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Statement of Eden Tirl

I was a child when "Fat Albert" premiered in 1972 and in High School when "The Cosby Show" aired in 1984. I grew up in front of my Grandmother's television set watching Mr. Cosby on Johnny Carson. He was the "Jello-Pudding Pop" man, and "the first black man on television" to do just about everything.

His most significant gift, to my teenage self, was a new and much needed perspective on the black experience. I had grown up in a predominantly white neighborhood, but was of mixed race, and had no mirrors on television that I related to...until "A Different World" and "The Cosby Show" were introduced.

For my generation, Dr. Huxtable was the father everyone wanted, black or white.

I met Bill Cosby briefly after a taping of "The Cosby Show" in 1989. I had just moved to NYC after spending the winter modeling in Europe. My agent knew of my desire to be an actor, was friends with Mr. Cosby, and invited me to the show.

The following morning I had an audition for "Ghost Dad". After meeting me the night before, Bill thought I would be perfect to play one of his children. An array of shades of blackness were cast on "Cosby" to play his children (which I loved and appreciated.) But I am very light skinned...being cast as one of his children seemed a stretch.

By the end of the day I had not landed the role in the film, rather been given a part on "The Cosby Show." I would be playing a cop. I was 22, 6 feet tall, and modeling consistently. It seemed odd to be cast as a dress blues cop? But, an opportunity to work on the #1 television show in the country...Fantastic!

My agent shared that Bill would be calling my home...that night. Yes I was angry with her for giving out my personal information. I also realized the reputation I had heard about Bill may be true.

The phone rang, and on the other end, a cultural icon. I had been around some bit of celebrity at this point in my career, but this was Bill Cosby. In the late 80's, in television...he was a titan.

He was warm and familiar with me instantly. He chatted casually, knowing quite a bit about me. Knew that I was from Minnesota and inquired whether I wanted to go to a basketball game that evening with him.

I thanked him for the offer and got very animated about my boyfriend. I wanted him to know that I was thoroughly involved. I was clear.

But none of my tone, or my repeated efforts to keep the focus on the show itself or the love of my boyfriend made much of a difference, Bill continued to pursue. He pushed to know how much I wanted to be an actress. Did I know that I could have anything I wanted? Did I know how beautiful I was...and, did I understand who HE was? The conversation ended right about there...he said there would be a car sent for me Monday to take me to rehearsal.

Arriving on Monday I discovered that I had also been given my own dressing room.

It was the show's fifth season, rehearsing Monday through Wednesday and shooting two shows on Thursday.

Standing on the "Cosby" stage for the first time was surreal, I was thrilled. Soon into the first day a man, appeared on set. Without consulting anyone, he came over to me, told me that Bill would like to have lunch with me in his dressing room.

I told him I couldn't leave rehearsal, and lunch wasn't for another half hour. He said it was "fine" and to come with him.

I looked around the set filled throngs of professionals, looking for some sort of confirmation. Nothing. Under any and all circumstances on a film or television set, there are departments that oversee the time and movement of everything...none of these departments even looked in my direction, nor said anything.

In front of hundreds of people, I was led off the set to Bill's dressing room. I was self-conscious and humiliated.

With my stomach in knots, I sat on the sofa in his dressing room, worrying about missing a rehearsal on the first day? I waited for Bill to show up...he never did.

Summoned again on Tuesday, I sat alone again, no Bill. After, I went to the head of the department that should have been overseeing me directly. I told her that I didn't want to leave rehearsal before everyone else anymore, that I needed to be there.

She point blank told me not to worry about it...that this happened "all the time!" She was also dismissive to me, which gave me the impression that perhaps she thought I may be a willing participant.

I drove home to her that I was not participating in whatever "this" scenario was, and could she please help me. She told me again not to worry about it, and did nothing.

I was summoned again Wednesday...no Cosby. This began to feel silly and unprofessional...I felt manipulated. Young actresses being yanked off set for lunch with the media titan...and NO ONE is concerned or willing to help?

Then it was Thursday, we shot the afternoon episode, I was once again promptly escorted into Bill's dressing room. This time Bill showed, closed the door behind him...and locked it.

There was a palpable shift of power. I lost my breath.

His chair sat directly inside and in front of the closed door. There was movement and noise outside, which gave no comfort. This felt dangerous and I was scared.

He began chatting in the fatherly, mentoring way that he does. Asking me again about my boyfriend? Inquiring if we planned on marrying.

He wanted me to know that he thought I had "IT"...the big "it" needed in television. I could have anything I wanted, was I willing to do what it took?

I kept it light and professional. I told him I was going to work hard and finish studying. He responded to that with a titter, like I was being naive. All the while my knees shook behind the coffee table.

After 25 minutes of "interviewing" me, he said something to me that let me know he was done bantering. I had one last deterrent up my sleeve, "Bill, you are Jello pudding pops and Fat Albert to me...you are my childhood." He barked back instantly, "Don't say that, they all say that!"

The mood in the room turned...I wanted out. I knew I had to walk a line...I had handled being "hit on" many times in the industry, this had far surpassed that. I felt dominated.

He then said, "Come here."

Everything slowed way down and I had to decide swiftly what I would do. I stood up.

Bill came toward me. When we were face to face he asked me to turn around. *How was I maintaining my decorum? I thought. I will be in a completely powerless position if I turn around.* I wanted to smack him.

My mind raced and concluded, I could knee him, elbow him, run out if he tried to touch me. I turned around. I felt him step toward me and put his hands over the backs of my hands. He began to move our hands together like an exercise many actors know as "the mirror exercise." I played along and made sure that his lower body stayed away from my bottom. When he was finished with this, he then pulled me into him, wrapped both our

arms around me, like lovers would, and whispered in my ear, "See, that's all we were going to do, make love. That's making love." He turned me around, hugged me and I left without saying a word.

Driving home that night, I knew I had "handled" the situation with courage and grace. Yet, I didn't like the feeling of not knowing what other cast and crew members thought. I didn't like not knowing how far a reach Bill had in the industry...would my rejection of his advances mar my career in some way.

I never came forward in 1989.

I knew that I had been sexually harassed. I knew that I should say something. Yet I had tried to get help while working on the show. If I got no help there, it felt hopeless to get it outside the show. Bill Cosby was untouchable.

We all saw the response last fall when the first courageous women began coming forward. It was shocking and disgusting to watch the news coverage...the outrageous, ugly comments towards these women. Portraying them out to be money hungry. Bill Cosby still being held up as Dr. Huxtable.

Today I encourage my students to speak up if they are being harassed or abused in any way. If someone doesn't listen the first time, you keep talking until you find someone that will.

It took 39 women to come forward before I was ready to share my experience. I hope that by being added as the next number someone else decides to regain her power and use her voice.

Abuse, harassment and rape of women and children are commonplace all over the world. I know we can all agree that we need to do everything we can to stop this.

I don't think it would be prudent to give someone a pass because of unrelated contributions to our community...or that we may all collectively share good memories of their once popular television show.

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