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# NEWSLETTER

## How racism has impacted my life journey, a testimony by Gabbie Beckley

*This article was drafted by **Gabbie Beckley**, adopted from Sri Lanka to Australia, clinical social worker, and is taken from the Blog [Intercountry Adoptee Voices](#).*

I have experienced many and varied forms of racism in my 40 years of living, walking and breathing in this world. It has impacted me in so many ways, how do I write them all down? I have grown up navigating this whitewashed world as a proud woman of colour, however being proud of who I am and what I have become in my life are not mutually exclusive. It has taken a lot of hard work, soul searching and conscious reflection many times over to become the most evolved person I am to date, and I am constant work in progress.

I have many family stories of racism, ones which now can be seen for what they were, in the time and place and the generational context from the speaker, not a reflection of my family as a whole.

One of the earliest memories I have is being told that a member of my family said, “No black child is going to carry my name!”. But once I was put into my family member’s arms, all the racist bullshit fell away and I was treated like everyone else. As I grew up, I in turn had great love and respect for this person, I forgave their ignorance and focused on our shared love of cricket and footy!

I have had experiences during my primary school years that I can still remember as if it were yesterday. Being kicked in the shins for sticking up of myself, for getting into physical altercations with racist bullies. For having teachers say to me, “I am ashamed to come from the same country as you”.

I have been called the N word more times than I can count. I have experienced overt, covert, intentional and unintentional racism throughout my life. I have been racially profiled by the police, been followed around in shopping centres by security guards.

I have worked in workplaces where people have said to me “where are you from” and what about your “real parents”. I have had people say to me, “Your English is so good for someone who was not born here”. I have had a boss not talk to me for months at a time because of something he perceived I had done wrong. But it wasn’t the case, he was just a racist person, and I was so glad to leave that workplace and step into the workplace of my dreams!

I have not been given opportunities to further my career because of people’s attitudes, resentments, and petty jealousy, which really boils down to, we don’t want to work for a person of colour.

I have been underestimated, dismissed, undervalued, and not seen my whole life, which is why I probably am drawn to social work and the fight for the underdog and to try and dismantle the structural inequalities that remain so entrenched in our society.

I am a fighter, I am a social justice warrior, I am a firm believer in the power to make a difference and a positive impact on people's actions, I believe in kindness and giving people a fair-go.

#### **How has this impacted me?**

Well, I consider myself as a person who thinks and reflects deeply about my actions and decisions. I have had the "what to do if you are stopped by the police" conversation with my children, in the wake of the well published murders of George Floyd, Tamar Rice, Brianna Taylor, and not to forget the tragic tale of our first nations peoples with the highest incarceration rate for young people and all the Black deaths in custody in which no-one is or has been accountable. I am sad, I am angry, I am dismayed that this is the current state of affairs that my children and I live in. Yet I do have hope – hope that we can build a community that brings about change, to work with like-minded individuals who share my passion and drive for positive change.

My experiences of racism have shaped the person I am, the parent I am and the social worker that I am. It impacts on my thoughts, actions, and deeds. I am mindful with how people view me, I am respectful in the face of racist person, and I refuse to be drawn down to their level. I think it has had an impact on my mental health when I was younger, it caused a lot of self-doubt and searching for my place in this world.

I think that one of my saving graces has been the reconnection with my birth family and culture. Getting to know them is getting to know myself! I have spent the last 22 years knowing, growing, and loving my family and I am thankful every day that I sit in a unique position where I am part of two worlds, and I can sit comfortably in both.

#### **What would I suggest being done to better address the racism experienced by intercountry/ transracial adoptees?**

I believe that adoption does not have to be the first resort. I believe that keeping family together in their birth countries with support via sponsorship/ education/ income generating activities would be beneficial to adoptees in general but specifically in terms of their mental health and connection to their roots and cultures. If adoptions do have to occur – maintaining a relationship with family is imperative! This includes birth parents, aunties, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and siblings.

There needs to be a greater emphasis on the adopter's thoughts and feelings in relation to adopting a child of colour. Deep dive into their history and experiences, get them to take annual courses on the impact of racism and how to be an anti-racism ally/ advocate. Ask them to look at their friendship circles, is it diverse? Does it represent a wide range of culturally appropriate, socio-economic, gender diverse people?

I think we should try collectively to share our stories and experiences, in the hope that with great knowledge comes great responsibility – and that is everyone's business!

In May 2022, Intercountry Adoptee Voices (ICAV) organized a webinar with a panel of 6 transracial intercountry adoptees who shared their experiences of racism, growing up in a country where the racial majority does not reflect their skin colour and outward appearance. The recording of this webinar is available at the following [link](#).



International Social Service – General Secretariat  
32, Quai du Seujet  
Geneva 1201 - Switzerland  
[www.iss-ssi.org](http://www.iss-ssi.org)

**For further information:** [irc-cir@iss-ssi.org](mailto:irc-cir@iss-ssi.org)

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