

Oprah Winfrey On Receiving the first Bob Hope Humanitarian Award

2:00 min.

There really is nothing more important to me than striving to be a good human being. So, to be here tonight and be acknowledged as the first to receive this honor is beyond expression in words for me. 'I am a human being, nothing human is alien to me.' Terence said that in 154 B.C. and when I first read it many years ago, I had no idea of the depth of that meaning.

I grew up in Nashville with a father who owned a barbershop, Winfrey's Barber Shop, he still does, I can't get him to retire. And every holiday, every holiday, all of the transients and the guys who I thought were just losers who hung out at the shop, and were always bumming haircuts from my father and borrowing money from my dad, all those guys always ended up at our dinner table. They were a cast of real characters—it was Fox and Shorty and Bootsy and Slim. And I would say, 'Bootsy, could you pass the peas please?' And I would often say to my father afterwards, 'Dad, why can't we just have regular people at our Christmas dinner?'—because I was looking for the Currier & Ives version. And my father said to me, 'They are regular people. They're just like you. They want the same thing you want.' And I would say, 'What?' And he'd say, 'To be fed.' And at the time, I just thought he was talking about dinner. But I have since learned how profound he really was, because we all are just regular people seeking the same thing. The guy on the street, the woman in the classroom, the Israeli, the Afghani, the Zuni, the Apache, the Irish, the Protestant, the Catholic, the gay, the straight, you, me—we all just want to know that we matter. We want validation. We want the same things. We want safety and we want to live a long life. We want to find somebody to love. We want to find somebody to laugh with and have the power and the place to cry with when necessary.

The greatest pain in life is to be invisible. What I've learned is that we all just want to be heard. And I thank all the people who continue to let me hear your stories, and by sharing your stories, you let other people see themselves and for a moment, glimpse the power to change and the power to triumph.

Maya Angelou said, 'When you learn, teach. When you get, give.' I want you to know that this award to me means that I will continue to strive to give back to the world what it has given to me, so that I might even be more worthy of tonight's honor.

Thank you."