid out our own endgame. We haven't decided when the time is up for this temporary policy. If not now, when? How will we know? It's no wonder that the country believes the temporary is permanent.

But the opponents of affirmative action also have their work cut out. As the mood of the country shifts, so does the burden. Those who would end programs that have given women and minorities a chance are now obliged to describe the tools they would use on the still-rocky road to equality. Without such a plan we can only assume that the goal is to go backwards.

While this debate goes on, it's worth remembering how much prejudice there still is in this world. Enough prejudice to follow a young pilot into her grave.

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## Eid bittersweet without family

Last Wednesday I was constantly receiving and calling people around Lincoln, impatiently waiting for someone to tell me what was going on the next day. I stayed home all evening waiting for the call. It was 10 p.m. and still no calls. This was driving me crazy.

But then the call came, and with it, a sparkling smile and glittery eyes. I told my brother sitting next to me that the new moon was sighted. The fasting month was over, and it was Eid, the next day.

The ninth month of the lunar year is the month of Ramadan. All the Muslims around the globe fast in this holy month. After that month, the day that the new moon is sighted is a big celebration for the Muslims. It is called Eid Al Fitr, meaning "the feast of breaking the fast." It is usually celebrated for three days and is a major festive holiday for the followers of the religion of Islam.

I called all my friends in Lincoln to gather at my apartment. Everyone was blithe and ecstatic, hugging each other in high spirits and ready for the celebration.

I don't know exactly why we were so happy, since we weren't with our families to celebrate this festival. It might have been because we were cheered up by the thought of eating at Burger King around noon or having guilt-free cigarettes while the sun was still up. Or maybe an excuse for skipping classes the next day became the reason for our smiles.

The party was lively with music, jokes, food and laughter. But people did not stay all night, as everyone had to do their laundry for the special prayers at 8:00 the next morning, and, of course, call home and talk to their families.

My brother and my cousin stayed at my apartment while the rest left. Taking advantage of my age, I told



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my brother that he could do the laundry while I would call home.

How clueless and extremely vapid I felt after three consecutive hours of trying to call home. I guess everyone was calling Pakistan that night, as I kept on hearing the recording: "All the lines are busy to the country you are calling. Please try your call again. And thank you for using AT&T."

Around four in the morning, I finally got through. I went and woke up my brother and cousin and put on the speakerphone, so all three of us could listen and talk at the same time. Everyone at home wanted to talk. My parents, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins — everyone missed us and we missed them.

Nobody wanted to hang up the phone and end the call, but it had been more than an hour and AT&T was keeping track of the time.

After we hung up, all three of us were quiet. The feeling was mutual: We wished we were at home with everyone. We talked about the old times when we were among our family and how special everything was.

We remembered the nights before the Eid when we used to drag our parents out and make them buy new clothes. The night before the Eid was lively. There were lights everywhere and swarms of people out shopping, eating and celebrating. Women bought colored-glass

bangles and painted their hands with henna. Everyone donned smiles and high spirits. The city glowed.

On the day of the Eid everyone got up early, bathed and put on their new threads with fabricated designs and festive colors. With a special glow and a fresh spirit, everyone marched off to the mosque.

After saying the prayers, the men and the women separately hugged each other. No matter who you were, rich or poor, young or old, related or not related, everyone hugged everyone.

After the hugging session at the mosque, it was time to go home to the family. Mothers waited with open arms and sisters greeted with loving smiles. All the elders gave money to the younger ones. People came to the house all day long with gifts. The holiday lasted for three days. No school, no business — just parties.

And now, here we were in Lincoln, remembering those days and wishing we were among our family. In keeping the spirit alive, we went to the mosque and said the prayers. At night, we had a big dinner at the mosque.

It wasn't the same. I guess this is life.

But this made me realize how much I miss my family, which I never did realize before. So actually, this has been a good experience for me, as now I appreciate my family more and know how special they are and what they mean to me.

It is true that the best things in life are free. But we take them for granted, and it is only when they are taken away from us that we know how precious they are.

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**Mike Luckovich**