



Video Story Transcript

When a Japanese City Person Moves into a Small Town in America

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lijBfRntwN0>

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.

Hi, my name is Karen Amano. I grew up in the suburb of Tokyo so I was a city girl. And every time I went to my grandpa's place in the countryside, uh, I felt lonely and, uh, scared, uh, looking at the sky melt with the stars. I wanted to go back home quickly, to the high-rise buildings and stores and the shop.

And, uh, I moved to New York City when I was, uh, 24. I had su... suitcase, you know, by myself and I didn't feel much difference from being in Tokyo. New Yorkers walk fast like Tokyo people and there are buildings and shelters, store so, um, I really loved there. And then I stayed there for eight years until I was hired by, uh, a theme park company in Orlando, Florida and moved down there. Very first night, I couldn't sleep in Orlando because it was so quiet. Ha, in New York City, uh, sirens and construction noise were my lullabies but I ended up, uh, staying in Orlando, Florida for 13 years. I had lots of international friends both in New York and Orlando.

And, um, 2012, my husband got a job offer in a small town in Midwest, only 2,400 people live. And, uh, it was a, uh... his position was Academic Dean at the Christian affiliated college. Uh, so, I'm Asian and he's Jewish so, uh, he wrote the letter to the, uh, search committee, uuh, to make sure if it's okay that he is a Jewish and his

wife is Japanese and a Shinto believer. And search committee says, "Oh, no problem. They are very open-minded."

So, after a couple telephone interviews, Skype session, both of us were invited to the campus interview, and finally he got a job. And then, um, it was gonna be a great career move for him and, uh, financially, it will help us so I should have been happier.

But I was concerned. Um, is there any racism in a small town in America because, uh, my Japanese friends told me their experiences in a small town. One of my Japanese friends said that, uh, nobody sat next to her at her local church and so she couldn't make any friends until she moved to Orlando, Florida. So, we moved and, uh, despite my worries, everybody was open-minded and sweet, sincere and kind. So, um, yeah, I was okay for five years.

And, uh, last week, um, I was walking my chihuahua and my eight-year-old daughter. Um, I, uh, broke my ankle a couple of months ago so, uh, we took just a leisurely stroll. And we are trying to go to the local park. And there are... the swings were occupied by four teenagers, two tall boys, and two girls and a toddler they're looking after, wandering around them. So, okay, it's occupied.

"Well, let's go." Uh, we kept walking and we were at the parking lot right next to the playground.

I heard a loud voice saying, "Look at the Asians in the parking lot. Shinko shonka chango ja. Ha ha ha ha ha!"

"Are they talking about us?" I wasn't sure but no other Asians actually in that town. I know only four other Asians who work at the Chinese restaurant. Okay. Uh, I wanted to ask them, "Are you talking about us?" But it was 6 p.m., getting darker, and three-pound chihuahua, me with broken ankle and eight-year-old girl, to approach them, I, I was not sure I could... it would safe. So, we went back home and, uh, my daughter and I are talking about racism. So, I told her, "You know, they made, uh, fun of us because we look different from them."

And, uh, we ran into my husband who just got back from work. And I told him about what happened and he was furious. He said, "I have no tolerance for racists. Let's go back there and talk to them."

Now his grandpar... uh, grandparents, were, uh, jailed and exiled from Germany by Nazis. So, uh, you know, we got in a car and went back there but they're already gone. And then the next day, my husband said, "Okay. Well, let's hunt them down. Give me the dis, discrati... description of the teenagers, you know, and then we'll talk to them before it's too late."

But I said, "Well, well, I don't know. Maybe they're not talking about us. It... well, if it happens again, um, we'll talk to the principal. If they go to the same school as my daughter, go there. You know, school has K-12 in a single building and we can start from there."

My husband said, "Are you sure?"

I said, "Yeah, I'm sure."

And then the next day, my daughter had a playdate with a little boy at the same playground. So, uh, the boy's father and I were chatting and I told him about what happened the day before.

And he started laughing. "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, yeah! Yeah and I... yeah, they're good teenagers and wild teenagers in this town. You know, they could pick on me."

And I said, "But wait, okay, you're a Caucasian and, um, well, uh, they wouldn't pick on you because of your skin color or the language you speak, or where you're from, uh, you know."

And then, he said, "Ah, okay, well, that's right."

"Well, they do that and, ss... influence other kids, including the toddler. They start copying their... "

"Ha, yeah."

And then I also told the story to my neighbor who's, uh, African-American lady. She's, uh, around 50 years old. And her reaction was, "Um huh! Ah, they're a lot of racism going on in this town; I didn't want to move here. Look at the flag, Confederate flag on there, on the house, you know."

And, uh, she also has a sister, uh, living across the street and she's, like, a mid-40. And I also told her about this story and she said, "Yeah, yeah. I was called names at schools and, uh, you know, we have interracial marriage. My husband is, uh, white. Still, we're walking a street, you know, teenagers make fun of us. And since I have the darkest skin, they make fun of me very loudly. I wanted to talk them back but if I do that, you know, they will stereotype me as an angry, uh, black woman. So, I just keep my mouth shut and my husband start preaching to that because he's very religious. And, also, my daughter was bullied from the second grade to the fourth grade. There's a bullying group and she made fun of her not having, uh, straight hair. She cried every day. And I said, 'I'm going to talk to the teacher and a principal.' But she begged me not to do that because

that will worsen the situation. Well, at the end, the leader of the bullying group moved to another, uh, town so it stopped. So, she's okay.”

And so, I, I didn't know that the racism happening in this town. And, uh, my daughter's school has the zero-bullying policy. It looks very peaceful. Where have I been - five years? And I realized, oh, yeah, I didn't feel fit in a small town, I, I didn't feel like belong to here so tha... that's why I was out of town a lot for, uh, gigs. Or going to Japan, other states, um, or staying in, working from home and barely talk to anybody else besides my, uh, husband and daughter.

But since I got the dog, I started walking in town lately. And I encountered this racism experience, um, so I thought, “What can I do? Oh, yeah. Instead of going to the other town, I, I should tell the story about, uh, my culture and, uh, Japanese folk tales at a local library and, uh, my daughter's school. You know, because the, the parents... if the parents don't, uh, teach their kids about other races, that they exist, who else can teach them. Uh, we need to educate each other so the children see me and they'll start accept, oh, yeah, other race. And this type of folktale happens, yeah.”

And one more saying. I told the story to my Muslim professor friend and she said, “Yeah, well, racism often comes from ignorance so we need to educate each other.”

So, at the college, I plan to do more, uh, cultural presentations. So, that's what I learned moving into small town life. You've heard my story. What was your reaction?