

On the evening of August 13, 2020, I was walking in my neighbourhood, down Edgewood st, on the right side of the street, on the sidewalk, in the direction headed toward Connolly St.

When I approached the corner of Edgewood and Connolly, I could hear a verbal interaction happening between a Black woman and at least one police officer inside of a police car a block away coming up on the corner of Connolly and Chester, to my right.

I stopped and I watched. I hoped it was nothing and would only be a few seconds. It continued. I pulled out my cell phone to document whatever was going on or about to happen.

Then, as the woman went to cross Chester Street, the police car accelerated and turned right onto Chester as the woman exclaimed that she'd been hit. She then used the phrase "Black Lives Matter". I panicked and my heart began to race.

I crossed the street and started walking towards the woman. I kept a normal pace. In my mind, if this was a worse-case-scenario type of situation, I didn't want to give the officer, or officers, any reason to say that I myself was at fault for anything at all and/or claim I was obstructing justice, seize my phone, delete evidence, arrest me, or whatever else. Though, again, at this point, no officers had exited the vehicle, and the woman didn't seem as if she was being arrested or detained.

Walking towards her, on the left side of Connolly street, coming from the corner of Edgewood, as she approached my direction from the corner of Chester, from the driver side, the officer, now turned onto Chester said to the woman "Is that your brother?" With, what I'll describe as, sort of annoyed look she said to me "He wants to know if you're my brother. Are you my brother?"

I chuckled to sort of try to break the ice, perhaps somewhat nervously to try to help calm myself and jokingly said to her "Yeah I'm your brotha" – "brotha" as oppose to "brother" as a type of slang term. She asked me if I knew how to get to Raman's Avenue, which is not relatively far, but in the opposite direction of where she was walking.

At this point, notwithstanding the fact that the officer accelerated his vehicle in her direction, I figured, if but hoped, it was just a situation where she was lost and the police were perhaps trying to make sure she wasn't at risk because of intoxication or mental illness or something. To me she seemed at least coherent and in enough control to be able walk and communicate. I figured it a possibility that the police were making her agitated just by virtue of the fact that they were the police (though, again, notwithstanding the acceleration of the vehicle). I figured I had no problem walking her home if the police would allow it, and would likely sleep much better if I did.

I pointed and told her it was in the other direction. She turned around and we continued to walk. As we turned left onto Chester, with a stern look and stern tone the officer said to me "Are you her brother?" With a polite tone I replied "No, but I can help get her where she needs to go".

The woman was agitated. I was empathetic, though at the same time I didn't want to see her get detained and so at one point I became distracted trying to calm her down and see if the officer would just let me walk her home.

He then started questioning me about a stolen green Ford Taurus, looking sternly at me as if he figured I knew what he was talking about, or as if he had caught up to the culprit. Truly baffled at this point, I calmly said "Wait, what's your name?" He ignored me and said "Come here" and motioned me with his hand, toward him in the street.

Baffled, and now a bit panicked again, I complied and walked into the street – a quiet and secluded side street – towards him as the woman and he continued their verbal exchange. He said to me "We need to know where the car is. So can you help me man? Can you convince her?"

When the officer said he was looking for a stolen car it threw me for a loop. For all I knew the woman had actually stolen a car and he had cause to arrest her. I figured it was absolutely clear and obvious that I myself wasn't with the woman as I had clearly come from the opposite direction, up the block and from the other side of the street. Baffled, I repeated "I can help her get where she's going". Again, she hadn't been placed under arrest and the officer had not exited his vehicle.

He then started asking me what my relation to her was. I said "We're just cool". Other than her first name and to say hello, I can't recall when or where met. We've never been to each other's houses. I couldn't tell if she even recognized me that night. Regardless, where she wasn't being arrested or detained, where it was after dark, and the fact that she was a woman – despite whether or not she was white or Black, and despite if the police were involved or not involved – I would still want to see or help a lost woman get home safe even if it meant walking her a few blocks out of my way.

"Obviously you're not concerned about us. [...] Everything they say you believe" the woman said as I tried to calm her down as I walked alongside the officer's vehicle as he followed her down the sidewalk. He rolled his eyes as he looked at me and said "The guy just wants his car back". I said "I don't even know whose car... I don't know. You got a call or something you're saying?" He said "Yeah. She was down the Corner Pocket with a dude tonight, they were drinking, some transgender guy that she was with, they took the Ford Taurus Station Wagon, and they never came back with it. So buddy wants his car back. He's not reporting it stolen just yet, but he *will*."

To make sure I followed I asked, plainly and matter-of-factly "So it was the person she was with who took the car?" He said yes, but that she herself had been in the car at one point. "This Mike guy that they met tonight, they took his car and never brought it back".

He then said that he had been dealing with the woman for the past 35 minutes. For me, this was a plethora of information to unexpectedly take in in what was a very short amount of time. Though something that stood out to me was that the officer didn't say that these incidents had been alleged, he stated them to me as implicit fact. To me, I figured he clearly hadn't witnessed this himself, otherwise

someone would have already been arrested and the stolen car already located. The words “Everything they say you believe” stood out to me as well in that regard.

I’m also curious as to what was the nature of the interaction in the previous 35 minutes prior to me just so happening to stumble upon it and witness the acceleration of the police car.

As he continued to plead his case to me, I politely replied “Oh I don’t know anything about [a stolen car]... I just seen her looking for directions or something. She said she thought you – the car was gonna hit her, I don’t know, I just wanted to make sure she was alright.”

The officer’s demeanour then switched. In an accusatory tone he asked “So what are *you* doing down here?” Baffled I said “Pardon me?” I was out walking in my nice quiet neighbourhood, the same as many of my white neighbours who were also out walking that night.

He said “Do you know that girl?” To be clear, the “girl” whom he was referring to was, in fact, a woman, albeit a Black woman, clearly older than both of us, two grown men.

His tone then began to escalate as he accused me of having just been on the phone with the woman. He didn’t ask me if I was on the phone with the woman, he told me that I was on the phone with the woman. I wasn’t! My call logs show that the SOLE phone call that I made that day was at 12:15 in the afternoon. It lasted 2 minutes and 50 seconds. I only have one cell phone. This in of itself was and continues to be absolutely enraging to me. That, combined with much of what else had taken, and was about to place that night has caused me great stress and a loss of sleep in the nights that followed while vacationing with my young children and family. I nonetheless kept me composure and calmly replied “No no she didn’t call me, I’m just checking out, making sure she’s ok I guess.”

With an accusatory tone he continued: “So how’d you end up down here? I’m not stupid man you don’t have to lie”. Panicked, frustrated, and now absolutely confused I said “Lie about what?” I honest to God had (and still have) no idea what his theory was or what he was even trying to suggest. I had clearly just so happened to stumble upon the interaction from up the block and across the street. I don’t know that any reasonable or competent person would assume me to be a transgender person, whom he said stole the vehicle. We had already established that I wasn’t her brother, that I hadn’t just been on the phone with her, and that I barely knew her but was concerned when I saw the officer accelerate his vehicle to ram her with it. She was clearly not evading arrest, I so, in hindsight, I now have deep concerns over the sheer legality of that tactic (trying to ram her with his car) in of itself.

Again, at one point, the officer said “I’m not stupid man”, though everything about his conduct that night came across as absolutely stupid. Incompetent at best; at worst: illegal, against policy and procedure, abusive of authority, and cutting corners (in addition to being incompetent and utterly stupid).

Though I was respectful the whole time, honest, not at all belligerent (though I very much felt the urge to be very belligerent), when it became clear to the officer that it was clear to me that he had no sort of

leverage over me, he reversed his vehicle. As he did, condescendingly, under his breath he muttered “Get out of the road” as he drove off without apologizing to me for my inconvenience, and without giving me his name as I had asked. He purposefully said “Get out of the road” in a manner that seemed purposefully muttered as though it wasn’t an actual command to help keep me safe, but rather so that he could seemingly regurgitate whatever foolish pride he felt he lost, using his authority as a police officer as a shield to be able to say it as a last word – under his breath like a true coward.

I was out walking in my neighbourhood, minding my ***** business!!

A whole additional series of paragraphs could be written as to additional reasons as to why this incident was especially problematic. The word “TRUST” is constantly used on the part of this city’s police officials when speaking about how it’s a top value and priority with respect to the police’s relationship with the citizens/community(s) they serve. “Trust”, “trust”, “trust”... In under five minutes, nothing about this nameless officer’s conduct did anything to bringing the police closer to finding a guy named Mike’s stolen green Ford Taurus. Instead, while remaining seated and barely moving a muscle his actions effortlessly, mindlessly and stupidly, had/have the potential to both impede and undo an otherwise plethora of hard work to build trust for the police. This in of itself threatens public safety. It was absolutely pathetic.

What happens when this sort of incident is viewed online and young people see it? What happens when those same young people are witness to a crime, say a violent crime or a murder, and then otherwise decent and competent police officers are tasked with trying to get information from them? Incidents like this are the absolute LIFE BLOOD of an increasing culture of distrust that exist amongst police and communities – particularly Black, Native, and racialized communities. It was so utterly avoidable, so utterly and plainly unnecessary, and just plain stupid – no exaggeration. I don’t say that to grandstand, I don’t say it to jump on any sort of bandwagon or groupthink – I say it as implicit fact.

Late last year Dan Kinsella spoke in front of an auditorium full of people and apologized for what many see as a culture of racism – systematic or otherwise – among Halifax regional police as it relates to street check data and other things (i.e.: incidents like the one I encountered August 13). A few weeks prior, at a community meeting in Halifax, I had introduced myself to Chief Kinsella, shook his hand and asked if he would be willing to let me interview him for a project for my journalism class. He gave me his e-mail, though he later declined. I instead interviewed Quentrel Provo (who runs ‘Stop the Violence – Halifax’) and asked him about negative backlash he’d received from the Black community about his involvement in the apology ceremony. When I asked him about his relationship with the Chief, he said he was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt with respect to the apology and his sincerity. The actions and conduct of the officer the other night do absolutely everything to undermine the credibility of people like Chief Kinsella. Additionally, it undermines the credibility of otherwise decent officers and, at best, makes their work harder, or, at worst, places their safety at increased risk.

The conduct and actions of this officer were in of themselves unjust. One way or the other, his actions will eventually see the light of day. In the meantime, I urge you to do what is right.

First and foremost, I demand to know the officer’s name.

If there is no record of our interaction, or his 35 minute interaction with the lady prior to my arrival, that in of itself should raise a red flag and be immediately investigated by the Serious Incident Response Team. He accelerated his vehicle to make physical contact with someone who was not evading or resisting arrest. He did not provide his name when I asked him. He falsely accused me, he insinuated that I was up to no good and seemed out of place in my own (albeit predominately white) neighbourhood. He then arrogantly (and COWARDLY) muttered to me to get out the street, when the only reason I was even in the street in the first place (on the side, not in the middle) was that he called me over in the first place to falsely accuse me and deem me suspicious.

HE needs to get out the street. He need to be sat DOWN, retrained, and placed on duty with a senior more experienced and COMPETENT officer to be able to better show him the ropes for at least a year. Or he needs to be fired. Or whatever the department's policy dictates.

I cannot underscore enough how utterly unwise, if not plain "stupid" it would be for him to deny these events took place exactly as I have described them. It will not bode at all well for the public perception, or the monetary budget of the Halifax Regional Police.

Since the police's official apology to the Black community, the public has seen and heard of many instances that blatantly call into question the sincerity, if but the significance, of the apology. Instances where the nature of how the instances even started in the first place is highly questionable; instances where young black people have suffered concussions, lacerations and sprained ligaments at the hand of Halifax police; instances where these same Black people were either not even criminally charged, or had their charges dropped; instances where the actions of the officers involved or the officers themselves remain under investigation, at least two of these officers placed on administrative duty for months now while the secretive investigations lag on behind the scenes; and an instance where at least one former officer of HRP's very own department claims to have been racially profiled, falsely accused, and lied to about his rights by the police. At the meeting where I met in the Chief in November, he spoke about a "Know your rights" campaign that the department would be unfolding to help built trust and awareness among the Black community. Nearly a year later, I' haven't heard anything additional about that. I can tell you first hand that at least one officer in your department doesn't himself seem to be knowledgeable of people's rights – that, or he simply doesn't care and figures he can cut a few corners by infringing on people's rights, and figures he can get away with it by virtue of the fact that he is police officer. This is absolutely ENRAGING! I am very curious as to how he conducts himself on duty on a regular basis, as to whether or not folks have complained about him in the past (on or off the record), and as to whether or not he has fabricated evidence, suppressed evidence, and/or destroyed evidence; falsified police reports or knowingly submitted misleading reports; or perjured himself in court. Based on his conduct during our interaction I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn he's done any or all of those things.

I would very much like to have a conversation with the officer, not to play him out, not to chastise him, but in the interest of public trust so that I can try to explain to him my perspective on the incident that night – if he is dignified and man enough and willing to do so. Why not? Again, I nonetheless demand to know his name and don't feel it at all unacceptable or un-doable for the department to provide me

with it in a very timely fashion, even if it takes longer to fully investigate the situation. I don't see why it would reasonably take more than a few days at most, as oppose to, myself, having to go online and asking the public if anyone recognizes a still image of his face and audio of his voice, and if anyone can provide me his home mailing address to be able to reach out to him directly.

Additionally, I intend to try to make both a physical and continue an online effort to track down the lady who was hit by the police vehicle and accused of being accessory to theft over 5000 that night, so that she and I can compare notes, and to urge her to document her version of the incident, and urge her to, herself, file a formal complaint about the officer if she feels she was criminally harassed or assaulted.

Lastly, in addition to other incidents that I made reference to, the other week, someone whom I know claims to have been detained at gunpoint by the police. She claims that when she asked what she was being arrested for, she wasn't told (which, to my understanding, is illegal). When it was all said and done, she claims she was released without charges and told that they were looking for a stolen vehicle that did not match the description of the one she was driving when they pulled her over. She says the officers said they were searching for a white guy who they said stole the vehicle. Like the woman who the officer tried to ram the other night (not "girl" as he referred to her, but WOMAN), she too is a Black woman, who bares absolutely no resemblance to a white male. She is soft-spoken, pure, sweet and utterly harmless, but nonetheless claims that she had to endure what she describes as an absolutely horrendous ordeal. I wasn't there, and so I don't say this to go off on a tangent and necessarily make a judgement one way or the other, though compounded with many other instances that remain under investigation in this city, this region, and throughout the country, Kayla's accusations remained fresh, if but in the back, of my mind as I stood on the corner of Edgewood and Connolly, watching and waiting the other night. I say this to overly emphasize the fact that I was not trying to at all grandstand in that instance or right now; I was not at fault or jumping to conclusions by suspecting that something wrong could be about to play out; I was not wrong to cautiously approach the situation if but to simply let my presence as a witness be known; and, again, I was mindful to not have it come across as though I was going out of my way to interfere with any sort of active investigation or police work. When I thought the police simply didn't want to simply see the woman at risk in a compromised state, and the woman asked me for directions, my immediate instincts were to do what was right and walk her home in lieu of her becoming increasingly agitated by the presence and questions of the police. I was not disrespectful at all. For my efforts I was falsely accused, questioned, had it implied to me that I looked out of place in my own neighborhood, not apologized to once it became apparent I was not at fault for anything; and talked to, treated like, and made to feel like a piece of shit – in my own neighborhood, across the street from my children's school (where I now have to be reminded of this for the next 7 years every time I drop them up and pick them up).

In a timely fashion, I urge you to do what is right.

Matthew Byard
matthewbyard@hotmail.com
902-579-9254

Additionally, would also like to know, if the officer did in fact log or file a report of his interaction, whether or not he included the fact that he accelerated his vehicle while the woman was trying to cross the street, and if he did in fact omit it, why?