

Racism Experience 1

When I was 3, my family moved into an upper-middle-class, all-white neighborhood. We had a big backyard, so my parents built a pool. Not the only pool on the block, but the only one neighborhood boys started throwing rocks into. White boys. One day my mom ID'd one as the boy from across the street, went to his house, told his mother, and, fortunately, his mother believed mine. My mom not only got an apology, but also had that boy jump in our pool and retrieve every single rock. No more rocks after that. Then mom even invited him to come over to swim sometime if he asked permission. Everyone became friends. This one has a happy ending...

Racism Experience 2

When my older sister was 5, a white boy named Mark called her a [n-word omitted] after she beat him in a race at school. She didn't know what it meant, but in her gut she knew it was bad. This was the first time I'd seen my father the kind of angry that has nowhere to go. I somehow understood it was because not only had some boy verbally assaulted his daughter and had gotten away with it, it had way too early introduced her (and me) to that term and the reality of what it meant—that some white people would be cruel and careless with black people's feelings just because of our skin color. Or our achievement.

Racism Experience 3

In my freshman college tutorial, our small group of 4–5 was assigned to read Thoreau, Emerson, Malcolm X, Joseph Conrad, Dreiser, etc. When it was the week to discuss *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, one white boy boldly claimed he couldn't even get through it because he couldn't relate and didn't think he should be forced to read it. I don't remember the words I said, but I still remember the feeling—I think it's what doctors refer to as chandelier pain—as soon as a sensitive area on a patient is touched, they shoot through the roof—that's what I felt. I know I said something like my whole life I've had to read “things that don't have anything to do with me or that I relate to” but I find a way anyway because that's what learning is about—trying to understand other people's perspectives. The point here is—the canon of literature studied in the United States, as well as the majority of television and movies, have focused primarily on the works or achievements of white men.

Racism Experience 4

On my very first date with my now husband, I climbed into his car and saw baby wipes on the passenger-side floor. He said he didn't have kids, they were just there to clean up messes in the car. I twisted to secure my seatbelt and saw a stuffed animal in the rear window. I gave him a look. He said, “I promise, I don't have kids. That's only there so I don't get stopped by the police.” He then told me that when he drove home from work late at night, he was getting stopped by cops constantly because he was a black man in a luxury car and they assumed that either it was stolen or he was a drug dealer. When he told a cop friend about this, Warren was told to put a stuffed animal in the rear window because it would change “his profile” to that of a family man and he was much less likely to be stopped.