

In the year that began with a continent on fire, just after we discovered that murder hornets were poised to attack humankind, I found myself a witness to history.

On an otherwise normal day, just 8 blocks from my home, one human being, with the assistance of three others, sat on another human being's neck until he died. All of this happened in broad daylight, in plain view of several onlookers who found themselves powerless to intervene.

As news of this very public murder of a citizen caused by authority figures made its way to the national news, protests began in front of a local police station, less than a mile to the east of where I lived.



The first 48 hours were relatively quiet. Protesters carried signs, chanted protest slogans, and generally made their voices heard.

In response, the local police were firing rubber bullets into this group of protesters who were doing nothing more than exercising their First Amendment right to protest.

Suddenly, a man with an umbrella walked through the crowd, made his way to the Auto Zone on the corner, and began to calmly and systematically break each window.

Shortly thereafter, this business broke out in flames. This incident started a chain reaction in which several other businesses in the neighborhood were also burned.

Stores were looted, and the formerly peaceful protest turned into what can only be described as a riot.

I watched the local news in horror as I watched my neighborhood burn to the ground.

The next morning, after most of the chaos had died down, I ventured out to survey the damage. Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw.

Looters were still exiting the local Target with their ill-gotten gains. Firefighters were pouring water on smoldering buildings. The neighborhood I knew was gone.

Overwhelmed, I began to journey home. My mind was racing with a mixture of sadness,

anger, and hopelessness. Suddenly, I became aware of something else occurring all around me.

A small army of neighborhood residents appeared, donning brooms and trash bags, cleaning up the mess that had manifested on our collective doorsteps.



Seeing the community come together like this filled my heart with hope that everything would be OK.

Community members from around the city and local suburbs filled the parking lot of the now-empty grocery store with donations of food for the local residents who found themselves with nowhere to shop.

Eventually, I found myself back at my apartment and sat down at my computer to share my experiences on Facebook and upload pictures of the scene.

As the page loaded, I began to look at my Facebook feed, and a post authored by a woman I considered to be my second mother caught my eye. It contained only three words, but those three words spoke volumes.

Her post simply said, **“White Lives Matter.”**

This post was the beginning of the end of a relationship with a woman whom I had adopted as my second mother, as my own mother had passed away several years ago.

I can only assume that almost everyone in the United States has a similar story of a friend or family member with whom they found it necessary to discontinue communication due to extreme political differences that seem typical during this time in history.

This is the story of where we are, how we got there, and how we can heal the divide.