

THE MONOLOGUE PROJECT: **YOU THINK YOU KNOW US**

By Christine Toy Johnson

Character: NICOLE - 38, an African-American female marketing consultant living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She is measured, unsentimental and fiercely sure of her words, responding to remarks pointed towards her from a middle aged Caucasian man wearing a "Make America Great" baseball cap at a family style restaurant off the highway in St Cloud.

Time: Late September, 2016.

NICOLE

You think you know us. But chances are, you don't. You really don't.

My husband Peter and I – we've been raising our kids to know that they can do anything, be anything – but it's not going to be easy. Nothing is going to be easy. Not even if you work harder than anyone else in the whole entire school. Not even if you become President of the whole entire country. Because people are going to think they know you. Before they even take the time to try. But chances are, they don't. They really don't.

My son, my James, came to the dinner table on his eleventh birthday and announced he was going to be an astronaut. And Peter and I, we say, "Yes, baby! You can do that! You should do that!" And we take him to the planetarium every third Saturday and we study the stars together and the sky is literally the limit! There's nothing out there that he does not want to see and touch and explore. And it is a beautiful thing to watch, to watch him run and be free and shoot for the stars!

I wonder: when do people stop seeing a little boy with dreams and start seeing someone to fear, instead? When do shop owners stop giving him candy and start following him around the store? When should his father and I have "the talk" with him? Never argue with a policeman. If they stop you, keep both hands present. Be polite. Don't make any sudden moves. Don't give *anyone* a reason to pull their gun on you.

Just a little more time, we thought, before he has to see the fear in people's eyes when they notice him walking towards them. Just a little more time. We live in a quiet, respectable neighborhood. Half the time we don't even lock our door when we go walk the dog. Just a little more time.

But no.

That time was ripped from him in an instant. From us. From me. From his father. From his sister. From his grandmother and grandfather. And cousins and aunts and uncles and teachers and friends and everyone else in the whole entire universe he couldn't wait to discover.

So don't you dare sit there and tell me that we need to "make America great again" so someone like you can "protect" yourself from *our children*. So someone like you can "defend" himself from my *eleven year old son* because you thought he looked "suspicious" when he reached for the candy that his friend, that still trusting shop owner, had just given him for getting an A on his report card.

Little boys should be dreaming of discovering planets, of running free and becoming President of the United States. Not of living and dying in a world that can't take the time to see them for who they *are* – and not who they *aren't*.

You think you know us. But you didn't know my baby, my James. And now you never will.

CHRISTINE TOY JOHNSON is an award-winning writer, actor, director, filmmaker, and advocate for inclusion based in New York City.

Her plays, musicals and screenplays have been developed and produced at such places as the Roundabout Theatre Company, The O'Neill Theater Center, The Barrow Group, The Meryl Streep/IRIS Writer's Lab, Crossroads Theatre, The Weston Playhouse, Prospect Theater Company, Village Theatre, New York Film Academy, New Perspectives Theatre, CAP21, and Leviathan Lab. A collection of her work was included in the Library of Congress Asian Pacific American Performing Arts Collection in 2010 and published by Indie Theater Now in 2016.

As a performer, she has been breaking the color barrier in non-traditionally cast roles for over 25 years, and has been featured extensively on Broadway, off-Broadway, in regional theatres across the country, in film, television, and concerts worldwide.

She is part of the elected leaderships of both Actors' Equity Association and the Dramatists Guild, a founding member of AAPAC (Asian American Performers Action Coalition), founder of The Asian American Composers & Lyricists Project and the 2013 recipient of the Rosetta LeNoire Award for "outstanding contributions to the universality of the human spirit" from Actors' Equity Association. Christine is an alumna of BMI, Sarah Lawrence College and the Certificate of Screenwriting Program at NYU. For more, please visit www.christinetoyjohnson.com. Twitter: @CToyJ