

Cynthia Gary

I'm Cynthia Gary. I stay on 60th street and 10th Avenue in South Central. I raised my kids in the Miracle Mile district, which is on the other side of town. We had no problems, but gentrification pushed Black people further and further South. We ended up in the jungle, and stayed on Buckingham, right off of Santa Rosalia. A lot of things happened in that area. You had times when they would lock the whole neighborhood down and you couldn't even go home.

My son was attacked for no reason at all. He wasn't a gang banger, no tattoos, went to work every day, was trying to be a man in his family. He had one baby and one on the way. He was working as a manager at the Dorothy Chandler Center in the catering department. Very upstanding guy. He graduated from LACES High School, which is a magnet (school). I couldn't ask for a better son. I want to keep him around for a while.

He had just come home from work. He was going to get the car to take his baby to the zoo and that's when it happened. They were trying to take his keys, and they ripped his pants almost off of him and beat him up. When he came back in the house, he was like, "Mama, I just got jumped."

I'm a single parent raising a male child at a time when it's just really rough everywhere. I mean, I was crushed. My feelings were hurt. I was very angry. As a Black mother, my first instinct was to get revenge. I was going after them. I went looking, but they were just nowhere to be found. I said, "Well, you know what? I got to pray, because I'm going revert back to them old ways that I've been trying not to. Growing up in Detroit, Michigan, you just develop certain instincts. I said, "God, you're the only one that can fix this. I'm not going to live in fear. I'm not going to let my son live in fear. You will have to lead the way." I felt a release.

'I'm sorry, but you can't go home.'

I remember a time when I took off work because I was so tired. I went and got my daughter's baby. I just wanted to go home and use the bathroom and take a nap and I couldn't do that. Why? Because the neighborhood was on lockdown. Something happened at the Crenshaw Mall and they had (the street) from Hillcrest all the way to Buckingham on lockdown. It's something when you come home and you got ropes across (the street), and they're telling you, "Ma'am, I'm sorry, but you can't go home." About 40 minutes

(later), they let us go back in. Those kinds of things are so stressful, especially when you're so exhausted. You figure, *okay, I'm almost home*. And then you see some yellow tape. It's just heart-wrenching.

I learned how to breathe, take deep breaths. I tried walking to let off stress and of course (to) stay in shape. I joined organizations; I got heavily involved in local community organizations working for peace. We have support groups for caregivers. I've been doing it all to stay focused and positive. When something happens, I just say a prayer and I keep going, because if I dwell on it, it's going to blow my top, and that's what I don't want.

It's worked for me, because here I am now. My son has a 13-year-old son. We're trying to get him through. It's a little harder because he's (grandson) biracial, Hispanic and Black. He's at the age when he's trying to make choices: Does he want to cater to the Black side or the Latin side? I try to take him to Black events; I try to take him to Mexican events. I want him to be comfortable in himself. He asks me, all the time, *do I see him as my Mexican grandson or as my Black grandson?* I always tell him, "I see you as my grandson. Whatever you grow up to be, I'm going to be proud of you." I let my granddaughter know this, too. You have to create a healthy environment for children and they will find their way. They will know where they can fit in.

'Try generating resources for these areas.'

One thing that they (policy makers) could do is look at people as people. If an area has a need, stop labeling that area as a Black area or a Latino area or a Russian area. It's just, *hey, in this area over here, we need some help. We need to put some resources to help these people. They need to have a committee or someone that could identify the needs in the community.* They have police reports, hospital reports, all kind of data that they could use to identify what's going on. Try generating some resources for these areas, and maybe the crime rates, violence and systemic racism will go down.

When you see people laying around with this homeless situation, it really hurts my stomach -it's so out of control. Where do these politicians live that they don't see this?! Along Crenshaw, it's simply horrible. They're putting a train there. They (the homeless) have nowhere to use the bathroom, nowhere to lay down, nowhere to eat. Who knows if they're not just eating the garbage? The other day I was by the ARCO gas station on Crenshaw and Florence and this lady took her pants off and had her behind tooted up in the air, taking a dump right in the middle of the day. I almost puked looking at this; I couldn't believe what I was seeing.

We have paid officials in this city. Something needs to be done to help these people. We need to stop the rhetoric and see some action. We need to house these people. They need to get these people off the street and get them the mental health (services) that they need. They're out on the street and are so out of control. Sometimes they're chasing people with weapons, and when you call the police, the police do absolutely nothing. They say they haven't committed a crime and there's nothing that they would do. Those people need to be protected from themselves. It's just awful.

If you Google it, Los Angeles is the homeless capital of the United States, and that says a lot. Not San Francisco, not San Diego, (but) Los Angeles. California is hit with homeless people. It's a shame that kids are scared to walk down the street because someone may be laying there. I've had that happen with my grandson. When we grow up in a society of fear like this, where are we headed? It's heart-wrenching. We have to stop saying, we have a policy; it's no good if you're not acting on the policy. They keep saying that so much money is allotted, but we still see the same ones on the street. The ones that need it aren't getting it. Our policy makers should be ashamed to say they are policy makers in a city that has this type of problem.

All these abandoned buildings downtown? they could turn some of those to hospital quarters where these people can come in, or bring people there and be assessed and get the medication they need. Get people to work with them to normalize them. Because after so long, it becomes imprinted in their DNA to live that type of life. That's what it seems like we're seeing.

We're doing what we can, and we need you to do the rest. If you can't do it yourself, reach out and touch some of these organizations because they're ready to go, especially in South Central. Everywhere you go in this city, you're going to see the homeless. Every community has outreach centers. They have people that will help.

Here it is 2020 and I'm still out there. I haven't given up. I'm trying to keep hope alive and I hope it stays alive, whether it's through me or someone else. We want to make this place a better place, and that should be our ultimate goal.

Recorded at:
Los Angeles County, CA
11/24/2020
11:03 am