The Racist Warehouse

It was a beautiful August morning. The sun was brightly shining on my sunglasses while my mother drove the U-haul truck to a warehouse in Santa Ana, California. As my mother drove down the streets of Santa Ana, I looked out the window and began to realize that the mixture of people was no longer a mixture; there was only white.

When we arrived at the warehouse, I had to peel my arm off the side of the hot door like a burnt sausage off a skillet. There weren’t many cars in the parking lot, and I could see the heat waves. As we walked up the boiling pavement, it felt like we were walking through a scorching desert. When we walked into the warehouse, there was a variety of electronic appliances to choose from, and about three-fourths of them were white (of course).

About every 15 minutes, a salesperson followed us around and asked if we needed help, as if we were retarded or ex-cons. My mother really dislikes it when salespeople constantly ask if we need help; if she needs their help, she’ll ask for it. Finally, after about two and a half boring hours of looking for any scratches or marks on the dryers and refrigerators that might fit best in our new apartment, my mother picked a dryer and refrigerator that were just right. She then let the salesperson know, and he replied with a smile, “All right, you can pick up your items in the back in about five minutes.”

My mother said, “Thank you,” in a nice, friendly voice and walked across the scorched pavement to drive the truck to the back.

When we got to the back, there were about three open spaces for picking up appliances. My mother chose the first parking spot she saw, which was by a white family’s car. Then she showed the employees the receipt for the appliances she had just bought. They said, “All right, we’ll be with you in just a minute.” While I waited for my mother, I looked over and smiled at the white lady in the next car, but instead of smiling back like a nice young woman, she frowned at me like I had something hanging from my nose.

At first, I thought, “Well, maybe she is having a bad day.” Then a few minutes later the people working at the warehouse started to look at my mother and me in a mean way. Then I figured that maybe something was on my face; but when I looked in the mirror, I saw nothing. At the time, I had only spent nine years and some months on this planet. I didn’t know racism was still around; I thought that situation had died along with Dr. King Jr.

Five minutes passed, then ten, then fifteen. We sat there watching people get their appliances and leave. We seemed invisible to them. As I sat in the car, burning up and listening to one of the most boring radio stations my mother could possibly choose, I was thinking, “We’d better leave or else I’ll go ballistic!” After 30 minutes had passed, my mother got frustrated and politely asked to have our items loaded. Five more minutes passed, and she asked again with an attitude.

They replied, “We’ll be with you in a minute, ma’am.” I could tell she was beginning to get upset because she started to get that “don’t bother me” look. Five minutes later they finally packed our appliances on the truck.

When we left the warehouse, I described to my mother what the other people were doing. She explained, “They were racist. They didn’t like us because we have different skin color.”

That was my first encounter with racism. It was just a small slice of reality-- that just because you look nice and politely smile at others, it doesn’t mean that others will treat you the same. This situation made me feel very out of place and confused. I didn’t expect those people to react as they did. We are all civilized, intelligent, caring, peaceful people . . . or at least that is what I had believed.