

Write Your Life

A micro memoir writing project

Talk about a moment when you realized the world isn't as safe as it might seem.

Pariah

“He was driving one of those big black SUV’s,” I say to Tizi. “A Tundra.”

It’s a Saturday night. We’re watching “What Just Happened,” a movie that critics in 2008 agreed was a bad movie about a bad movie. We’ve reached the point where in a minute one of us will say, Do we want to watch this?

“And what happened?”

“I was almost to the stoplight at Big Beaver and Woodward. The light was red. A hundred yards from the intersection this guy just came looming up behind me in his big black car, like they drive in government. One of those huge armored vehicles?”

“Maybe he wasn’t paying attention.”

“Yukon. Not Tundra,” I say. “No, he did it on purpose.”

All right, I was going slow. I tend to drive five under, which makes me a pariah. Even on a Saturday morning. But what he did, it was aggressive. It was an act of intimidation. When I stopped at the intersection, he was already there, in the right lane. I inched up so I could see him. White guy, forties, sunglasses. A big black dog in the back seat.

“Maybe he was in a hurry,” she says. “Why are we even watching this?”

“Robert DeNiro.” He’s a movie producer, at the pre-release screening of his new film for Hollywood bigwigs and critics. There’s a dog in the movie, a big white barking dog, and something terrible happens in the opening scene, first to Sean Penn, then to the dog. The bad guys execute the dog, for barking.

“Did you rent this?” Tizi asks me.

“No. That’s why we’re watching commercials.”

When I was a kid, we watched Saturday Night at the movies. It came on at nine o’clock. Whatever was on that night, you watched it. Fred Astaire. Doris Day and Lana Turner. Burt Lancaster and Charlton Heston. And whatever was on, it took two hours, with commercials. “Edge of the City,” “The Tall Men,” “River of No Return,” “The Asphalt Jungle.” At 11:00 p.m., America went to bed.

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In this movie about a movie, they've crossed a line. The audience can't take it. You can shoot Sean Penn, but not a dog.

"You gotta be careful," Tizi says. "On the road."

"He was a suburban guy. In a hurry."

"You saw him?"

"He stopped beside me."

I stopped. At the light beside him. I stopped and looked.

"Did you look at him? You shouldn't have. You shouldn't look at people."

"On a Saturday morning."

"Anytime. Especially on a Saturday morning. People are crazy."

The dog held perfectly still in the back seat.