

BBC reports, *"James Cho died alongside his parents Cho Kyu Song, 37, and Kang Shin Young, 35, according to reports. His six-year-old brother was injured but survived."*

[The gunman] was seen on video with a clothing patch with the letters RWDS, which stands for "Right Wing Death Squad". This is a phrase popular among right-wing extremists and white supremacy groups."

James Cho was 3 years old.

My son will be 3 next month.

My son.

Asian.

White.

Hapa.

... alive.

The day at work today was long, grueling with the work that feels nonstop as I prepare to transition from one place to the next, trying to reconcile the reality of my current work to the forward trajectory of the school that is hopeful, new, yet unknown, navigating the human relationships, the infinite wheel of work in refining 'school', the concept of education altogether in the hope and faith that we are doing all that we can to make the world the best place for our young ones, the youth, those for whom we must do better. And in the midst of my usual stressors, I happened upon the news of the mass shooting that somehow felt more personal, close to home, as I read the last name Cho, my birth name, my son's partial identity. And inside I wept, over and over again, while putting on a brave face until a breaking point that was still work-related and stupid. Trivial. Irrelevant... when the world had just closed in on this 6-year-old surviving child of two killed parents and a baby brother whom I can't help but see in the face of my own precious 3-year-old son.

I walked into my next meeting.

Then the next...

... and one of my colleagues came in, leaned into me for a hug that wasn't unusual for us but awkward this time, with her standing far taller than me who was rooted in my chair. I nonetheless felt her love as she said to me, "I've been thinking of you all day. Just reading the news out of Texas, the last name Cho, and I just had you on my heart... all day." Inside, I wept again, and as others filtered into the room for this final meeting of the day, I just tried to make a lame joke about the last time a mass shooting hit close to home for me, recalling the Virginia Tech shootings of 2007 when one of my autistic students said to me in class, "Ms. Cho, it's ironic that the shooter's last name was Cho and yours is also Cho. Isn't that funny?" I don't think that was the appropriate response. I don't even know why that's the response I gave. I just did... maybe because I didn't know what to say, as sometimes I fill the tense gap with my

awkward and failed attempt at comic relief. But I knew that if I said nothing, I'd just crumble. Weep aloud. And this wasn't the place to weep aloud... was it?

I'd been asked to write a piece on community and culture a few months ago, and I had been drafting and redrafting what feels like a thousand versions of the community story I wanted to tell. In the end, I couldn't produce something that was clear and articulate enough to convey the mixed emotions that I was feeling when it came to building a culture of belonging, the paradox of all the good and the bad, the weight of responsibility - self-imposed or not - as a leader to create a community where its members feel whole.

I can't remember the last time I gave up on something, as stubborn as I am... but I gave up on this article, because I just couldn't do it. I wrote an apology email instead of the article on Sunday evening, the day I was supposed to send in my draft. I sprinted through work on Monday as fast as I could trying to ensure my checklist was whittled down.

Then today happened, Tuesday. When I read James Cho died by the hands of Hate and Racism. And with it, I realized what building community boils down to, why it matters to build a culture in a school where people can bring their truths and not be judged for it.

Because our schools should be a place where our children feel seen.

Because when we're seen, we exist.

Because if our existence is recognized, we become real to those who may have never noticed us.

And for this, within our schools, we should notice every child, every individual, as humans deserving of dignity.

Because:

Racism exists.

Colorism exists.

... just as sure as we exist.

We exist.

My son exists.

He's 3.

Yellow, like Baby Shark, he says.

Orange, like Grandma Shark, he says.

Blue, like Daddy Shark and Daddy's favorite color, he says.

White... he says no, because you can't see white on white.

My son.

Asian.

White.

Hapa.

... alive.

And for you, my son, and William Cho, I pray we educators never give up on building Community for you within our schools, a place where you're safe to weep aloud.

My final meeting of the day was to finalize this statement for our school, and it seems apropos to close my stream of consciousness with it... as in my heart I know, if it weren't for my own inhibitions of what 'strong' should look like, weeping aloud in front of this final group of the day would have been just fine... just right.

May 9, 2023

Final DEIJB Statement:

We believe it is essential to cultivate compassionate environments. We are committed to designing a present and a future where our community members and collaborative partners lead with diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just systems. We have the privilege and the obligation to honor and protect our intersectional community and to co-create a collaborative space of trust where all are embraced without marginalization of their authentic selves, including identifiers such as: age, national origin, race, ethnicity, linguistic diversity, ability, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital/civil partner status, and belief systems. We are committed to reimagining a space that is centered on embracing truth-telling and being accountable to the gift of each other.

We will do this through actively learning and raising awareness to disrupt systems that create explicit or implicit obstacles to the safety and belonging of our collective community.

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