

"This isn't your country. Go back to your country!" he said as I tugged harder on my mom's abaya, an Islamic dress. I hid behind my mom while a big man with bright green eyes and light brown hair was spitting and yelling mean words at my mother. It all started when my mother and I went to a gas station to fill up gas in the car.

As a family that comes from an Islamic background, my mother was dressed according to that. She was wearing an abaya and something called a niqab; a face covering that covers all the face except for the eyes, something that is optional in our religion. That day, we were approached by a big man wearing an orange construction suit that randomly began to scream and shout words because of the way my mother was dressed. My mother pushed me behind her in order to protect me and to stop me from seeing what was going on. He shouted many curse words that cannot be mentioned and spit out other words that sounded like this: "You don't belong here in this country. Why are you even dressed like that? Why is that even on your face? What are you hiding under that? If my kids saw you, they would be scared and wouldn't feel safe and comfortable around you. People who dress like that are terrorists." And the last one that I remember the most because it hurt me the most was, "I feel sorry for your kid that's hiding behind you."

I held onto my mother's hand and squeezed it as she began to tell the man, "I am sorry you feel like that, and I understand how you feel, but everything will be okay." She kept repeating those words and praying inside her head that the man wouldn't hurt us. After smashing most of the things on the counter, yelling at the store clerk, and slamming the door behind him, I suddenly heard a sigh of relief from my mother as she hugged me and told me, "Everything will be okay."

It is this moment that I will never forget, that is stuck in my head, that has proved to me that my Michigan hero is my very own mother. My mother taught me that during difficult times like these she will always protect me and have my back no matter what and that not every evil act in this world needs a reaction.

She also taught me not to be scared of people that criticize me because of the way I am dressed and to be proud of my religion. Her calm attitude and her strong faith in God has made me a stronger person. I hope my story inspires other people of different religions to be proud of what they believe in, what they wear, and to never be scared of being who they truly are.



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