A Story of Discrimination –

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Have you ever thought that in exchange for living in a free country, your ego, your pride, and even your dignity have to suffer some forms of discrimination? I never have and was naively elated upon setting foot on the American soil. However, I soon faced discrimination on different levels. I always reassured myself that I just happened to meet a few cranky narrow-minded people at the wrong time. The truth is that not until an innocent and simple act of returning a Vitamix blender five years ago made me become a target of discrimination, did I bitterly accept that discrimination in this so-called “the land of the free” is indeed an undeniable reality of the norm, and it changed the way how I would deal with it.

That day, I went to a store to return a Vitamix blender I bought for my mother-in-law two months earlier. I explained to the young white clerk that my mother-in-law changed her mind and wanted something else, so she did not open the box. I also apologized that I was too busy to return it promptly. Seeing the
factory seal unbroken, the clerk started the return process. Just then, a middle-
age white lady at the next station raised her concern loudly and reminded him to be careful. Her warning instantly shocked me and changed the peaceful atmosphere to a heated one.

“With people like her, you never know what they do,” she warned the clerk. I was puzzled, not understanding yet what she meant by that. She asked the clerk to open the box to see if everything was there. Then she continued saying out loud, “These people, they always buy and use it, then claim something is wrong.” I felt blood rush to my face, but calmly and politely, I asked her if she was talking about me. Looking at me with a contemptuous smile, she replied, “You people are known to take advantage of the return policy so we never know.” That put me right into a defensive mood. I sternly told her I had not said that there was anything wrong with this blender and demanded her to inspect the already opened box to see whether it was what happened in my case. The conversation was noticeably tense between a Caucasian woman and an Asian woman, each on each side of the counter, with a young Caucasian man getting caught in between, and a few curious customers starting to gather around us.
At that moment, a supervisor came out to assist. The young clerk informed him what had happened, and then I told him my side. The supervisor apologized, talked to the lady, and she also apologized. But I could tell she was not sincere because she repeated that they had to be very careful with people like me. I was so upset that I requested an address where I could send in my complaint, and I did. They wrote back a letter of apology for the bad experience and included a gift card of 400 dollars, the exact price of a Vitamix blender. I sent back the gift card with a note expressing my acknowledgement of their apology and making it clear that I would never trade my self-respect for any amount of dollars or anything else.

I understand that there are a lot of untruthful Asians out there, but that does not justify discrimination against the whole race or innocent individuals. Issuing some apologies with some money to compensate for the insults can never solve discriminatory issues, and neither can trying to prove yourself worthy of respect each time you are discriminated. We have no control over people’s mind, but we do have power over ourselves. The best way to defend ourselves and at the same time, to raise awareness of the beauty of diversity within our abilities is to live up to the valuable customs and traditions we dearly hold to be true.