

# Cultural Autobiography: A Season of Change

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# My Culture: Acadian American or Cajun

- Ancestors faced many trials and tribulations.
- Descendents of Acadian exiles, Spanish, German, and French Creole
- Currently make up a significant part of Southern Louisiana
- Acadians were evicted from Nova Scotia in the mid 1700s
- Some became slaves in British colonies
- Many ended up in French-colonized Louisiana west of New Orleans where they shared swamps and prairies with Attakapa and Chitimachas Native American tribes
- Many cultures have assimilated into Cajun communities
- Cajuns were mostly secluded from mainstream America until the early 1900s



# The Acadian American Culture of my time

- We have a strong sense of who we are, including:
  - Strong sense of belonging to the same cultural group; also have a strong belief in where we belong—no matter what, our home is our home
  - We know many of our customs and beliefs, but our language and some of our customs have been lost
  - Feeling that we can face any hardship, some that others may be reluctant to face
  - Strong belief in family, food, religion, community gatherings, oil industry, farming, hard work, good times, music, and unique cultural and folk beliefs

**Music:** French with unique instruments, including, accordions, triangle, washboard, and fiddle.





All of the boys in my family learned to play the accordion.



**Folk: Traditions are passed down from generation to generation. It is a Cajun tradition to have traiteurs who treat illnesses. Passed down from male to female to male, generation to generation. Growing up, I remember phone calls to my Greatmother (called Old Mawmaw) for treatment of earaches and other illnesses (faith healing).**

- Other folk beliefs:
  - Egg pacques
  - Taitail
  - Coup de main – community gatherings
  - Fais-do-do – Dance away the evil



# **FOOD:** Food is a big part of the Cajun culture.

Anytime people are gathered together it expected there will be coffee and food. Unique culturally food includes, crawfish, crabs, shrimp, garfish, and catfish. Often times those foods are boiled or deep fat fried.

- Anytime someone visits your home, coffee is expected and if it is mealtime, then it is assumed they will stay to eat. There is always enough food for everyone! Men and women cook.





**Religion:** Most Acadian Americans are Roman Catholic, however, many are also Southern Baptist as well as other Christian faiths.

- The First Communion is a big event in a Catholic child's life.





**Family:** The number one priority in my cultural upbringing was family. No matter what, family came first.

- There was also an unspoken rule that what happened in a family stayed private among those family members.



**French language:** The French language is traditional among the Cajun culture. My father could speak only French when he started school. His grandparents could speak only French, as well.

- All of my mother and father's siblings speak English and French fluently. I have a mixed usage of French and English terms. Examples:  
Cest' Bon  
Cowsons  
Comsah  
Cuzin





**Hard work:** My parents and husband worked on farms picking cotton, and pepper or working sugarcane, rice or crawfish farms throughout their childhoods. They worked side by side with people of different races, as equals. My family always kept a large garden. As a child I spent my summers picking beans, tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers then putting them away.





**Oilfield:** My grandfather worked the boardroads his entire life. Again side by side with other races. I was always taught you judge a man by how hard he works for a living and not by the color of his skin.



**Oilfield:** My father and all of my uncles served in the military and then worked the oilrigs all of their lives. My daddy once told me that in those dangerous fields of work, you had to depend on the people you work with for your life and safety. There is no room for prejudice in a place like that.





**Fun:** Another strong Acadian belief is “Work Hard, Play Hard.”

There always has to be time to enjoy life and take time for the good things life has to offer. Some examples include, Mardi Gras, Festivals, family gatherings, bar-b-ques, crawfish boils





**Festivals:** Mostly based on giving thanks and praise for what we have (i.e. Sugarcane, Crawfish..) but, also a time to enjoy our blessings.



- Dance is a big part of the Acadian Culture.
- The adults used to dance around the kitchen floor when I was a child.
- Examples: Cajun Two-Step, Zydeco Waltz



# *The Traditional Cajun Country Mardi Gras, the Mardi Gras Run*

- Not at all like what happens in New Orleans or other large cities
- Was found in most French sections of Louisiana in the nineteenth century. As they went from one household to the next, the riders engaged in a rowdy celebration

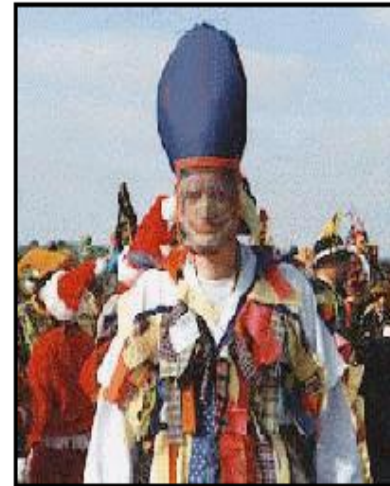




*This rider in the Mamou courir has a capuchon and an animal mask.*



*Notice the hair flowing around a beak in this mask, also in Mamou.*



*This mask, worn by a rider in the Eunice courir, parodies a bishop's mitre.*



*This Mardi Gras in the Eunice courir successfully begged for a quarter in exchange for posing for this picture.*

In earlier, more impoverished times, when the Mardi Gras re-enacted the medieval tradition of a procession of beggars, they might very well have needed help from farmers to get the ingredients for their gumbo. Today, the Mardi Gras still carry on the tradition of begging.

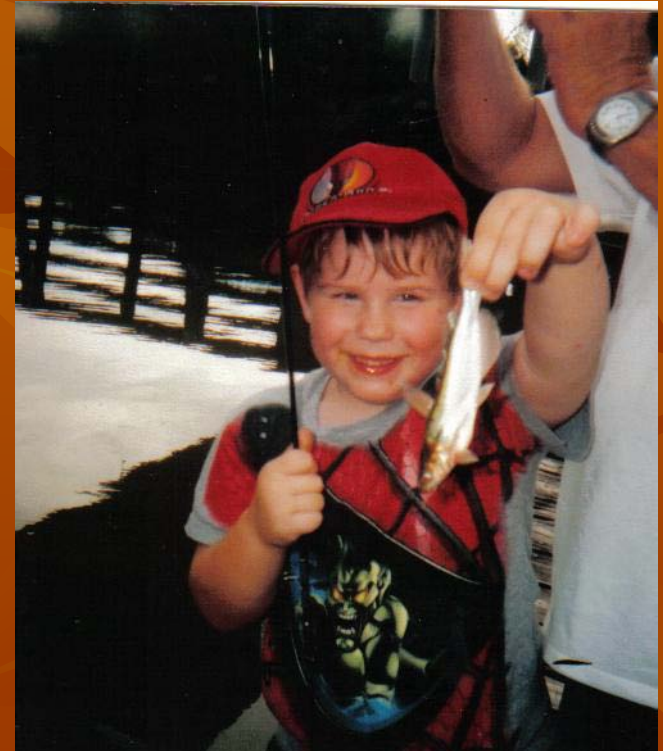


**Strong sense of belonging to a particular group of people and acceptance of differences in others**



# Fishing:

Crabbing and fishing are a big part of the Acadian culture





# My Life: How my culture and family made me who I am today

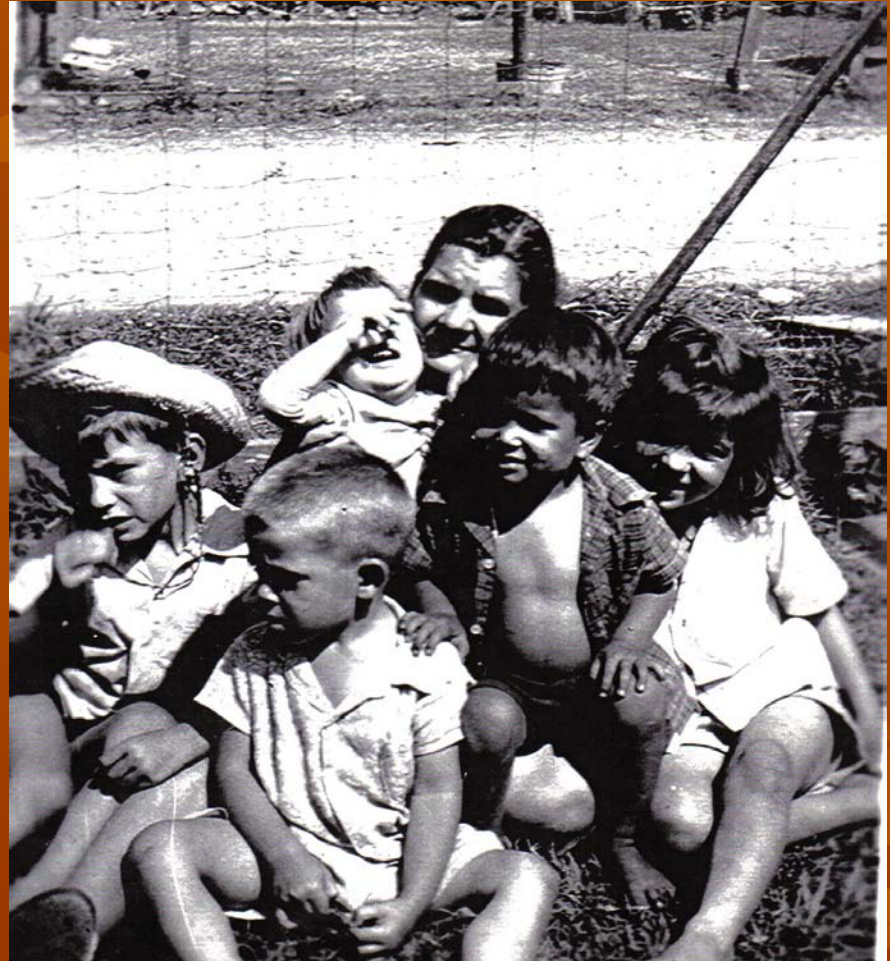
- The Beginning:





# My Mother's family: The Seguras and Delcambres

- My grandmother was illiterate and American Indian (she doesn't know which tribe)
- My mother and one of her brothers were illegitimate. Which was unaccepted then.
- My mother was mostly raised by an elderly Black neighbor
- Poor as church mice
- Eight siblings
- Worked the fields as hired laborers for \$5 a week
- Very dysfunctional family upbringing, my mother basically raised her siblings.
- We had little contact with her family as I grew up.



# My Father's family: The Broussards

- Strong family values, held together by my father, my grandmother, and her parents
- Nine children, my father was the oldest
- We were also poor, but didn't know it
- My grandmother and parents worked hard to provide a normal childhood for us all
- Blended family with 7 – 12 children in the house at one time and a variety of adults





# LulaMae Breaux Broussard

- Raised nine children alone
- Babysat in her home
- Sewed and ironed for “out”
- Worked her fingers to the bones





# The beginning of my immediate family

- My parents married in January 1960, my dad was 21 and my mom 18
- My sister was born in December of that year
- My father had siblings ages 16, 14, 13, 11, 8, 3, and 2 when my sister was born
- My grandmother also had a daughter three months later
- Since my father was the man of the house, he provided a home for his mother and siblings.
- Therefore, our family was blended



# A time to grief

- Following the joyful time of my sister and aunt's birth, there was a time of grief that blanketed our family
- In a five year period, four children from our family died in separate incidents
- It was a time of mourning for my family that they thought they would never get over



**First was the death of my grandmother's newborn son in 1966. Next was a fire in my parents' home that caused the premature birth and subsequent death of my mother's newborn daughter in 1967. In late 1969, my father's thirteen year old brother died from a two year battle with Cancer.**





**A month later, the nine month old son of my father's brother died from a blood infection. Also during that time, both of my great grandparents got ill and moved into the family home with my grandmother and her children**



**In December 1970, I was born into a home with my two parents, my sister, my grandmother, my two great-grandparents, my uncle's wife, and six other children who were my aunts and uncles.**





# Blended Family:

- This was the family that I grew up in until I was in the third grade.





# How it affected me:

- Due to the tragedy that the family had faced over the five years prior to my birth, I was watched over and cared for more than anyone could ever imagine
- That resulted in me feeling that I was “special” and that I could do anything I wanted
- I spent my early childhood, until about age 9 in that blended family where my time was spent playing school, running outside, and pretending to be madams.

**My father worked in the oilfield his entire life and supported the large household.**



- We all lived in a rent house on the Northside of Lafayette, in a primarily Black neighborhood. I grew up playing with my sister, aunts, cousins, and neighbors. Nobody said anything about what color anybody's skin was. I don't remember any racial issues during that time in my life. We were always just a large group of kids running around together. It was the older kids who discriminated against the younger ones in some ways.

## **The House: The only real home I remember**






# Learning to sew:



# A change in my life:

- In case you were wondering how my grandmother had ten children while she was a single mother: My grandfather was the reason for that!
  - He always worked away from home and claimed to be separated from my grandmother, except for when he came home to visit the children a few times a year—and usually left my grandmother expecting a new baby
  - We were always excited to see him because he brought us presents. His visits were always unexpected and joyous, like Christmas.
  - I didn't understand until I was an adult how he had wronged out family
  - When I was about eight, he contracted lung cancer and came home to stay! He bought a home for my grandmother and the four children remaining a home.
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- My father also bought our first home and we moved away from my grandmother and the other children.
  - It was presented as a happy time! The first people in our family to ever own a home! However, it was a time of mourning for me.



# Education:

- Unfortunately, education is not a high priority in my family or in many Acadian families
- I always did well in school, probably because I was taught to read and write when I was three while playing school with my aunts and sister
- No one on either side of my family had ever graduated from high school before me.
- Persell's paper referenced three babies born at the same time in three different types of homes. I had the same experience in my own family





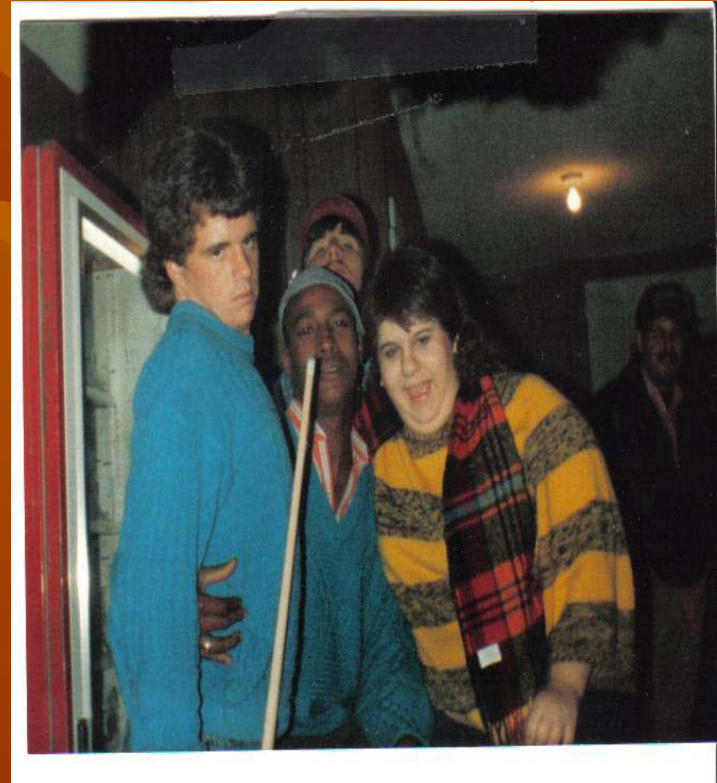
# Influences

- One good thing that came about from breaking our larger family unit down was the focus on education by my mother.
- We moved to a neighborhood where education was placed high up in the list of priorities, which was very different from the community that I had been in previously
- I had always loved school, after being left home alone each day while the older kids went to school I loved school from the first minute
- One of my high school teachers, Mrs. Christine Callier, motivated me to continue my education



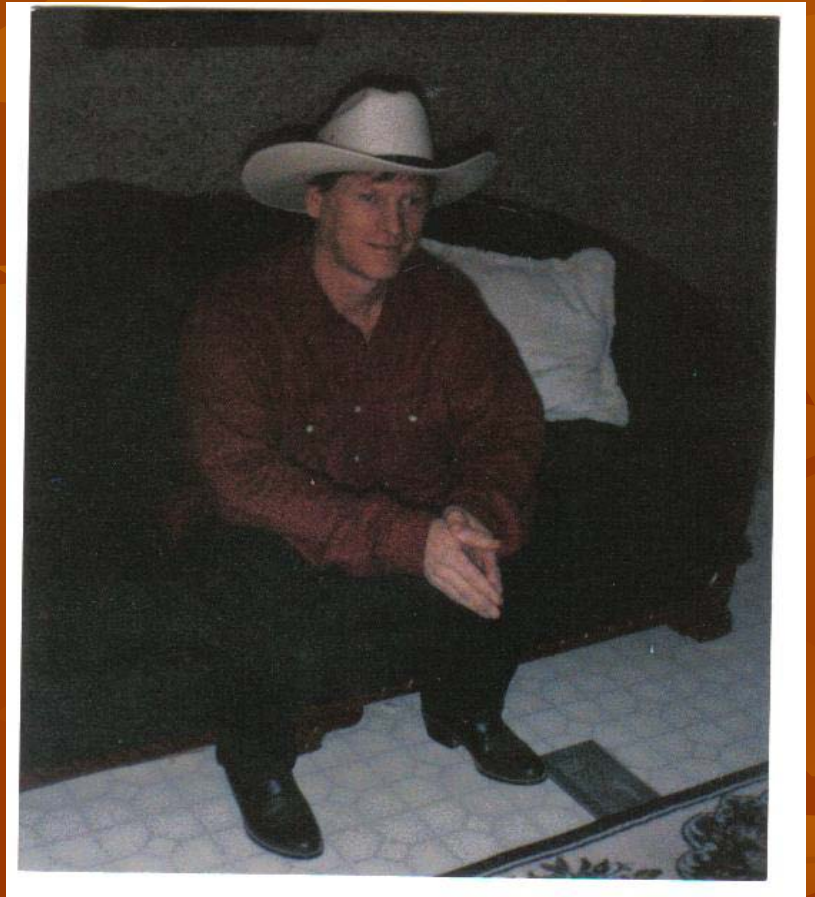
# Racial Issues

- I became more aware of the differences in races once we moved into our own home in Breaux Bridge when I was eight.
- Because my mother and father had worked and had been raised side by side with people of different races, they didn't point out any differences to us or make any differences in how they treated people of other races.
- However, I soon found out that not everyone had the same beliefs
- I always had trouble understanding people's beliefs in regard to racism: Jr. Deputy Cadets.
- In school we all played together, but there was no mixing of racial groups outside of school until I was about 16 or 17 years old
- My junior year was the first integrated school prom in Breaux Bridge



# Other forms of Discrimination:

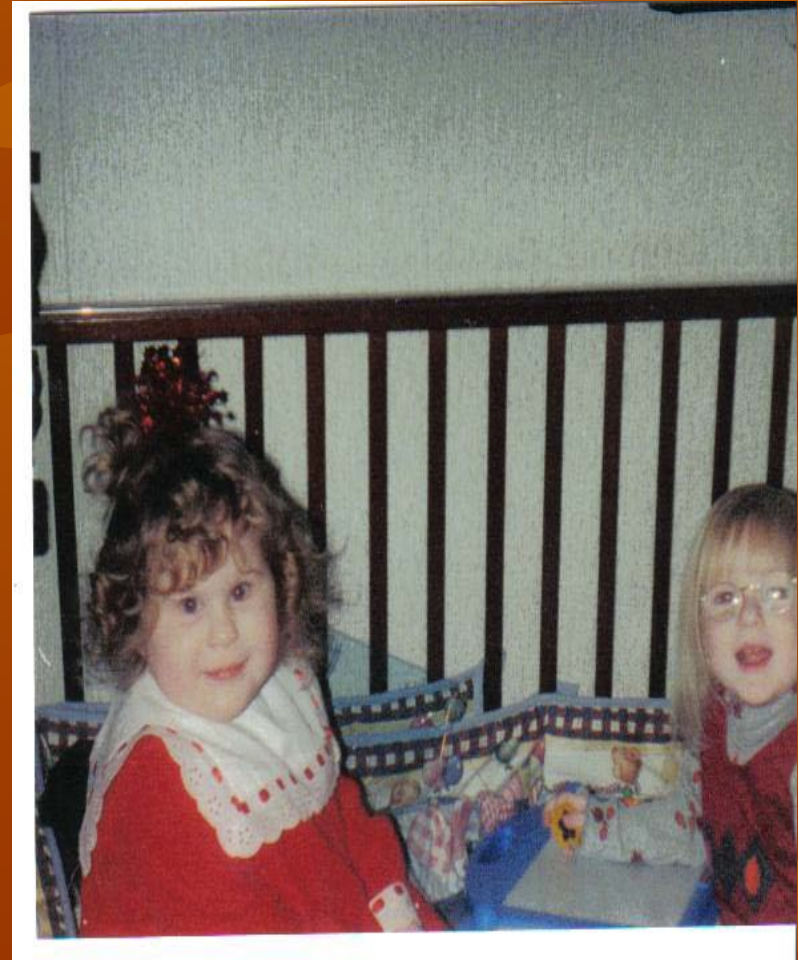
- Disabilities:
  - My husband is Visually Impaired, he attended LSVI in Baton Rouge as a child
  - He pushes away any affiliation with the blind community due to the discrimination that he has faced during his lifetime.
  - He was ashamed of his disability and tried to hide it from people for most of his life





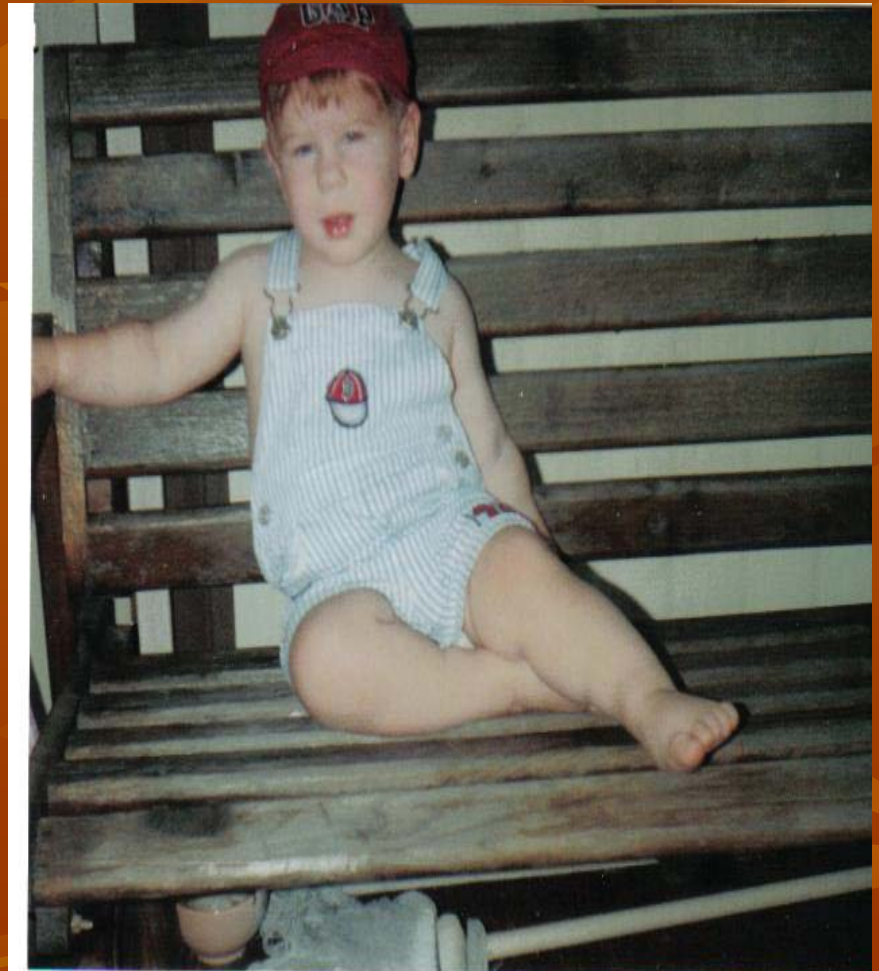
# Finding support:

- After our son was born with the same disability as his father, I embraced the VI community and my husband soon followed
- We joined a support group and met a family with a little girl with the same condition who lived close to us
- We have remained great friends and support groups for each other.



# A different world?

- Of course it is a different world now than it was when my husband was a child.
- My son has many more advantages and the world seems to have a different view of people with disabilities now
- However, we still have discrimination, ex: t-ball



# A new generation:

- Racial discrimination was something that I had never even considered when raising my children
- Since they had grown up in a very small town with very little racial diversity, it was never an issue that came up
- It was never an issue in my early childhood and I didn't even think about it as being an issue for my children
- UNTIL, we moved to Northern Louisiana this past year





# My experiences:

- I have noticed a more pronounced sense of racial discrimination and desegregation here than I experienced in Southern Louisiana
- Due in part to this class and in part to my children now being in a more diverse school setting, we have been discussing race frequently in our home this year
- It has been a positive learning experience for us all, but also it has been an eye opening experience
- I have realized that there is so much I don't know

# Who I am today!

- I am proud of my heritage, my family, and my culture
- I have a strong connection with the lifestyle that I grew up in
- I am accepting of people who are different from me
- I believe strongly that education is the path out of poverty
- I think you have to work hard to get anything worth having
- Last, but not least I believe that family comes first!

