

Little Adam Story

In 1970 my Uncle started a Cultural Center and Food Co-op on the Eastside of Detroit called OPERATION GET DOWN. At that time it was probably one of the hippest names to call a center where African-Americans in Detroit could learn about their culture, organize and get fed with other culturally minded intellectuals.

OPERATION GET DOWN was very successful over the years. Fed thousands of families. There was a school that taught black education. And notable Black Leaders visited and participated in marches and forums. It was the place to be. And our family was right there in the middle of it. Almost every weekend my mother would drive us to Operation Get Down. Where I was wearing dashikis, learning Swahili and reciting the principles of Kwanza. Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), Imani (Faith).

One thing I noticed early on was that neither my family nor I looked like the majority of African-Americans at OPERATION GET DOWN. Even though being black is a state of mind more than a color, I couldn't help but feel a little out of place.

Then one weekend there was a book fare at OPERATION GET DOWN. I remember one of the volunteers called me "Little Adam". He had a book in his hand opened to a picture of a man that looked like me. He told me that this man was one of our "baddest" Black Leaders. He was a Congressman from Harlem NY and did so much for black people and poor people by passing legislation in Washington. After that interaction "Little Adam" was my name around the center. I felt included, because no one could question my blackness.

Directors, writers and producers have shared the idea of playing Adam Clayton Powell, Jr many times through out my professional life as an actor, but it was Susan Batson who knew the actor and human being that I would become by committing to it, and Sherry Vigdor who boldly acknowledged the writer in me to continue writing. I appreciate them both!