**LOVING DAY-2024**

Once upon a time, not so long ago, in May 1988, a very young and pregnant Susan Brooks, my maiden name, married an even younger Ronald Garie in San Diego, California. Neither of us had planned on this union. I, in my wisdom, knew that I had amenorrhea caused by stress and ignored my weight gain over the prior four months. Shocked and surprised that the doctor said I was pregnant, I nonchalantly mentioned it to my mother, who lived in Arizona. She immediately told my father, a civil rights pastor and within 24 hours they were in San Diego, planning our wedding. My mother and I went to A Pea in the Pod maternity store and picked out a green dress and Ron rented a black tuxedo. We invited all our friends and family to the church and were married by my dad. Even though this was not a fairy tale wedding (more like shot gun) it sounds simple enough; except one thing, even though this was 1988, it was still rare to see an African American woman marrying a White man, even in San Diego. Our wedding party consisted of me and Ron, who looks German; his brother, who looks Irish; his mother, who was Italian and Native American; his stepfather, who is Chinese American; my family, who looks like Krazy Mixed-Up Salt, and our friends, including the grandson of Fredrich Nietzsche, the famous German philosopher. What a time, what a time.

So, what does that have to do with Loving Day? EVERYTHING! 30 years prior, Richard and

Mildred Loving, from Virginia, were married in Washington, DC. Richard was White and

Mildred was African American. Childhood friends, they decided to get married in 1958 on Mildred’s 18th birthday and returned to Virginia. They were arrested two weeks later, unaware that Virginia considered interracial marriage to be illegal, based on Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act. They pled guilty to the charge and were sentenced to one year in prison each, unless they left the state. They moved to Washington, DC.

After moving to Washington DC, the couple sought legal action against the state of Virginia. They filed a protest in 1963, with the then US Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy, who referred them to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The ACLU attorneys filed a motion with the higher courts in Virginia to have the Loving’s cases overturned and eventually Loving v. Virginia made it to the United States Supreme Court. On June 12th, 1967, the case was ruled in their favor. The Lovings' courageous fight against institutionalized racism led to a groundbreaking legal battle that challenged discriminatory laws not only in Virginia but across the nation. The Supreme Court's ruling in their favor not only invalidated Virginia's antimiscegenation statute but also struck down similar laws in 15 other states, affirming the fundamental right to marry regardless of race. Beyond its legal implications, Loving Day serves as a reminder of the complexities of race relations in America and the ongoing struggle for social justice. While significant progress has been made since the Lovings' era, challenges persist, and disparities continue to affect marginalized communities.

Loving Day encourages reflection on how far society has come and how much further it must go to achieve true equality for all. It holds profound significance as a symbol of love's power to overcome societal barriers and prejudice. It stands as a testament to the resilience of individuals who dare to love across racial boundaries and the tireless efforts of activists who fight for equality and justice.

The celebration was created by Ken Tanabe in 2004. Ken grew up in an interracial family with a

Japanese father and Belgian mother. His goal was that the celebration would bring multi-ethnic families together around the world. As we commemorate Loving Day each year, we not only pay tribute to Richard and Mildred Loving's courageous stand but also renew our commitment to upholding the principles of equality and justice for all. Loving Day challenges, us to confront prejudice and discrimination wherever they exist and to embrace love in all its forms.

Loving Day celebrations take many forms, ranging from community gatherings and cultural events to educational seminars and film screenings. These events provide opportunities for people of all backgrounds to come together, celebrate diversity, and honor the legacy of the Lovings. Participating in Loving Day festivities fosters dialogue, understanding, and solidarity among individuals from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. It reinforces the importance of inclusivity, acceptance, and mutual respect in building a more harmonious and equitable society.

In a world often divided by hate and intolerance, Loving Day reminds us that love knows no bounds and that together we can create a more inclusive and compassionate society. As we celebrate Loving Day, let us honor the past, embrace the present, and strive for a future where love truly conquers all.

So, thank you Richard and Mildred Loving for paving the way for me and Ron to get married. And even though we were divorced a couple of years later, we are still good friends and have an amazing daughter and granddaughter.