

“The incident left many of us feeling uneasy, angry, and ashamed”

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 Latest in a series of posts on the Arts in Bethlehem 

Kimberly Schwartz is a student studying Sociology & Anthropology at Moravian College. She is passionate about criminal justice reform, equal rights, feminism, and climate change. This piece was originally written for a course at Moravian titled Writing as Activism, taught by Dr. Joyce Hinnefeld, in which students are encouraged to consider topics such as mass incarceration, migration, and how to change the world through writing.

What I Know, Right Now, About Incarceration in The United States:

A History of Learning Through Experiences and Exposure

part 4

n the summer of 2020, several highly publicized cases of police brutality ending in the death of unarmed black citizens led to mass protests around the world. I attended several peaceful protests in the Lehigh Valley. During one of these protests, I witnessed the police attempt to detain a young black male for being disruptive. Representatives from the local chapter of the NAACP stepped in and were able to prevent an arrest from occurring, but the incident left many of us feeling uneasy, angry, and ashamed.

I am 20 years old, and I have just moved out of my father's house in the suburbs of Macungie and into a townhouse in downtown Bethlehem with my boyfriend and two of his friends. I am awoken in the middle of the night by my boyfriend tossing and turning violently. I shake him awake and ask what's wrong. He has tears in his eyes as he explains that he was having a nightmare about his time in jail, specifically the week he spent in solitary confinement after a corrections officer found Seroquel in the cell he shared with three other inmates. For a moment, he believed he was back in solitary confinement and that he would never again be free. He explains that he has nightmares like this often and smokes marijuana in order to sleep through the night. As the years pass, I learn more and more about his time in jail and how it has negatively affected his mental and physical health. This man spent several months in jail and an additional year and a half on parole after a police officer searched his vehicle and found half an ounce of marijuana, a few plastic bags, and a scale. This search was conducted because the officer claimed he could smell marijuana.

fourth part in a series . . .

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