

99 WRITING

Retrospect

by Kevin G.

TYPE
NARRATIVE

Have you ever thought about how racism can affect others?

It doesn't just affect their feelings, but it can create fear for their safety. How do I know this? I've been through these experiences. I've been there, and I have also seen it. It is not just me, it's the whole world that can be affected, like a virus. I was nine years old when I became aware of this issue.

My father and I were walking down the street after we got our hair cut. We had parked just a few blocks away. The street smelled like food fused with the faint smell of smoke. The sky was gray and it was not the best day, either. It was an ordinary day, but I suspected that something sinister was going to occur. I felt like my chest was warning me. My dad and I stopped into this sketchy corner store.

The outside of it had stickers and graffiti all over it. We went in and it was dirty just like a regular corner store, but more dirty than you usually expect, and smelled like a bunch of cigarettes. We walked by the counter, and we saw a person who we suspected was

the shop owner. He was Asian, short (he needed a stool to reach the counter), and elderly-looking (there was barely any black hair on his head). He kept a real close eye on us like we were up to something. We went to the chips area, then we noticed the ceiling—it was a bunch of mirrors. We saw our reflection and right after, we noticed even more reflections of ourselves. So many mirrors placed on the wall to the point where the shop owner could see every single angle. An African American man appeared just a few seconds after we found out about the mirrors. He looked a little over six feet tall, big and strong. So strong you could see his veins popping out. Then suddenly, the shop owner got scared and he pulled out a gun. I put my hands right up and dropped everything that I had in my hands.

I was so terrified. I couldn't think straight. It was as if my soul had left my body. Pointing the gun between the African American man, my dad, and me, he yelled, "Try to steal something and I will shoot. This won't happen again." I did not know how to feel at that point. I stood there for seconds that felt like hours. I still had my arms up. Then my dad grabbed my hands to try and put them down slowly, with caution, while the shop owner still had the gun out. We walked slowly with our hands where the shop owner could see them while he was aiming the weapon toward us.

It was like I was in a movie. A bad one. Moving slowly, hearing an echo of my dad's voice, my body felt cold. My smile was gone. Time just stopped. We walked away with nothing but fear. I was breathing heavily and fast like I had just run a marathon.

But that day I realized there was a bigger problem in this neighborhood, this city, this state, this country. This world. It felt angry, with no smiles and no happiness. I had to take a few days to process what had just happened. The fact that a gun was brought out and was pointed directly toward me was even more terrifying. That feeling never left right away. It stayed with me for such a long time. That moment the guy pulled out the weapon. I could've died. I could've lost my dad that day, too. A life could have been lost. In the years that I have been living in this world, I have lost family members. Close and far away, but it still affected me. I lost a family member because of racism. He and his brother were shot, but unfortunately, only his brother lived. And it was all because of their race. It was a white guy who fired a gun at them, although I know not everyone is the same. He had reasons for why to shoot. I can't imagine the pain of seeing your sibling lying next to you. Lifeless. Without a heartbeat, while you were suffering the same pain as them. It makes me anxious whenever I go places alone. Different people have different perspectives about why they do what they do. Have you ever felt this way before?

Have you ever thought about how racism can affect you and others?

