



# Video Story Transcript

## Listening to My Neighborhood: A White Woman, Gentrification, and Belonging

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ROJjhBkwrs>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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My name is Julie Ganey. And this story I'm going to tell you is an excerpt from a longer solo show, I have called, "Love Thy Neighbor...Till It Hurts."

My husband and I first moved to our current neighborhood, Rogers Park, about 15 years ago in 1999. Rogers Park is, literally, one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the world, in terms of culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic, gender, age, everything. So, we were looking for a condo we could afford near public transportation, and we just happened to find one in the north of Howard area which just happened to be in Rogers Park.

So, the first week that we moved in there, it was Halloween. And I was driving home from Evanston, where I'd been teaching six and seven-year-olds drama. And I was dressed like a duck. So, when coming into my new neighborhood from the back, and taking a shortcut, and on the sidewalks, there are kids and moms. Kids are in costumes, moms are pushing strollers. And as I turned from this one little street onto another, I hear or maybe feel something go, thump. I stop the car. I'm not sure what's happened. Had I hit something or run over something? But it actually, it felt like something had hit the car. So, on the sidewalk across the street, a group of kids and moms are staring at me.

I opened the door and get out and I'm hit on the hip with a raw egg. And I say, "Oooh, what's going on?" dumbly. And another egg hits me, this time on my face. And this egg is running down my face, I say, "Look why are you doing this?" You know.

And this little boy, in some kind of costume, maybe a pirate costume, he yells, “Go on back to your own neighborhood!”

And I say, “No, no. This **is** my neighborhood. I live here.”

And another kid yells, “Yeah, you don't belong here.”

And I say, “No, no. I do. I live here.”

And I'm standing there and I'm realizing I'm making the situation worse by not just getting in the car and driving away. But I don't understand why nobody is telling these kids to stop. And then, this little girl in a princess costume, she, kind of, yells like, “What's that costume? What are you supposed to be?”

And another egg hits the car. So, sometimes they hit the car, sometimes right at my feet. And I say, “Oh, I'm a duck.”

And pirate boy yells back, “You're not a duck. That's not a duck costume!”

And I say, “Oh, well, I'm a mallard. You know, I have a duck bill in my car.”

Somebody else, “Screw you, duck!”

And finally, I've had enough and I got back in the car and I drove away. And in the rearview mirror, everybody on the sidewalk was just staring at me.

And when I got home, I was upset. And my husband Brad, right away, he wants me to describe the kids. “Which way were they walking? What did the tall kid look like?”

And I keep saying, “No, no. I'm not hurt. You're missing the point.”

But he didn't listen. He and the local beat cops ended up questioning a bunch of random kids on the block for a couple hours.

So fast forward a year and a half. I'm now teaching a summer drama camp for 25 kids in the neighborhood at the local school, a block away from our condo. It's hot, it is hard, (my learning curve is very steep), and I'm eight months pregnant. So, my co-teachers and I spent the first couple of weeks negotiating discipline, figuring out how to meet these kids where they were. But finally, around week four, everything started clicking. And it started seemed like we're really going to get some kids onstage to do a show, you know. Every day, we would spend some free time outdoors after lunch. And the younger kids would play on the playground and the older kids would shoot hoops with some of the counselors on the small court next to the school. I would always plant myself on the stairs and listen to the older girls talk about the boys.

And this one day, I remember, Jessica was emptying Hot Tamales into my palm and I look across the playground and I see this group of adults, mostly men, about 10, gathered on the sidewalk next to the little kids, about maybe 25 yards away. Two of the men in the center of the group, dive at each other and start fighting, in this tight, snarling knot. And the folks are eggin' them on. And before I can think anything, I'm up. I'm waddling across the grass and I'm yelling, “Hey, hey, stop it! You can't do this here!” You know, and they're paying no attention.

You know, all the kids are noticing. All of a sudden, they realize something exciting is about to happen. But I continue and I'm yelling, “Get away from here!”

And finally, one woman in the crowd notices me, and she yells, you know, “Mind your own business! This ain’t got nothing to do with you!”

And I say, “No, it does. I’m in charge of these kids. Move away from here!”

And meanwhile these men are fighting and it’s very violent. They’re banging against cars and they’re rolling on the sidewalk. There’s grunting. And I noticed that one of the men in the onlooking crowd is carrying a bat or a big stick.

And I yell, “Get away from here or I’m calling the police!” and I feel this wave of dizziness.

You know, maybe it’s adrenaline or a familiar deja vu of realizing myself to be ineffectual, in a situation that I’m making worse, probably. So, I start fumbling, 9-1-1 and the woman sees this. And she says, “I said, mind own business, fat butt!”

And then from right over my, my left shoulder, I hear Jessica yelling back, “She ain’t fat, she’s pregnant!”

And then I realize all the camp kids are, like, right next to me. And I start shooing them back inside. I’m just desperate to get them inside before something really horrible happens in front of them. But Deja, another one of my teenage girls, is reaching over me and she’s yelling, “Don’t you talk to Miss Julie that way!”

And other kids are joining in. “Yeah, she ain’t done nothing to you! Leave her alone!”

And then somebody in the crowd yells back, “Shut up, Deja!”

And all of a sudden, it feels really dangerous. The energy outside the fences changed. And I say, “Come on,” and I get everybody inside as fast as I can.

Once we’re back inside, you know, the kids are revved up. They’re excited. Some of the younger kids are re-enacting the fight on the stage. The older kids are talking about who knows who in the group of fighters. And who they’ve seen around the neighborhood before.

Deja takes my arm protectively, she says, “Are you all right, Miss Julie? You know, your face is all red. Don’t worry, my cousin knows that Gigi, I’m gonna tell him to fix her.”

They’re all revved up but I am exhausted. You know, I, I’m not up for any kind of teaching moment with these kids, who know infinitely more about violence than I do. And then this boy, Anthony, one of the older kids that everybody looks up to, shuffles over and he sits down in a folding chair near me. And he says, “You can’t do that.” He’s kind of looking at his gym shoes. “You can’t do that. It’s stupid. People around here don’t want some white woman telling them what to do.”

And I, and I say, “But, but I would have told them to stop it if I was white or Chinese or Hispanic or whatever.”

And it kind of shakes his head and he says, “You just shouldn’t get in people’s face, like, you know a better way for everything.”

I felt myself flush a little bit because, yes, I did think I knew a better way. I didn’t want me or these kids living in the middle of violence. But these kids, some of whom might have thrown eggs at me a year and a half earlier, who knows, they saw what I didn’t. They saw this woman who had moved into a neighborhood, with very little understanding or curiosity about the community that lived there, or the social disruptions and gentrification taking place there. They felt ownership over the neighborhood. It was theirs to defend. You

know, maybe they weren't moving into the fancy new condos but they were growing up on the same blocks their parents had. And they knew about the boundaries that have to be worn away not just painted over.

I think, now, maybe you have to let a neighborhood teach you how to be a good neighbor there. Across all the chasms that divide us and there are chasms that divide us, skin color and money, where we're from, and what we have, and what we don't have. Understanding begins in misunderstanding. With one awkward step after another, stumbling forward and surrendering and listening and listening and listening. Until one day, you realize, you're walking around a place that finally feels like home.