



pact's

point of view

serving adopted children of color

... and the Beat Goes On

By Gail Steinberg

The night my daughter came by after the L.A. riots, I was in bed, glued to the TV, furious at the Rodney King verdicts, sick at the anger spilling over the streets. She waved the copy of *Newsweek* that had been laying around all week, demanding to be read. "How could they?" she yelled.

"Who? What?" I said, guilty to think there was something worse going on than I knew, something else I had missed. What mattered most in that moment was that my daughter is Black and I am White.

"Did you see this?" she said, waving the magazine in my face as if it alone were a cause for war.

Newsweek, you might remember, had an unusual cover that week. The whole page was glossy white, covered with thick black text and no pictures. The dominant words were black and white. Our copy had been next to the sofa for days. I had kept meaning to read it, but never had. You know the feeling.

"Look at this! Just look at it! Look!" she kept repeating, shaking the pages in my face. I understood it was the cover of the magazine that was offensive. To save my life, I couldn't see why. The moment was like staring at an optical illusion, knowing that my own limits kept me from seeing something so enraging to my child. It was a test. The stakes were nothing less than being with her or being one of the enemy. I didn't have a clue.

"The word WHITE is three times bigger than the word BLACK," she finally said.

"Oh."

It was exactly like the split second when I saw through that famous optical illusion: Remember when you first saw the wine glass abruptly change into the profiles of two women? Hello. I saw it: my daughter was right.

How, in this moment when racial sensitivities of the whole country were at fever pitch, could a national magazine run a cover like this? The graphics undeniably showed black as less than white. How could I, a determined-to-be-sensitive, reasonably aware human being, not have noticed at all what jumped out at my child straight away? Hello?

To be AWARE: To be sensitive — painfully, acutely, sharply, psychically, subconsciously, fully, intensely, suddenly, and wholly sensitive to what is. As always, my lesson is, I must see who I am. I see again, with grief, my limited vision. As a White person raised in America, I do not fully notice racial slights. I can not see fully, wholly, subconsciously, in the same way as does my child who is Black. For me, racial awareness is a secondary experience. For my children, it is primary.

All I can hope for is this: that when reality comes through to me, I can see it. Each time I learn my own blindness. As Charles Darwin said, "We must continue to think in a little more detail about this struggle for existence."