

Given this issue's theme, "Black and White," a discussion of race seemed inevitable. While many of the pieces herein have nothing to do with race, it's certainly a potentially touchy subject. So, as Chairman of this fine magazine, allow me to assure you that our staff is well versed in the virtues of good taste with regard to these sensitive issues. And what makes me qualified to evaluate race-related humor? While I may be white, I think I understand the African-American community. After all, I was practically raised in it.

In the early eighties, I was just beginning to understand the intricacies of this complicated world. My mother brought me up well, exposing me to a myriad of interests, among them television. Mom was one fiendishly clever matriarch, however, and until I was four or five, she had me fooled into believing there was only one channel on television: PBS. Eventually she allowed me to watch *Masters of the Universe*, *Voltron*, and *Fraggle Rock*, but PBS made me who I am—oh, the nostalgia! While I can spend hours reminiscing over *Square One*, in truth I owe almost everything to just two men, who honestly deserve parenting credit of some sort: LeVar Burton, host of *Reading Rainbow*, and Gordon (Roscoe Orman), resident of *Sesame Street*.

Without a doubt, these two black men prepared me, a Midwestern Jewish white boy, to become the cosmopolitan Yalie that I am today. Sure, my parents deserve some acknowledgment, having taught me to walk, to talk, and to master the so-called "practical life skills," but ultimately their contributions pale in comparison to what LeVar and Gordon did for me. (Also, as many will concur, I've never really mastered those "practical life skills.")

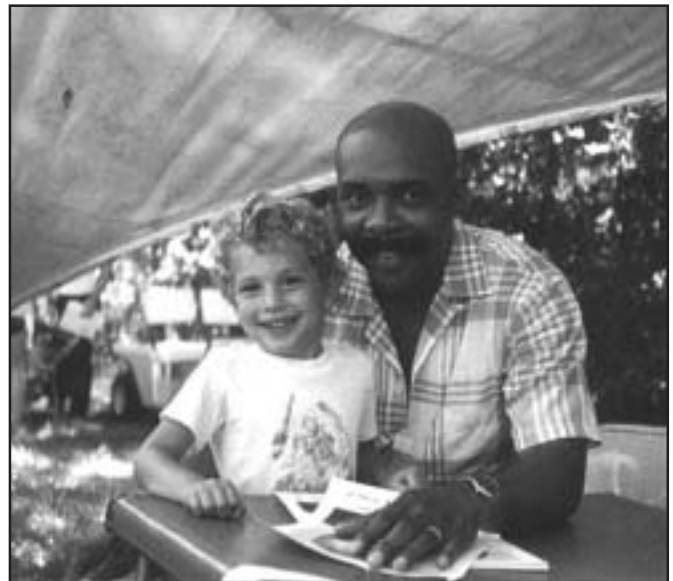
LeVar, with his personable manner and kind demeanor, taught me that, like a butterfly in the sky, I can go anywhere. Without LeVar, I might never have read any books at all (Did those parents of mine have books? Ha!), but you don't have to take my word for it.

Gordon. While I cannot put into mere words whatever it was Gordon taught me, I'm sure that it was meaningful and important. One can't help but look up to a man who would forgive Cookie Monster for eating his Christmas tree. What compassion! He was like a father to me. Granted, a father I only saw for an hour a day, and a father who had never met my mother, but a father nonetheless. And then, as fate would have it, one day in 1985, he made an appearance at the Kansas City Zoo, giving autographs. As I stepped up to meet him, I smiled brightly. I realized I had found my mentor, the man who truly reflected my inner self. I will always treasure my picture with him. Gordon was and still is my role model, and though I may never become a mustachioed bald-headed African-American man, I can always dream.

Since LeVar and Gordon were a part of my extended family, I never thought of them as being different. Together, through their example, they taught me to appreciate my nonexistent black heritage.

Thanks to these two amazingly talented and influential African-American actors, you can rest assured that this issue of the *Record* represents the sophisticated, high brow comic sensibility that you've come to expect from us. Thank you, LeVar, but most of all, thank you, Gordon.

—LIPOFF



Future *Record* Chairman Jules Lipoff with "surrogate father" Gordon (Roscoe Orman), ca. 1985.