I’ve been thinking; you know, sometimes one thing happens to change your life, how you look at things, how you look at yourself. I remember one particular event. It was when? 1955 or '56... a long time ago. Anyway, I had been working at night. I wrote for the newspaper and, you know, we had deadlines. It was late after midnight on the night before Memorial Day. I had to catch the train back to Brooklyn; the West Side IRT.1 This lady got on to the subway at 34th and Penn Station, a nice looking white lady in her early twenties. Somehow she managed to push herself in with a baby on her right arm and a big suitcase in her left hand. Two children, a boy and a girl about three and five years old trailed after her. *(Think about a time in your life when one incident changed your perception of yourself or of someone else.)*
Anyway, at Nevins Street I saw her preparing to get off at the next station, Atlantic Avenue. That’s where I was getting off too. It was going to be a problem for her to get off; two small children, a baby in her arm, and a suitcase in her hand. And there I was also preparing to get off at Atlantic Avenue. I couldn’t help but imagine the steep, long concrete stairs going down to the Long Island Railroad and up to the street. Should I offer my help? Should I take care of the girl and the boy, take them by their hands until they reach the end of that steep long concrete stairs?

Courtesy is important to us Puerto Ricans. And here I was, hours past midnight, and the white lady with the baby in her arm, a suitcase and two white children badly needed someone to help her. I remember thinking; I’m a Negro3 and a Puerto Rican. Suppose I approach this white lady in this deserted subway station late at night? What would she say? What would be the first reaction of this white American woman? Would she say: 'Yes, of course you may help me,' or would she think I was trying to get too familiar or would she think worse? What would I do if she screamed when I went to offer my help? I hesitated. And then I pushed by her like I saw nothing as if I were insensitive to her needs. I was like a rude animal walking on two legs just moving on, half running along the long subway platform, leaving the children and the suitcase and the woman with the baby in her arms. I ran up the steps of that long concrete stairs in twos and when I reached the street, the cold air slapped my warm face. (Think about a moment in your life when the way you were raised was challenged. For example, trying to help others in need and they yelled “Get away!” How would you feel and respond?)

Perhaps the lady was not prejudiced after all. If you were not that prejudiced, I failed you, dear lady. If you were not that prejudiced I failed you; I failed you too, children. I failed myself. I buried my courtesy early on Memorial Day morning.

So, here is the promise I made to myself back then: if I am ever faced with an occasion like that again, I am going to offer my help regardless of how the offer is going to be received. Then I will have my courtesy with me again.

**TASK:**
Jesus Colon’s “Little Things are Big” is written in the POV of Colon, an African Puerto Rican immigrant. Colon makes the decision to walk away from the woman in need based on his own fears and experiences with prejudice.

Rewrite the events on the subway from the POV of the woman. Consider the following:

- You **MUST** include a flashback showing why she is on the subway with her children at midnight. (Remember that flashback is a scene in a movie, novel, etc., set in a time earlier than the main story)
- What did she think about Colon? What was her first impression of him? Was she afraid?
- Consider specifically the events after he left her. Was she glad he walked away without helping her? Did she wish for help?

Remember that this took place in 1955-56 during The Civil Rights Movement.

Your response must be 1¾-2 pages long.
Aug. 28, 1963 was a tense day for Clarence B. Jones. As the longtime attorney and adviser for the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Jones had a long list of worries as people started to fill the streets around the monuments on the National Mall. Were the right permits filed? Would the speakers veer off script? Would enough people show up?

“I had this feeling that we were going to throw a big party and nobody comes,” Jones recalls.

But people did come — at least 250,000 of them. Still, Jones also worried that the crowd might also include agitators, “some of what I called ‘agent provocateurs’ — white as well as black,” Jones says. “I didn’t know whether some of the black nationalists who were opposed to Dr. King’s non-violence, or whether some of the people from the right wing, the Klan... would provoke something.”

And then there was the delicate and thorny issue of wrangling all those celebrities, Jones says, like Marlon Brando, Shelley Winters, Sidney Poitier, Joanne Woodward, Paul Newman, Joan Baez, Odetta and Bob Dylan, to name just a few.

In the end, things went smoothly, from the singers and the speakers to the big crowds and blue skies. After sleepless nights and fretful days, Jones was able to take his place on the stage at the Lincoln Memorial and take it all in.
Among his most vivid memories is singer Mahalia Jackson at the microphone, Jones says.

“How could you not be moved by this woman’s voice? You would have to be unfortunately afflicted with some type of muscular disease that would prevent your muscles reacting to what your ear brought to your body.” (Think about a musician that you admire and when you hear their music it takes you into a zone of pure enjoyment)

Of all the entertainers that day, Mahalia Jackson was the singer who had a special hold on King. When King was feeling down, she would speak with Jackson on the phone.

“I guess you would put it now as ‘telephone gospel therapy,’” Jones says. “And he would speak to Mahalia Jackson and she would say, ‘Mahalia, please sing to me. I’m having a rough day today.’ (Think about a person who makes you feel better when you are sad or feeling anxious or having a rough day.)

“And she would sing one or more of his favorite songs, and... he would close his eyes listening to her,” Jones continues. “In some cases, tears would come down his face and then he would say, ‘Mahalia, you are giving me the Lord’s voice this morning.’

King had enormous respect for Jackson, Jones says. And because of that, the reverend listened to her when she offered him unsolicited advice while King stood at the podium on the day of the march.

While he was reading from the prepared text, Jones says, Jackson shouted at King. “This is after she had performed, of course, she’s sitting down, and she just shouted at him... ‘Tell ‘em about the dream, Martin! Tell ‘em about the dream!’” (Think about the topic of Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech. Why do you think it is so famous?)

Jackson knew that King had delivered a rousing speech earlier that summer at Detroit’s Cobo Hall, bringing the crowd to a feverish pitch when he preached about his dream for a better...
America. So despite King’s prepared script that August day, Jackson encouraged him to bring that moment from Detroit to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

“Now, most people probably didn’t have the slightest idea what Mahalia was yelling to Dr. King,” Jones says. “What he did upon hearing that, he took the text of the speech — the written text that he was reading — and he moved it to the left side of the lectern [and] grabbed the lectern with both his hands.

“And I see this and I turn to the person standing next to me... and I said, ‘These people don’t know it, but they’re about ready to go to church.’"

SIX WORDS AND THE LETTER FROM BIRMINGHAM JAIL

Jones is proud of his contribution to that moment in history, but he still wishes more of King’s dream will be realized in his lifetime. He says he’s tremendously proud of progress that’s been made. But, as Jones wrote in his book *Behind The Dream*, as long as there’s a need for a legal category for hate crimes, police officers “pulling over African Americans because they’re driving cars considered out of their financial reach,” and people “selling their houses because too many black families have moved in,” the dream remains diluted, tarnished and unfulfilled, he says. *(Think about the parts of Dr. King’s “dream” that you think have been fulfilled.)*

When asked about his thoughts on race today, Jones harkened back to the letter King wrote from inside the jail in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1963. King scribbled out that letter on scraps of paper and it was Jones who secreted those scraps out of the building during several visits. In the letter, published under the headline, “Why We Can’t Wait,” King said complacency and hate were the enemies of progress.

So, when asked to offer his six words on race, Jones replies, “Hate is why we cannot wait.”

**TASK:**

Write a narrative from the POV of one of Dr. King’s audience members. Be sure to include their observations of the crowd, Dr. King and his message.
What purpose does your narrator have? Is he/she an agitator? An African American ally? A white ally? A journalist? Make up a history for this person. What brought them to be in the audience?

Your response must be 1¾-2 pages long.

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