

My name is Karuna Padiachi. I am the Interim Detachment Commander for Lanark County O.P.P. When I first saw the dreadful video of George Floyd's life being mercilessly taken away at the hands of a police officer, I was horrified. I was met with similar feelings of disgust by the video of Ahmaud Arbery jogging in a residential neighbourhood, only to be shot and killed. George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Eishia Hudson, Chantal Moore – the list goes on and continues to grow. These events have pushed society to a boiling point, resulting in the international uproar we are seeing globally today; however, these issues are long-standing, and it is well past time that something was done about it.

We have walked this path many times before, and I sincerely hope that this time, we manage to persevere until real change is effected. For too long and too often, the majority have remained silent. This has compelled me to share my story, as I believe that the time for persons of all colours to speak out against racial injustice is long overdue.

I am a Canadian Citizen of East Indian descent. I was born in South Africa and spent the first 20 years of my life growing up during the apartheid regime. I grew up in a society where segregation and racial injustice was not only a devastating way of life, but a law. Upon birth in South Africa, each person was classed into a race category; White, Black, Coloured, and East Indian. I grew up in a township designated for East Indians, within eyesight of a township called Soweto, designated for Black people. The other side of Soweto was designated for Coloured people. Many people have visited South Africa and marvelled at the beauty of the country, but these townships bore no resemblance to that. Non-White South Africans (or "Blacks", as most of us referred to ourselves during the struggle) were not treated as citizens nor offered any rights or freedoms afforded to our White counterparts.

When we travelled to Johannesburg for basics like groceries and clothing, we passed the White residential areas and marvelled at the beauty of the country. We dreamed of living in these clean spaces with recreational facilities, shops, restaurants and amenities.

When we needed to use a public washroom, we had no choice but to look for the sign depicting a Black figure posted above the door, as it was against the law to use the washrooms designated for White people. When we went to dine at a restaurant, we scoured the streets for signs that allowed Non-Whites, as most of the restaurants were reserved for Whites only. When seeking employment, we scoured the job ads and crossed out all those that stated "Whites only need apply" or "no Non-Whites allowed".

As a teenager, I went on a camping trip with my sister and her university friends. We toured and admired the beauty of the country we were born in. I remember one night when we needed a place to stay, and drove into a beautiful resort where we found a heated infinity pool overlooking the Drakensberg Mountain Range. I was ecstatic at the prospect of camping here. However, my dream was rapidly crushed when the manager came out and told us that Non-Whites are not allowed. He then proceeded to direct us to the Non-White resort down the road. Upon arriving at the "resort", we were met with a porta-potty and a single tap of cold water literally right off the side of the highway.

During my first year of high school, I participated in a peaceful boycott of classes to protest against the racial inequalities within the educational system. I recall police unleashing their dogs on us and chasing us with sjamboks (whips) and beating those that did not run fast enough. The peaceful protesters that were unfortunate enough to get caught were jailed and tortured.

My parents were both talented teachers whose careers were stymied by the systemic racial injustices of the apartheid system. I thank them for teaching me the value of education and equality. They taught me that all people are created equal and that everyone should be treated with fairness, respect and compassion. They provided my sister and I with the best they could in a country that was besought with racial hatred which made it extremely difficult to teach racialized children to be confident and compassionate.

My aspirations of a career as a pilot were never fulfilled as my parents did not have the financial means to pay for private flying lessons and flying schools in Johannesburg were restricted for Whites only. Overall, career choices for Non-Whites were limited, and most of us never had the opportunities to achieve success or advancement in our careers.

In the late eighties, my parents encouraged me to seek life with more opportunities, and so I came to Canada. Upon arrival here, and for the first time in my life, I felt free. I woke up the first morning and looked out the bedroom window to see a White man in his yard. I chuckled at the thought that I was now living in a White neighbourhood with all the recreational facilities, shops and restaurants that I had once been banned from by law.

I began dreaming again. I was free of the confines of the apartheid regime and had the ability to pursue any career I wanted. However, I was quickly made aware of the fact that not all was as rosy as it appeared on the surface. I had studied and worked in computer sciences in South Africa and so I started by applying for computer related jobs, but was always rejected for not having "Canadian experience". I ended up taking any job I could get, including stocking grocery shelves, cleaning up spills in store aisles, telemarketing, and working night shifts as a room service waiter in a hotel. After a couple of years, I was fortunate enough to be hired as a data entry clerk for a small company. During these years, I learned very quickly that as great a country as Canada seemed, racism still abounded. I was taken aback by the racist terms I heard in Canada, which were different from those that I had been subjected to in South Africa but were just as toxic.

Now, 30 years later, I am a proud member of the Ontario Provincial Police. I joined the O.P.P. in 1994, the same year that the apartheid regime fell in South Africa. The racial injustice I witnessed in my country of birth inspired me to join the O.P.P. to continue the fight against racial discrimination in the country that is now my home and that I love. I am proud of the meaningful career I have cultivated with the O.P.P. and the positive changes I have effected in the communities I serve.

As a racialized police officer, I have been subject to various forms of racism by some in communities that I have served right from the onset of my career with the O.P.P.. I have been told on several occasions that the only reason I, along with other visible minorities, was hired was because hiring standards were lowered for minorities during Premier Bob Rae's government push in the early 1990's to make policing more diverse. I have been told to go back to my country and have been called various racist slurs on numerous occasions while serving my community. Racialized officers are acutely aware that our job performance is being constantly judged, and it is often inferred that we are in certain positions only in order to meet a "diversity quota".

I have also been fortunate to have worked in communities that accept me for who I am, and with police officers that care about their communities and everyone that lives within them. I am fortunate to work in an area such as Lanark County with a detachment full of police officers and civilian staff who I respect and trust to treat everyone in our community with fairness and compassion.

I am proud of the O.P.P.'s continuous efforts to improve racial diversity within its ranks and to promote racial justice and equality within the communities that we serve. While this has certainly yielded some progress, we have a long road ahead of us, and it is our duty to continue tirelessly down this path.

As a proud police officer, it disgusts me that there continue to be officers who abuse the powers entrusted to them and discriminate against people based on their race. I firmly believe that the majority of police officers are law-abiding, dedicated citizens who believe and uphold the oath of office that we swore to or affirmed on the day that we received our badge. However, we continue to witness the actions of wretched individuals hiding behind a uniform. The term "a few bad apples" is not an acceptable excuse and should not be used to minimize the number of despicable individuals who do not share our values.

I am filled with horror when I watch these individuals assault protestors who are peacefully speaking out against the brutality and racism in their communities. When I witnessed the peaceful marchers of

Washington, D.C. be subjected to violence at the hands of the police and military forces, I was taken back to my own peaceful protesting in South Africa, and the fear I experienced at the hands of law enforcement officials. Those who abuse their entrusted power are a disgrace to the uniform and have no place in this profession.

It is my duty and the duty of all leaders within the policing community to speak out against racism. It is our duty to fight for justice and peace for all human beings regardless of their ethnic origin, heritage, creed, colour, age, or gender. It is our duty to work with the communities we serve, to listen, to hear and to heed the messages that our communities are telling us. It is our duty to continue to educate ourselves and others and speak out against racial and social injustice.

New technology, policies, rules and regulations against racial and social injustice are not effective if we as senior leaders within the policing community do not immediately and actively implement these changes to the fullest of our abilities. Most importantly, it is our duty to immediately remove those who are infected with vile hatred from our profession. As a community, we must continue to work together and speak out against these individuals in order to continue to make our communities safer.

It is my mission as the Interim Lanark County O.P.P. Detachment Commander, and as a senior leader within the O.P.P., to work with all the community leaders within Lanark County to ensure that together, as one community, we can ensure racial justice for all.

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