

and Liz Smith at Boys N Girls Club

Last week I was invited by Eureka Police Chief Andy Mills to attend a discussion about race relations in our community. ~~Feeling busy and stressed for time, I hesitated, but decided to attend.~~ I'm glad I did. That gathering took place two nights ago, with about 16 people seated around the table in one of the smaller rooms at the Ingomar. Dinner was hamburgers and french fries. Except perhaps for the vegans, the healthy diversity of our community was well represented: seated around the table were African Americans, Hispanic, Native American, whites and a several of mixed ethnicity. ~~The balance between male and female was pretty even.~~ Police officers were there as well, ~~of differing rank and ethnicity; about 1/3 of those attending work for EPD.~~ We took time, a lot of time, to listen to each--sharing our respective stories and listening ~~to others;~~ ^{to ourselves} I think the conversation was transparent and candid. There were some familiar and some new terms that surfaced. Terms like 'implicit bias.' Do we all have 'implicit bias' against those of other race or ethnicity? I think we do. I could try to absolve myself of race bias, because I have friends pretty much across every spectrum of race and nationality. But, if I'm honest, it's easy to think more highly of one self than others: and by extension: one's own family, clan, race and nation.

~~So what's the big deal? We all have biases, and even some prejudice. Let's get on with living together and working together. If only it were so easy...The problem is that those who hold bias are often the ones in power, and those in power can be remarkably blind to power they wield and the ways it effects others.~~

In the course of conversation
~~We learned a lot both by sharing and listening. For example:~~ I told the ~~true~~ story about my son and his close friend, who 15 years ago had gone to Big Five. My son intended to help his friend buy an air soft gun: such guns are the type that shoot little plastic balls, enough to sting your skin if they hit at close range or maybe injure an eye. Before they went in, my son demonstrated how far and fast those little plastic balls can fly. No one was around—so he thought. When they came out of the store a Eureka Police officer pulled up with lights glaring and shouted loudly, "Put up your hands!" My son's ^{was} airsoft gun was on his front seat and he ~~quickly~~ ^{aged 7} tried to explain that it was just a toy: not a real gun. My son, sister and his best friend were left with hands in the air for a good time. Fortunately, the officer did not shoot them. But he was pretty angry, and continued to shout at them that he ^{to} could have shot him if he'd had the air soft gun in hand.

He may not have put gun in hand

Later one of the African American moms said something like, this: "How would you like to feel like that about your son almost every night?" I wouldn't like it.

Many of the police officers told their stories, talking about the inherent risks, dangers and difficult decisions they have to make almost daily. ~~They invited us to ride along.~~ Perhaps most touchingly, they told about how much they love their families and yet put their lives in jeopardy whenever they confront criminals with guns or other weapons. They encouraged us not only to respect and see the uniform, but to see the person underneath the uniform. Each officer is a person, with dreams and aspirations, loves and struggles--much like us all.

In the course of the conversation I ~~could see community forging,~~ and I for one began to feel the hope that our shared humanity runs deeper—far deeper-- than the things that make us different.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment