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No room for anti-Asian sentiments

By Shavonne Lin

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Howâ€™s everybody doing? I hope youâ€™re all doing well. To be honest, I didnâ€™t want to write this column about COVID-19 and self-isolation. I thought that with all the negativity prevalent in todayâ€™s media, I shouldnâ€™t be adding to it with this column, and instead, help create a sense of normalcy by writing about something else. But I realized that itâ€™s important for us now, more than ever, to document our lives and feelings during this unnatural time in history. So here I go.



In these last few weeks, my life has become repetitive, with each day being identical to the next. Each morning, I wake up to new headlines about increased death counts, possible school closures in the fall, the dismal state of the economy or something new that Trump said. Iâ€™ve been getting my daily eight hours of sleep (yay!), staring at my laptop screen and completing assignments for school. Iâ€™ve also been sewing masks for the San Mateo High School Red Cross Club, FaceTiming with friends and making rosemary focaccia. Suddenly, going to the supermarket is like going into battle armed with facemasks, sanitary wipes, gloves and hand sanitizer, and walks outside have become rare occasions that I look forward to. School has been canceled for the rest of the school year and, along with other high school seniors, Iâ€™m mourning the loss of prom and other senior activities. But while this scary new reality seems endless, I keep telling myself that it will all eventually pass, and that hopefully in a few months, we will be able to go about our lives normally.

While I've grown tired of seeing all this negativity, at the same time, I feel hopeful whenever I see people spreading positive messages online, or read heartwarming stories about our brave nurses and doctors who risk their lives to help flatten the curve. I'm grateful that my family members and friends are healthy and safe. And for the most part, I'm proud of how our communities have come together to fight and prevent the spread of COVID-19. But there is something that bothers me still. As an Asian American, it hurts my heart to see that Asian Americans and Asians all over the world have been experiencing racism and xenophobia as a result of the pandemic.

Asian-owned businesses and restaurants are getting their storefronts vandalized. Asians are getting spat on, attacked and manhandled in public. I see anti-Asian sentiments online and video clips of people throwing looks of disdain and cruel, racist remarks at Asians on the streets. My dad told me about his own experience with this back in late March, when a white SUV deliberately stopped in his path in a downtown San Mateo parking lot. The people inside rolled down the windows, and while laughing and pointing, called him racial slurs and yelled at him "to go back to China." My dad said that it wasn't a big deal, and that some people don't know any better than to deal with their fear in this way. But I could tell that he was shaken up by it. My parents immigrated here from Taiwan back in the '90s and worked hard to build a future in this country. We are American citizens. We deserve to be here.

In the Bay Area, where there is a large population of Asians, I'm surprised to see that racism toward Asians is still taking place. I can only imagine how Asians living in other areas are being treated. Right now, everyone is having a hard time trying to keep themselves and their loved ones safe. But for Asians in America and in various other countries, we aren't just worrying about the possibility of getting COVID-19, but also the possibility of racist attacks. So why do some ignorant people take it upon themselves to make this difficult time even harder for others? Fear over COVID-19 doesn't justify verbal harassment, violence and hate crimes. I hope that someday everyone will understand that words and actions are powerful, and we should use them responsibly, not to spread hate.

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