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Racial Autobiography

I was your atypical, naive young white kid. I always made friends wherever I went. People would see me with a posse of other young boys and wonder why we weren't doing school or something. I got in trouble a lot and didn't have a ton of supervision. Oftentimes things would blow over and would be back to playing tag with some of my friends. One time when I was hanging out with my Chinese friend Luke. He began to tell me a joke. The joke went as follows, "How do you name an Asian baby?" I was clueless. "You throw a spoon down the sink." then he mimicked the sounds "Ching! tong! ching!" as if one had just clattered to the top of a pile of dishes. I didn't really get it at the time but he was insistent that it was a very funny joke. (At this time of my life I was still under the impression that peak humor was making fart sounds from my armpits.)

Some time went on and I decided I wanted to tell another friend who was older than me the same joke. Not sure why I decided this was the best way to win his attention but I thought it might impress him to think I was funny I guess. Then upon retelling the Joke, he had a laugh pat me on the back, and said I was a pretty funny guy. The compliment felt good but I still didn't really understand the significance of the joke. A couple of weeks went by and I heard my mom's footsteps walking up the stairs while we were home. She has a phone in her hand and a furious expression on her face. Apparently, one of the other moms had heard me tell this joke to one of the other kids and said stuff like how I was a "racist brat." I didn't attend a public school, instead, I was part of a homeschooling co-op of close-knit families. Which is probably why it got more traction than it would have in a public school at that time. Long story short my older sisters and I weren't allowed to go to the co-op anymore. All because of a stupid and offensive joke I was too ignorant to understand.

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This is when I became more racially aware and understood people had different societal experience's based on cultural differences and the way they looked alone. I became more sensitive to inappropriate humor relating to different cultures or making fun of other ethnic groups. Once I was older I found another group of friends that let me hang out with them. I felt really comfortable being myself around these guys and we would go biking and play video games in our spare time. But I started to notice they didn't feel comfortable being themselves around me which I didn't get. They started referring to me as 'cracka' and I asked "What is a cracka?" One of them awkwardly admitted it meant "You're a white dude." A couple of years went by and I started to realize that to these guys, I was just their token white friend and was basically a joke for them. They didn't care to know who I was beyond the basic fact that I looked different.

The thing is I don't hold that stuff against them and it isn't really a source of trauma or anything it was just an experience. People have different experiences and navigate life differently based on those experiences. The only thing that concerns me about my racial past is that I don't exhibit negative behavior toward other people based on looks alone. I want to experience people for who they are, and let them express themselves as individuals before jumping to any pre-existing conclusions about race established by stereotyping that's gone on for generations.

Racial justice is something I must know how to be a part of. On a personal level, it starts with disagreeing with the basic negative impacts I see. It might manifest itself in the form of racist humor, stereotyping, and racial bias. In conclusion, my journey to becoming racially aware has taught me the importance of sensitivity and empathy toward others. I want to continue to learn and grow and be a part of creating a more just and inclusive world for all.