

# The Asian Reporter

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**MY TURN**

■ Dmae Roberts



## Common cause

It had been an exhausting two weeks finalizing work on my film, *Mei Mei, A Daughter's Song*, a personal story about travelling to Taiwan with my mom in 1989. To top it all off, I wanted to find something nice to wear to the event last month celebrating the anniversary of the radio documentary on which the film was based. Shopping for clothes is one of my least favorite activities, so I generally put it off until the last minute. Despite my fatigue, I ventured to Lloyd Center, trudging along from one store to another.

In retrospect, the shopping trip wasn't such a smart idea following a two-mile walk on a treadmill. I was trying on jackets and cardigans, but did not want to walk back and forth to the dressing room, so I stayed on the sales floor, taking off my small black across-the-shoulder purse and hanging it on one of the racks. I walked around for a minute or two before realizing I wasn't wearing the purse any longer.

A frantic retracing of my footsteps followed as I darted around the clothing racks, all the while muttering comments about my stupidity and envisioning the ordeal of replacing my credit cards and iPhone.

I approached a white sales clerk who responded, "Oh, that's too bad." Then, as I became more distraught, an African-American sales clerk about my age took it upon herself to help me search everywhere in the department. We were soon joined by a white woman who said, "I had this happen to me before and I'm sure it's in the store somewhere." She tried dialing my phone number, but we could not hear it over the store Muzak. Another white woman soon halted her shopping and joined the search. I asked the second sales clerk to call my husband, who was at home and could activate the "Find My iPhone" app.

We dispersed throughout the floor trying to hear the sonar alarm of the app if the phone and purse were still in the store. All of a sudden, a young blonde woman appeared from the clothing racks holding up my purse and asked, "Is this someone's

bag?"

"Yes!" I shouted and then hugged her as she handed my purse to me. Then I called out to the women in the search party: "We found it! We found it!" They came running and I hugged them all with a few tears trickling from my eyes while thanking them for their kindness.

A moral of the story: Don't go shopping when you're tired. Another moral: There are so many great women in this world.

Later, I reflected on the common cause that brought together an Asian American, an African American, and two white women. Yes, it was my cause, but I know in my heart, I, too, would have dropped everything to help another woman find something that was dear to her. I wondered how strangers with such diverse backgrounds find compassion and kindness amongst each other. I wondered what commonalities people possess that allow them to see through race and demographics, act out of selflessness, and view each other with the same importance they place on themselves.

The divide between races has come into sharp focus lately, in light of the grand-jury decisions involving the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. Their deaths are not just a concern for the black community, but an issue that affects all people. Senseless tragedies like these could possibly be avoided if we begin to view people first as fellow human beings, like the women in the store did for me that day.

No doubt it's too simplistic of an analogy to equate the kindness I experienced among strangers of different colors coming to my aid in a shopping mall with these tragic deaths. But these women could have easily shied away from me, viewing me as some weird upset woman, and the store clerk might have instead called security. They chose compassion and tried to get to the root of the problem. That day I met strangers who dropped everything to help me. They saw me as a human being and treated me as they would want to have been treated themselves.

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