

We should all be bothered when we bear witness to violent acts. I was most bothered by the videos that captured moments when human life left a man's body because of racism. That violence captured and replayed brings feelings of terror and trauma to me as it should to everyone. When I see men that look like my father, my grandfathers, my uncles being killed before my eyes, I am not watching it voyeuristically. I am watching it empathetically. It deeply hurts me.

In my family and in my experience many truths have been passed down to me. These truths may differ from those that were passed down to others but someone else's truth does not negate mine. One such truth that stays with me is the fear that results from existing as a black person among a society that is historically rooted in racially-based hatred and white supremacy.

When I see the videos, one way in which it triggers feelings that keep replaying for me is that these scenes are our worst fears becoming reality right before our eyes. When I say "our," I specifically mean we as people of a darker skintone. This is why the videos are trauma-triggering.

I remember a timeframe starting back in 1999 when I was 18 - 23ish years old and going through a time of rekindling some relationship with my father (and step-mother). Sadly, I didn't and still do not have a close paternal bond, so that timeframe sticks out in my head and as being most memorable in that some new and previously unknown family stories and experiences were passed down to me.

One of those stories is a truth that my father who is a beautifully dark-skinned black man born in Jim-Crow Era Alabama, raised in Detroit spent some of his formative years in that city that was ravaged by systemic racism which led to race related riots during the 1960's. At some point before the divorce, he and my mom moved to Boston, so that he has not lived in Detroit or the Midwest for many decades now. However, his current wife (my step-mother) who is a white woman told me that to this day he never steps foot outside of his house without his driver's license identification in his pocket - not even if just walking a few feet from his front steps to put out trash barrels for town pick-up. This is because he remembers growing up during a time when any white person or police could call him out and question whether or not he belonged.

That particular story and that legacy of truth illuminated a deeper sense of understanding in me that over and over again, every day, somewhere in his mind he is likely questioning his very own right to exist simply due to the color of his skin. I can't imagine how that impacts him and how it plays out in other ways. Maybe one day we can get to a point for me to talk with him about it, but for now I see that there is so much innate trauma there that is in part due specifically to a history of violence against black men in our society. I don't doubt that some of that has impacted him and trickled down to me as his offspring in ways that I am not even fully and consciously aware.

How do we mentally and spiritually process this? How do we help one another?

As a mother, the older my children get, I have concerns that my daughters may also feel some of this innate inter-generational fear that manifests in a sense of feeling as though

they don't always belong. I am sure that I would feel even more on edge about all of this if I had a son. I pray for them and all of their friends about all these things that it will continue to get better for them and future generations. It's a legacy that I hope to break but I can't do that on my own.

For me, I am thankful that in my generation I do not continually feel that fear which is ingrained in someone like my father partly because I was born later. Also, because I was not born as a black man in this society that conditions people to stereotype and hate on people based on historical racism and false narratives.

I know I am worthy and I exist freely. I appreciate not feeling like I constantly have to be on guard or prove that I belong. I wish everyone could feel a sense of belonging because that might help combat some of the problems we as a society are facing right now. Thankfully, I continue to have hope.

I am comfortable in my own skin. I appreciate and recognize that I am the way I am because I grew up with my mother who was very intentional about the choices she made regarding how I was socialized and the community where she raised me.

Now, as I reflect back on that time I appreciate that my mom always put me in situations where I had to interact and engage with all types of people, not just black and white but also immigrants and people of varying socio-economic groups *with empathy and without judgement.* For better or worse, she rarely sheltered me from seeing that not everyone has the same privilege of living with full-on sense of safety and stability. These are some of the reasons why I believe if you're going to help someone, then it's always best if you can do it without passing judgement because everyone has their own set of challenges and struggles in this life.

My mom was always socially conscious and she used to talk with me about these things. I know she made certain choices with me in mind hoping it would help me be more successful. It was no accident. It was her intentions that resulted in me having confidence in all my interpersonal interactions regardless of culture, ethnicity, race.

Similarly to my father, my mother was also born into Jim Crow Era Alabama and has stories of being discriminated against from the time of her being an elementary school-aged girl because of her being black. However, somehow she had better skills than most in knowing how to navigate through those types of experiences. Probably, in part because of my grandparents who taught all of us to live unapologetically because we deserve to exist in this world just like everyone else.

My mom and I started out living in Saginaw, Michigan and then Flint, Michigan. I am leaving out some details here. However, there was a time in between when we were actually homeless and lived in a shelter for a short time, like a week, before getting an apartment in a low-income neighborhood. I remember that vividly, because my first-grade academic year was spent in Flint.

Then, she decided to go back to school with the thought of earning and studying for a master's degree at Michigan State University. I was around 8 years old, in second grade. We moved from Flint to East Lansing, Michigan for us to live on campus in student-

family housing. I ended up mostly growing up on campus and in a college-town atmosphere with a huge international community that valued education and learning. In hindsight, that time I spent growing up in that community thankfully sheltered me from what it could have been like if we were to have stayed in Saginaw or Flint which are more racially and socio-economically disparate communities.

For some people, having a college degree is a status symbol. My mom never actually earned her master's degree because I think her main motivation was not to end up with that added piece of paper. Her motivation was for she and I to have a safe and stable community in which she as a single parent could raise me safely and with dignity because we had some traumatically rough times before we left Saginaw and Flint. She attended college classes in order for us to live on-campus while at times working two jobs simultaneously. At some point, she landed a full-time job and we moved off campus after I was in the 6th grade.

It is uncomfortable to talk about race and experiences shaped by our racial and even our socio-economic status. None of us choose the families we are born into. However, I believe that this is the exact reason why we have a responsibility to care for one another with empathy and less judgement.

Based on my observations and experiences, I believe and know that no one who has experienced discrimination enjoys the process of calling it out or even talking openly about it. Mainly, because who wants to keep reliving that type of trauma? Especially if you think others will try to silence you, your pain will be ignored, and you continually have witnessed a history of injustice against similar transgressions? I could go on about this, but I won't right now.

Ultimately, I feel fortunate in that I mostly grew up in a community that values multiculturalism, diversity and inclusion. Please, never discount or disregard the importance of these values. These values are what bring about feelings of reassurance and safety for those of us who don't fit into the dominant culture. It's not about being politically correct, it's about helping people feel a sense that they belong. If it weren't for my childhood friends and community then who knows where I would be.

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