

Look At These Dirty Knees.

1982. I still have no concept of race. No difference. I know not that I look different. Nothing to tell me otherwise. I'm just a young boy. And everyday is a good day. I know I was happy then. I can barely remember any poor memories. And even my first encounters with what in contemporary times could be dubbed or interpreted as bits of discrimination, had no ill effects on me. I was just a young boy. And this was my youth. And it was good. Everyday was a good day. I had no concept or comprehension that I might be different. Different looking. Different in appearance. Different in any way. I was, just a kid as they say. I was just a young boy. I was just a human. I ran through the school yards thinking such things. I attended all activities thinking such things. I was human. It just never occurred to me that I could be anything but human. I remember my first awareness or consciousness that I was different was through my eyes. That was the easiest entry point I suppose. From anyone's point of view. Low hanging fruit as they say. I began to realize I was different because of my eyes. The first time it was brought up to me was not in speech, not in any kind of vocalized or verbalized way. But through gesture. As children tend to do, if one can grab the sides of your face and massage the surface enough of your cheeks, one can portray very small, slanted eyes. And this is what was portrayed to me. And I remember, it was not any language that

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had been associated with this gesture. But it was this action and then a finger towards me to suggest or imply that this was me. Very simple communication. Finger points to me. Distorted face. This was how I looked. This was my face. These were my eyes. Slanted, slit eyes of the sun going down. The shades closing. The garage door falling to the ground. These were my eyes. And if I can remember correctly I, perhaps in ignorance, felt no ill will. This was fun for me. I was that age. I too made such faces. I too grabbed my face and massaged the skin enough to form different faces. Later there was a song associated with this. I believe it went like this, "Chinese, Japanese look at these dirty knees." I still don't know what this means. But I remember the lyrics. And when singing this song, kids would again, massage their faces back and forth to portray different faces. Different faces but all with the slanted eyes that I had begun to realize, were my own. But again, it did not seem to matter to me. Or in my memory, or my memories tell me that such things did not matter. It did not affect me in the way one might think. It was all something I took part in too. With similar motions, we mimicked people that might be overweight. I remember through the same massaging of the face, we did a voice over story of somebody named Chubby. "My name is Chubby. My mom is chubby. My dad is chubby. My brother is chubby. And I am 2 chubby too." I remember several

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years later, several pop cultural titans of cinema were released and spread to the masses. Apunies and later Indian Jones and the Temple of Doom were iconic cinema that we absorbed over and over again via VHS tape. And I remember there was a character played by a young asian boy in these movies. And similar to the pointing fingers and the started eyes, people always said that this character was me. This actor was me. This representation was me. And strangely, I loved it. There was somebody on the television, who looked like me. And this somebody, had amazing talents. Driving cars, martial arts, gadgets. And I was glad to embrace it. I loved that there was somebody on screen that somewhat resembled me. And more importantly, he was positively, optimistically, respectfully thought of. It was okay to be me.