



Video Story Transcript

SEEING THE OTHER

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G18cX7n6O2M>

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.

When I was a kid, I saw white people in my neighborhood. I saw white people on TV. I saw white people at my school. And I, basically, thought that all white people were the same. I didn't know any better.

But then one day in school I learned that there were two ways of being white. There were Christians and there were Jews because that day the teacher stopped the lesson plan to teach us how to play with a small top called a dreidel. And now I had played with tops when I was a kid but g... only boys played with tops with a string around it. And if you pull the string, then the top keeps spinning and spinning and spinning. But this is a little more involved. This top had four sides with strange markings on each side and would fall over and you would find out if you got to play... to win some candy, those wrapped, uh, those gold coins.

And that's why I got excited because this game was better than a board game Candy Land. You, actually, got to win candy. And then later in music class, I learned the dreidel song, "Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel. I made it out of clay, And when it's dry and ready. Oh, dreidel, I will play."

Now the funny thing was at that time I didn't learn that playing with the dreidel and singing the dreidel song was part of Jewish custom. I just thought it was a game for white kids, cause it... something I didn't do at home. But then I realized my classmate Christopher didn't know much about dreidel either. And I asked him why he didn't.

And he said well that's because he was Christian and not Jewish. And that was the first time I really heard those two words. And so, I started to talk to Christopher about what it meant to be Christian. And then my

other friends who were Jewish and I began to learn about their different faith practices and the cultural traditions.

And I kind of felt that my Christian friends had stacked the deck in their favor because they had cooler holidays. They had candy for each and every holiday. They had candy canes and Christmas cookies for Christmas. They had marshmallow peeps and chocolate eggs for Easter. My Jewish friends didn't have candy for all their holidays. And my Christian friends had cartoon characters and mascots for each holiday. They had Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and elves and the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus. My Jewish friends didn't have any cartoon characters or mascots. Actually, the disparity between my Christian friends' really kid-friendly holidays and my Jewish friends' not so friendly holidays was really apparent in the springtime when my Christian friends were coloring eggs and eating marshmallow peeps and my Jewish friends were eating unleavened bread for Passover. Santa Claus. Now during the winter, Santa Claus is everywhere.

And one year my grandmother came to live with us from Bangladesh. She'd never left a Muslim majority country and lived in America, which was mostly a Christian majority country. And so, when she saw this image of Santa Claus lit up on lawns and on billboard ads and on television, she kept seeing this robust man with a big flowing white beard and was covered in clothing from head to foot. She thought that Santa Claus was a Muslim imam because many imams on TV when you see them, they could have beards and they're covered from head to foot. I spoke to my grandmother that, no, Santa Claus is not a Chicago imam. He's this man who brings presents to all the kids during Christmas. And she looked at me as though I was odd, I was strange, I was confused and I realized my grandmother had never really lived in a Christian country. And she was seeing all of this through her Bengali Muslim filter. And I realized that what I was from my family was an explorer, a cultural anthropologist who would go out into the indigenous population and gather data and interpret it for my family.

Now my family came from Bangladesh, which had been part of India, which was once part of a British colony called British India. And so, they were aware of Christianity and many Christian customs. So, they knew about Easter and that that was the day when Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead. But when they saw Easter in practice in America and saw the Easter Bunny everywhere, they asked me, "Arif, what's the Easter Bunny for?"

Well I didn't know. So, I talked to my friend Christopher and said, "Hey, Christopher, what's the Easter Bunny for?"

And he said he didn't know but he would go home and ask his mom.