

You are Not a Label

By Joe Chiarella (<https://JoeChiarella.com>)

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There are a lot of “What I Believe” type statements out there these days. Please allow me to make mine: “I love everyone, no exceptions. And I believe everyone is much more complex than any one label.” These statements are some of my “I believe” statements.

I believe that everyone is a person, unique unto themselves. I hail from a mindset that looks beyond the superficialities of color, height, weight, sex, language, creed, culture, subculture, politics, socio-economics, nation or whether you prefer almond, soy or cow milk. I acknowledge that such things are part of who you are – but you, the person reading this, YOU are MORE than the aggregate of all of these things – and you are NOT the singularity of any one of them (unless you choose to make it so in which case I think you are limiting yourself).

If you are 5 foot 7.5 inches tall, that is NOT your identity. If the scale says you weigh 178 lbs., that is NOT your identity. If your genetics is such that your skin is darker or lighter, that is NOT your identity. If you grew up on one side or the other of the proverbial train tracks – that does not define who you are either. These are like mono-syllable labels when all of us are much more like prose of great beauty. My choice, daily, is to love each person I meet – as a unique mosaic of genetics, circumstances and more.

One of the great advances of a number of social movements over the last couple centuries, is that humanity has moved to a more evolved ethos that denounces a view that says that I can “draw large swaths of conclusions” about a person just by looking at their skin color, or sex, or how they dress, or pick your label of choice. Doing so is a form of prejudice at least and racism at worst.

I fully subscribe to this ideal. Everyday, I prefer to get to know YOU as a person, as an individual. I accept that your skin is white or black or brown or olive or yellow, but that observation does not control what and who I think you are. Those conclusions are drawn from shared thoughts and experiences that illuminate those conclusions. This is what I believe.

Now, I’m not perfect. I’ve made mistakes and will make more. There are times when my behavior does not match my desired ideal. But I am self-examining enough to note these errors and strive to do better next time.

Yes, I was raised by a first generation American born of Italian immigrants and a who-knows-what generation American born of German immigrants. So, there are certainly cultural nuances adopted from that origin. Sure, I can make a pretty good facsimile of my Italian grandmothers famed cheese raviolis and meat sauce. And my “disciplined, tenacious and plodding” work ethic is certainly influenced by my German heritage. But I also make a pretty good chicken and Chinese vegetable stir fry and, some have told me, my dance moves are clearly influenced by my 80% African-American high school experience. These are mere “features” of the ongoing product evolution that is me – but they are not ME. You would be ill-advised to paste any obvious label on my forehead.

So, let us all dispense with the divisive label-pasting conclusions and resolve to get to know each other personally. Let that experience drive what we believe to be true of each other; not some all-too-easily pasted label on the other’s forehead.

May I ask of you the same courtesy that I extend to you? Please do not pre-decide who I am, what I care about, or what I believe just by looking at me or draw any conclusions about me because I eat meat and don’t drink milk from cows. I am not that simple. And I don’t think you are either!

Doing so, I think, will help to continue the positive arc of humanity.