

MARYN MASUMIYA AND SHAWN S.

My name is Maryn Masumiya and I live in West Los Angeles, born and raised. I've lived in LA County for 40 years.

My name is Shawn. I live in West Los Angeles. I've lived in LA County for about 12 or 13 years.

'White supremacists were out there that night.'

It was around midnight, around Christmas, and I was doing a late-night run to Ralph's right around the corner from our apartment. I pulled up to the driveway. I put the car in the garage, normal stuff. This kid, a teenager, white male – he might have been in his early 20s – was across the street. He had a hoodie on. He pretended like he was jogging, but he was jogging toward me. I had four or five bags of groceries in my hand, and he looked at me to see what I was like. It seemed as though he was looking at me to see what race

I was. He was looking for a victim. He circled around twice. That obviously startled me because I'm thinking like, *Who's this guy? Is he trying to mug me?* I've been mugged before in Chicago. I had groceries in my hand; I'm struggling to get into the front of the apartment. He's saying, "What are you doing in this neighborhood? Why are you here? You don't belong in this neighborhood," something like that at first. I didn't really try to say anything to him. I just tried to ignore him.

I was inside.

So, there's two gates – a swinging thing and you have to put your key in the front part. We have a gate in front of the apartment. I was struggling trying to get all these things and he was behind me. To open the gate, I had to turn around; he was directly behind me. He kept saying, "Why are you here? Who are you?" He insinuated that I had a gun. At some point, he was saying, I don't know if he said, "Black man," but he said, "He's got a gun. Help! Someone help me!" He was saying it loud, yelling. Mind you, this is around midnight. No one was around. He was basically saying everything that he could, except for the n-word. He knew that it wouldn't be counted as a hate crime if it wasn't said. I opened the gate. He didn't touch me. I, of course, had fear that he would. But I opened the gate, I walked in, and then he started screaming, "He's got a gun! He's got a gun!" for the whole apartment complex to hear. My wife hears this. She walks out.

He's basically trying to trespass onto the property. This is my family's property. He started yelling racial slurs at me. Calling me an ugly Asian. Saying, "Your people work hard, but they're all still ugly." I was like, "This is family property. You do not trespass. Do not step one more foot," because he was trying to come

through the gate. I could see that my husband was startled, and we didn't know if he had a weapon or what he was going to do. I ran in to get my phone and I said, "I'm going to call the cops." It was such a high-tension situation. It was Christmas Eve, and it was the last thing we expected. This is a neighborhood that my family has been in for over a century.

Her aunties, they built the house. They built the apartment.

It's historically a Japanese American neighborhood. It was very violating that it happened right in front of our apartment.

'They were trying to provoke a situation.'

On Christmas Eve, there were other incidents that were similar to what happened to us. I believe it was strategic. I think white supremacists were out there that night trying to ruin people of color's holidays. Like he said, they knew the law and they knew what not to say and they were trying to provoke a situation. There's similar situations that happened up north. I think it was a Filipino family at an In-N-Out or around there, same thing where they're like, "This family are criminals," and they're trying to create a commotion.

I think he wanted me to hit him because I was bigger than him. He was maybe a 20-year-old, young, white kid. He was trying to manipulate me into physically hitting him or pushing him away. The way he left was that I think that you [Maryn] were threatening to call the cops and he blew his cover by saying, "She's an angry Asian, ugly Asian." He wasn't expecting her to come out and defend me. She threw him off guard.

I've been in situations before where I've had a gun to my head in Chicago. This felt similar, but not the same. I felt like he was a threat; I just didn't know what he would do. Did he have a knife?

We did call the police. He had run away. We have a station very close to us. They came pretty fast, and they tried to find him.

Both police officers, it was a woman of color and a man, were trying to downplay it like, "He's probably a prankster." He wasn't on drugs. He was a regular, young, white kid.

We alerted on the NextDoor app, neighborhood apps. Once we did that, we received a lot of cyber bullying. They called us racist. Then eventually, I think it was [Shawn's] mom that said to file the police report.

I mustered up the courage to do that, to go to the police report and file it, but they would only take it because he said, “Angry Asian.” They wouldn't take it otherwise because he didn't say the n-word. I was wearing a Princeton hat and they were looking at me, antagonizing me. [The police] said, “Anyone can say, ‘I'm not a fan of Princeton.’” But I was like, “This was a targeted hate crime.” It was very belittling. They said, “Well, anyone can technically walk up right to your residence, you know.” It felt like we got gaslit.

[The police] said, “If he physically hits you, then you have the right to hit him back. You also have the right to defend your property physically if you wanted to.” But what does that lead to? I live here, but it's not like I was able to punch him or push him away or physically assault him for getting on our property. It doesn't make sense to me.

‘It felt very targeted.’

We had to fight to get the report taken. I think there needs to be better education around the nuances of this and how it's very complex. When you're in this type of situation and then you have to go into an unsafe space, like a police station, to report it and then they intimidate you out of taking that report.

These people know what they're doing, and they're very well versed on the [law].

Most people are not going to call out your race when they're trying to attack you. They're going to do it in a way that they can get away with. Especially if it's a white person, they know their privilege. I think there has to be better context setting and understanding and empathy around that in terms of the reporting. And more accessibility as well. You have to go into the station and many people are intimidated. Like he [Shawn] was intimidated to go in.

I've never been in a police station before.

It was extremely nerve-racking. It was hard to sleep. We had our adrenaline going and we thought, *will he return? Will he return with more people?* It felt very targeted. It wasn't a random incident. The fact that he knew where we lived. We ended up getting security cameras. But even though that incident happened two years ago, every time we pull into the garage, I never have my back to the street. I'm constantly on the lookout. I worry about him anytime he's running a late-night errand.

I bought two baseball bats, one for the car and one for the apartment. We don't own guns.

I'll never forget the look on his face. Him holding all those groceries and this person coming and I didn't know what was going to happen. I was really screaming at him to get away and do not trespass. It was a really heated situation. Luckily, we weren't harmed in the situation, but it was very close to happening.

If I did not have the mental control that I had, I would have fought back physically because he was really close to me, antagonizing me. He was racially antagonizing me, trying to provoke me to assault him.

'It is not a safe process.'

It was scary. I had a lot of concern, especially for my elders and my parents. We were seeing all the [racial violence] incidents happening, and we would get stares a lot during the COVID pandemic. People would be staring at us, or they'd stare at us and put more hand sanitizer on. There's all these microaggressions going on. I mean, it was Christmas Eve. We were getting ready to celebrate with our family. That was my last holiday I had with my mom because she ended up passing and it was ruined.

My family is from the Great Migration. Both of my grandmothers are Black. My grandfather is white passing; he's mostly white. My other grandfather is from Japan. He was full Japanese, and they came from the concentration camps in Manzanar just like my wife's. Our ancestors were actually in the same place in Manzanar.

In World War II, all my relatives were incarcerated in those concentration camps. That's why they even have the building in the first place. Because Japanese Americans lost everything during the war, they all had to band together. They all pooled their money together to get this apartment building.

She was saying to him, "My family owns this property. You don't belong here." And he was like, "No, they don't." He was some young, little, arrogant, white kid, he said, "No, you don't own. Your family doesn't. You don't belong in this neighborhood. You don't own this property. Who are you?" It was so ridiculous.

The response from a lot of Asian people in the community is they're afraid. The fact that we wanted to report, that we wanted to be more vocal about it and we were upset, they might have the tendency to be like, "Just keep quiet and let's not say anything." It is not a safe process for many people of color to go into a police station and report these things. It's more about flying under the radar.

I come from the Black diaspora and we obviously don't think that anything's going to be done in the first place. I mean, whatever ill will or whatever mistreatment that we have, we have to fend for ourselves and fight for ourselves. It's good to be loud. It's good to be very vigilant about letting people know that this happened. But obviously in the AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) community, they would see it differently because they've had different experiences in this country than the Black community.

All the places that we reported to, we had so much resistance and then the bullying on top of it. We received the most support from Stop AAPI Hate (a nonprofit organization that tracks incidents of hate and discrimination against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders). I did end up reporting to that organization and then I was a part of some healing circles that they were piloting as well. I even reported it to the West LA Neighborhood Council, and they had some meetings about stopping AAPI hate in the neighborhood. One of those meetings ended up being hacked and trolled and a bunch of people got on the call, and they were yelling racist slurs. It's a problem and it's happening even in these cities that you think are immune to it. I think we just want to raise awareness that these incidents are happening, and we want them to be taken seriously and for there to be channels for support and to not feel like we're alone in this.

'I live with it every single day.'

I would say [to the County,] work on your reporting and get more input from people that have had these experiences. When I was in the city council meeting, the Hate Crime Unit was patting themselves on the back for having such low numbers of hate crimes and I said, "I don't think those numbers are accurate because the way that you're taking reports right now are not reflecting reality." I think the statistics and the reporting really needs to be worked on and led by people who have experienced these things. There needs to be safety around that because people do not feel comfortable telling the truth if it is not a safe environment.

I think police should take these situations seriously and they should take the reports even if someone doesn't call out your race [explicitly]. Make the reporting more accessible, letting people fill it out online just like 211 LA does. It's much easier, especially if there's a language barrier. For example, if an elder is attacked, they may not speak the language. I think these hate "incidents" where people are being targeted, they really need to be taken note of, because they're being underreported.

I think a lot of people don't want to report. If they've experienced this racial incident, they have not reported it because of fear. I think many people don't trust the police in these situations because it's almost weaponizing the systemic racism that does exist.

Listen to lived experiences of people that are oppressed. I do think the County could provide more mental health resources, especially that are culturally sensitive or racially sensitive to victims that do go through hate crimes. And to know the nuances of all of this and that it's very complicated. It's very rare that someone is going to suffer a crime that is so targeted on paper in the way that it needs to be for justice to be served. It ends up with a lot of frustration and burden on the victims.

It's really tough. It can happen to anyone. We live in Los Angeles and we think that we're liberal and we live in a very diverse environment, but it really can happen to anyone. After this happened to us, our circle of friends, it really opened their eyes to that.

Recorded at:
Culver City,
Los Angeles County, CA
11/7/24
8:00 am

I live with it every single day. It doesn't matter where I live. I still feel it every single day, the anxiety of not feeling safe, feeling that I will be victimized or attacked or so on and so forth, just for walking out the door.

As a person of color, it's kind of normal. It's a structural issue. It's the very bones of this country. And I don't know what can be done, to be honest, because it's such a deep, embedded historical issue. If anything, I think they need to take the threat seriously.

