



*#LUNCHBOXCHRONICLES by Tai Hall (Sample)*

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(Facebook posts in *italics*)

*August 21, 2015 8:02AM - Boston, MA*

*DID YOU KNOW PLYMOUTH ROCK IS IN MASSACHUSETTS?! 'Tmma go land on it!*

*August 21, 2015 11:55AM*

*Boy Wonder is messing up my agenda! I SHOULD HAVE LANDED ON PLYMOUTH BY NOW.*

*But no. He's still sleep.*

I landed. And I must say, Plymouth Rock actually wasn't that impressive. Real talk... it's just a rock. A simple, underwhelming, basic rock. I expected so much more from you Plymouth. Don't let them fool you, size does matter.

*August 22, 2015 8:01PM*

*Rock Climbing. Laser Tag. Hiking. & this kid wants to add canoeing on before breakfast? My body hurts #NewHampshireBound*

*August 22, 2015 5:19PM*

*BONUS STATE! (Ran out of stuff to do in New Hampshire... No seriously it's the most boring state we've ever been to we'll come back in the winter and do a whale watching cruise) #VermontBound*

Vermont Vermont Vermont. What can I say? Montpelier was breathtaking. The lakes; the mountains with their ice snow caps; the meadows and dew drops were wet morning kisses across the curling land. It looked like the screensavers I grew up daydreaming my life away to... Oh, and everyone stares but doesn't speak. I understand at the time my hair was blue and while that may not be the norm there... or anywhere for that matter... I don't think they were staring because my hair was blue, but more so, because our skin was brown.

As we have been making our way across the forty-eight contiguous states (we'll get to Hawaii and Alaska eventually), I have been slowly "waking my son up." Part of my frustrations with him and his lunch box aren't solely because I get tired of constantly replacing his lunch box. But it's indicative of how oblivious he is to his surroundings and his person. And that downright scares me. A young black child growing up in the twenty-first century where being black is punishable by death— cops shoot first and ask questions later— I cannot afford for my child to not know what is going on around him.

I'm just not strong enough for that. My love isn't arranged that way, I am NOT built Ford tough to last. If anything were to ever happen to my son, I would crumble.

My heart breaks for the moms I've seen on television interviewing after their sons were killed at the hands of police. I find myself crying with them and I never even knew their kids! I stopped shielding him from the world and coddling him in the overprotective quarters of Prince George's County in hopes that enamoring him with an armor of knowledge, even at such a young age, would create a foundation of protection and awareness.

As we made our way through the valleys, stopping at gas stations and local attractions, the glares and gazes became more apparent. He picked up on it and said, "Mommy I think they're staring at your hair!" I curtly responded in correction, "No baby, they're staring at your skin." He simply responded, "Oh." Every time we have one of those encounters or heavy weighted discussions about racism and discrimination I feel like I am robbing him of his innocence.

Hatred, racism, and fear are taught and acquired. They are not innate. Living in the North has afforded us several luxuries, one of which was the pseudo-security in that we are free. We have mixed schools, upscale restaurants, thriving job opportunities, non-dilapidated hospitals.

But maybe that freedom I thought we had was the veil that W.E.B Dubois referred to a century prior to the world snatching Trayvon Martin's or Mike Brown's freedom away.

Freedom is a very pliable word that is thrown around too loosely. It falls in the category of "Love" or "Life," and other words that have no true definition. There is no real demarcation of 'free' in the land that has been dubbed "The Land of the Free." Perhaps I missed the small print at the end of that disclaimer that reads, "Only if you are white."

When we were in Texas, I tried my hardest not to stop, but the gas tank made me. We were in Waco. My son hopped out of the rental and obviously Diddy Bopped his way into the gas station skipping through the aisles looking for Pringles, his snack addiction at the time. I made my way to checkout and hesitantly slid a twenty (dollar bill) across the counter to the man, as their antiquated pumps didn't take credit cards.

Without batting an eye or skipping a beat, the man replied to me never looking up from his paper, "We don't take too well to your kind round these parts. You best gets on." He kicked his overall'ed pant leg up perching his edema filled left ankle on his right knee, flipped the page of the news column, and kept reading.

Not once did we make eye contact, but we didn't need to. I made eye contact with his shot gun sitting next to the register—a rusted sawed-off that looked like it definitely still worked. I thanked the man and hollered for Kordelle to leave the store; "Kordelle let's go!" Kordelle whined in return, "But mom I didn't find any Pringles yet." He instead grabbed a plain bag of Lays chips, scurried to the counter placing his merchandise alongside his money in front of the man.

The man looked at the food and snatched it away hollering back, "I told you to take your monkey and git!" Kordelle was so confused as I had been teaching him about money. He was

learning the value of a dollar and knew that money allowed him to buy the things that he wanted. At that moment, he wanted the chips; he provided the money... the confused look on his face spoke, "You have the chips; I have the money, why can't we switch?"

I was too terrified to lecture him about talking back, or to stop mid fear, induced with adrenaline to rush to explain the situation. I snatched my heart by his arm and ran out of that gas station faster than a sinner at a saints' convention. Tossed him in the passenger side of the car, peeled out the parking lot like Danica Patrick, and didn't say a word for the next five minutes fighting back tears. Kordelle finally asked me why we left before we got chips. There was a Caucasian family riding bikes along the sidewalk. I asked Kordelle to look at them, and tell me what he saw: "How are they different than us?" He named everything under the sun from the fact that their family had a daddy, they had a dog, the kid had a shiny red bike unlike his green one with training wheels. The mom had long black hair. He addressed everything except for their skin color. With no sugar coat or sweetness in my response, I told him exactly what happened.

He sat quietly and listened. And all he said when I was done was "Oh." I asked him if he had any questions.

"No. I get it."

We drove to the next gas station one town over in silence on faith and gas fumes praying we didn't break down in Waco.

That wasn't our first encounter with racism and it wouldn't be our last. All I knew was that our black boys were being hunted. Were prey, sleeping cattle at night, unaware of the looming civil war. While I kept stating, "Kordelle I need you to come home with your lunch box." The severity of him being born black translated my request to, "Kordelle I need you to come home alive."

There was a huge problem that wasn't being addressed in this country like the pink elephant in the room—the elephant had just gotten bold and belligerent. Had invited himself to dine, seated at the helm of the country's dinner table, and wasn't leaving anytime soon. Black culture is looking around at all the non-minorities, "Sooooooo... we not going to talk about this elephant? Just going to... sit here like there isn't a ridiculous disrespectful large pink elephant eating us out of house and home? Oh aiite."

Now fast forward a year and thousands of miles away in Vermont. Those same feelings started to arise. But here, it was different. No one said anything crude or mean. They just stared. Having to be overly conscious of how I acted and what I said, knowing the world was watching, and this may have been the only time they would encounter black people aside from what they see on TV felt much like being on Broadway under bright lights. Except I didn't have a check waiting for me in my dressing room.

We went to Ben and Jerry's Waterbury Factory, tried way too many different flavors, and allowed the sugar rush to take us away before heading to the beach. While I know there are black people in Vermont, I will say I wasn't saddened to decrease that number by two when we left. I don't think I am a control freak, while some of my acquaintances and ex boyfriends may disagree, but knowing what's going on around me gives me a sense of peace. The entire time we were in Vermont during that hot summer, I had no peace. I had faith and fear.