

## “You Shouldn’t Talk to People With Black Hair”

同志社国際中学校 2年 板東 由里子

Racism. What images fill your mind when you hear this word? Does it make your heart filled with hatred against our society? Does it make you feel tired? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? However you feel about it, we must be reminded - it is us who created it. We, humans, are so phenomenal, radical, and proficient. And yet, we are still deficient and self-centered that we make a civilization to make our own kind go through so much pain.

“Apartheid.” This word means “apartness” in Afrikaans, one of the many languages in South Africa. Apartheid was a system of regulated racial segregation that was introduced to South Africa and Namibia in 1948, and ended in the early 1990s - yes, fairly recent. South Africa was dominated politically, socially, and economically by the country’s light-skinned people. When I first went to South Africa in Grade 3, I had no idea about the history of South Africa and what it was like there. I thought my stay would be just the same as the other countries I have stayed in. Some new friends, favorable neighbors, and a welcoming public. Thus, I was shocked when I was first faced with discrimination, which I remember so vividly.

I went to the gym for swimming sessions every week. One day, as I was putting my bag down, I noticed that the warm pool wasn’t working. As I was stretching, a little girl, about 5 years old, came in with her father. They put their luggage next to mine, and the father went outside for a moment. Then the friendly girl said to me, “The warm pool is broken!” To that sweet reminder, I agreed with her. As I was finishing my sentence, the father of the girl came back in. He glanced at me with a stern look and ushered her out to the 25m pool. As they were leaving, I overheard their conversation:

“Did she talk to you?” the strict voice of the father. Then, to my surprise, the words that came out of his mouth were, “You shouldn’t talk to people

with black hair.”

I was startled. Do I look like a threat to his daughter because I have black hair? Am I not supposed to talk to younger children because my hair is black? Then, it hit me. I was Asian. So... Asian and colored people aren't allowed to talk to white people? That's what they're teaching their own children? I was going through a mix of emotions, topped with confusion. I only figured out later, shockingly, that this was relatively common in South Africa.

In my opinion, I don't think racism is something we can put a stop to. I think it is something in our human instincts and woven into the fabric of our society. Of course, I don't mean that racism must continue to be expressed between us because I believe that that would be impossible. Ideally, we would hope for a population that all 8 billion people would unite and eternal peace could be an easy achievement. But our community doesn't work like that. We all have our own opinions and sense of values, and some people agree and disagree. That's why there are debates, arguments, and wars around us. And also, why racism is a thing. It's just the principle.

However, by all means, we have solutions. We always have a choice to not express our hate towards people. First, I think that everyone must learn and be able to control their feelings. Second, hatred and jealousy can be turned into strength. We should make positive mindsets driven by these negative emotions. For example, I learned to use the opportunity to work harder so I can get the chance to look back and say, “Look at me now!” Doing this helps me boost my confidence, and I feel more like myself than any other time.

In conclusion, my current opinion is that racism is something that cannot simply be erased in front of us. I'm no TED talker, I've only been around for fourteen years. It's obvious that I'm barely a fragment of this huge universe. But as long as I live, I believe we can always find ways to tolerate it and use

our unique experiences wisely. I hope, that one day, I'll find a conclusion to the problem of racism that most people would agree on. And until then, I'll keep on thinking.