



THE MAN BEHIND ELMO

EDITORIAL

As an adult, I have always felt good about retaining some of my child-like qualities, such as having the ability to laugh at certain situations instead of becoming uptight. I know that laughter can be a healing mechanism for the body. So, I take advantage of every opportunity that I get to laugh. One toy is the Tickle Me Elmo Doll. When touched on his stomach or on his foot, he starts laughing, falls back on the floor, kicks up his feet and stands up and asks to be tickled again. It made me laugh so hard that I purchased one for myself. So, it was only natural for me to be curious about its creator. I found out that the artist that helped to turn this cartoon character into a superstar was Kevin Clash.

After reading a newspaper article about Kevin Clash, I found out that a film existed as well. "Being Elmo" was a documentary about a young black man who realized a dream which came true. He had a unique experience which all most never happens to a black child in the inner city. It was a dream that came out of his love of watching television programs such as Walt Disney, Captain Kangaroo, and Sesame Street. These programs captured his imagination, inspired and motivated him. It was a story that I could relate because I had a similar experience during my childhood. I wanted to be on the Mickey Mouse Club Show and become one of the "Mousketeers". However, when I shared my desires to my parents, I received a totally different response. I was told to forget my dream because it would never happen. Of course, I am much older than Kevin Clash and grew up in a different time period. So, I was happy that he realized his dream and didn't have to share what I had to undergo. I was pleased to see that his Mother and Father gave him the love and support that he needed as a child. I loved how his father encouraged him even after he made his first puppet out of the lining in his coat. Had Kevin not received that love and encouragement, I'm sure his story would have had a totally different outcome.

To me, the film is a good tool to help young people identify resources, map out direction, and develop a timeline to reach your goal. I respect him for sticking to his guns even after being teased and ridiculed by family and friends. I believe that one should focus on what makes you happy and not let obstacles stand in your way. You should never let people tell you what or what not to do, but decide for yourself what is best for you. The film showed that he was comfortable in the direction he wanted to take his life and that he was comfortable with his public person. These are all distinguishable attributes, however, once you become famous, your public and private life both become public domain. It was his private endeavors that society condemned and used to topple his ascension to fame and fortune. Actions have consequences and he found out the hard way. He was fired as the voice of "Elmo".

After giving the puppet a falsetto voice and a spirit of "Love", the rest remains history. The name, Kevin Clash, may have been omitted from the files of the Sesame Street Organization, but, his creation lives on. The character, Elmo, continues to bring smiles and joy to the faces of many children, as well as the young at heart and that's a legacy no one can destroy.