



The newspaper delivered the paper. Another boy came with him.

Ruthie, who was four years old, ran and opened the door.

“Hello, little...” The newspaper boy’s friend called her a bad name.

Ruthie stared at him. She didn’t understand why he was being mean. Her mama said no one should say that word to black people.

Ruthie wasn’t black. She was bi-racial. That meant she was not just black and not just white. She was both, just like her brother Ronnie and her sister Amber. Ronnie was five years old, and Amber was three.

Mommy and Daddy were white. Ruthie and Ronnie and Amber were adopted. Daddy said that made them very special because Mommy and Daddy picked them out. Mommy and Daddy loved them very much.

Ruthie still felt bad because the boy called her that name. Maybe it was bad to be black.

Later the whole family went to the mall to buy summer clothes.

Ruthie saw a black girl who was looking at T-shirts. She was a lot older than Ruthie. “Mom, she’s black,” Ruthie said.

“Ruthie!” Mom said.

The girl frowned.

Ruthie’s mom knelt down. “Honey,” she said. “It doesn’t matter what color people are.”

“I hate black people,” Ruthie said.

“Oh, honey, you don’t mean that. Everyone is the same.”

Then why did some people call black people bad names? Ruthie wondered.



The city had a summer program for kids. The kids could take fun classes or learn to swim. That afternoon Ruthie and her brother and sister went for swimming lessons. Ruthie, Ronnie, and Amber were the only ones in the class. The teacher was a teenage girl. She was black.

Ruthie wanted to run away. "You go ahead, Ronnie. You too, Amber. I don't want to swim."

"It's fun," the teacher said. "My name is Marie, and I'll teach you how to swim like a fish."

Amber giggled. "I have a goldfish," she said.

"You do?" Marie asked.

"Can I swim like she does?"

"Almost," Marie said. Then she turned to Ruthie.

"Don't you want to learn to swim?"

"No."

"It's fun."

"No," Ruthie said.

"Why not, sweetheart?"

"You're bad!"

"What!"

Ruthie felt terrible. But it was true. Marie was black.

"Black people are bad."



“Who told you that, honey?”

“Nobody told me.”

“Then I don’t understand,” Marie said.”

“Kids call black kids bad names.”

“Sometimes they do. And that’s not a good thing.”

“I’ m not black,” Ruthie said.

“You’re not?” Marie asked.

“Mom and Dad are white.”

“We’re adopted, “Ronnie told Marie. “We’re bi-racial.”

“That’s good,” Marie said. “But being black is good too. And being white. And red.”

“And purple,” Amber said and giggled.

“I don’t know of any purple people,” Marie said. “But they would be okay too.”

“So come on, Ruthie. Let’s go into the pool.”

Marie took Ruthie’s hand and helped her into the pool.

Later Ruthie told Mom and Dad how much fun she had.

Mom smiled. “That’s good,” she said.

Ruthie was glad she’d gone swimming.



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