

Speaking Up

THE BURGLARIES TARGETING ASIAN AMERICAN FAMILIES STOLE MORE THAN MONEY AND PROPERTY

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We are an Asian American family in Eugene whose home was recently burglarized, and our lives will never be the same.

In August, our parents came home from work to find the front door wide open. Inside, everything had been tossed — mattresses flipped, drawers overturned and every pocket of clothing turned inside out. Even the hidden storage, which only our parents knew about, had been found. The responding officer said it was one of the most ransacked homes she had ever seen.

Our family next door and a neighbor across the street both had security camera systems covering our home, but we believe the criminals used a jammer to disable everything, which has happened in other cases. We're also confident a remote surveillance device was hidden in the bushes because video footage showed someone picking up what appeared to be a camera after the burglary. We have no way of knowing how long we were watched before the crime occurred.

Our parents always believed hard work was the path to safety. They never took

days off, never went on vacations, and worked 12-plus hour days for decades to save for retirement. In one day that belief was shattered when our parents lost their retirement savings and irreplaceable sentimental items — wedding gifts, keepsakes from when they immigrated and memories from our childhood.

What has deepened the trauma is how little empathy we have seen from the broader community.

When the Eugene Police Department announced suspects had been arrested for burglaries targeting Asian American homes, not a single local elected official issued concern or support for the victims or the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community living in fear. Public discussion focused on immigration and Flock cameras while the victims were ignored.

It's a painful contrast to how crimes against others have been treated. When professional athletes had their homes burglarized by similar crime groups, there was immediate national media attention and involvement by federal agencies. The perpetrators didn't get to post bail and skip their court dates. Victims weren't blamed for keeping valuables at home, and people were sympathetic to the trauma experienced by wealthy famous athletes.

Meanwhile, our parents, average people who ran a small business for decades, received little sympathy or support.

We were shocked to learn these crimes have been part of a nationwide trend of organized crime rings targeting Asian American households. Somehow, this issue never received significant attention, so most people, like our parents, had no idea. When local media did report on the issue, we saw victim-blaming and harmful stereotypes that all Asian victims were affluent, even though in Oregon more than 13 percent of Asian Americans live in poverty.

Many of the victims are small business owners who also work long hours and do not live luxurious lives, but due to racist assumptions, they are viewed as “easy” targets.

Since the burglary, our parents have tried to become “less visible.” They constantly worry they unintentionally did something to make themselves a target and brought this upon themselves by somehow existing in the “wrong way.” But what can they change?

They don’t own designer goods, don’t use social media and live in a modest home. They’re small business owners who work 360 days a year because they can’t afford to hire employees, yet they’re still presumed to be wealthy solely because they are Asian.

Before the burglary, they were proud of their work. Unfortunately, the burglary did not just empty their home, it has stolen their dignity and pride. They’re scared to leave home now, but they can no longer afford to retire.

Instead, they are forced to keep working while constantly looking over their shoulders because they have been stripped of any sense of security. We see the emotional, mental and physical trauma this nonviolent crime has caused.

How can you sleep at night when you know criminals stalked you for an extended period of time, violated your home based on racist stereotypes and are now posting bail to skip town (again)?

Some may argue burglaries happen all the time, especially in Eugene, but these are not random crimes of opportunity. These burglaries are racially motivated, involve organized crime structures that make them difficult to prosecute, and see Asian Americans as the perfect victims.

Studies show Asian victims often choose not to report crimes because they believe nothing will be done, or fear they will be blamed. No city should allow any community to be systematically targeted by organized crime without public outrage. Yet in Eugene, there has been a disturbing silence.

We see support for injustice occurring in distant places, but when Asian American families are terrorized, there is hesitation to even acknowledge it. We want our parents — and others like them — to be seen as deserving of protection and empathy, and to feel safe in their homes again.

We want to live in a city that does not stay silent simply because the victims belong to one demographic. We cannot bring about change unless the community bands together to demand justice for AAPI friends, neighbors and colleagues.

Will you remain silent, or will you speak up?

THE AUTHOR IS THE OREGON BORN AND RAISED ADULT DAUGHTER OF ONE OF THE ASIAN AMERICAN FAMILIES AFFECTED BY THE RECENT RASH OF BURGLARIES TARGETING AAPI HOMES. EUGENE WEEKLY DOES NOT USUALLY PUBLISH ANONYMOUS OPINION PIECES, BUT THE WRITERS FEAR RETALIATION AND THEIR FAMILY EXPERIENCING BEING FURTHER TARGETED.