Persecute
By Josue Cuellar

“Hey, fu give us your money!” yelled one of the four guys who surrounded me. It was late after school on a windy day. I waited for my mother to pick me up at the corner of campus. I attended my second school year of high school in South Central LA. I was wearing my white XL shirt, combined with my grey pants. I held my backpack with my right arm, while I stood next to the school’s fence, where my mother usually picked me up. As I waited, I showed off my new pair of Jordan shoes. Students came out school, and I saw many attractive young girls walking in my direction. I made cute gestures to them. As I stood, I acted tough and strong, a guy who wasn’t afraid of anything.

“We told you to give us your money,” another guy shouted. “Oh, pocket check fu.” The bullies came out of the front gate of the campus. They were wearing large black shirts, almost like uniforms. Some of them were wearing baggy pants, even showing their posers from their behind. They had tattoos on their arms and their faces looked mean.

As they walked towards my direction, some students crossed to other side of the street to avoid them. People didn’t want any problems with them. The bullies came up to me as I stood on the corner of campus.

“Ah! Chill. I don’t have any money with me,” I responded in a worried voice. The bullies surrounded me and one of them stared at my expensive shoes, which cost me one hundred-fifty dollars. I had just bought them last week in a store at the Galleria mall. Then I imagined myself walking home barefoot. As the guys were bullying me, students ignored me and parents picked up their children as if nothing was happening.

In that moment, I felt so humiliated, how the bullies were bossing me around in front of the entire school. My pride was down. It felt like it was the worst moment in my life. People didn’t even interfere. Maybe they were afraid or didn’t want to get involved. This was one of the reasons our neighborhood crime was so high, for the reason that we allowed this abuse to occur in our area.

When I looked behind me, I saw two of my friends walking home in my direction, accompanied by a beautiful young girl who was in my physics class. I felt ashamed getting pushed around by these bullies. When I saw my friends, I felt confident to confront the bullies. I didn’t want to appear as a scary guy, but as a fearless person. For a moment, I thought I had my friends support for anything.

Then one of the bullies tried to search me. When I felt his hand on my pocket, I lurched back and my shirt was pulled. The other bullies saw my cell phone, which I had underneath my shirt. I punched and pushed the bully in front of me. Then I retreated towards my friends. When I got closer to my friends, I threw provoking gesture to the bullies.

“What then man,” I shouted to them.
“Hell not,” yelled the soaring bully who looked like a guerilla. His face turned red and angry. He looked like he wanted to eat me or cut me into pieces. I blinked and I saw him running towards me. I made my fist strong and stood on guard.

“Ah, baboso corre,” yelled one of my two friends whom I thought had my back. But when I heard him shout: Dummy run, I ran. When the bullies saw me run, they ran after me. Then the persecution started on the streets of South Central LA.

As I ran, I jumped on and off the sidewalks, as students walked towards me. I tried to avoid crashing into them. I even passed running in front of my two friends. They did the same thing as the others and ignored me. I turned around and saw the ferocious bullies behind me. I passed fences and other surfaces tagged with graffiti. I passed through neighborhoods, where I avoided ripped mattresses, old sofas and other items thrown in front of sidewalks.

My heart was pumping and I was getting exhausted and overwhelmed from running. I felt so embarrassed running in front of my classmates. The good thing I had just run the LA Marathon a year before and I was in good physical condition. The bullies didn’t stand a chance. I left them behind and I lost them. I ran around the whole school and then twelve more blocks until I reached home safe.

The next few days I didn’t even pass in front of my school. I was afraid to encounter the bullies. I didn’t want to give them a chance to cut me into pieces. I told my mother it was unsafe to return to school, and my academics suffered.

While we watched our backs in our neighborhoods, we couldn’t concentrate on learning. When we listened to sirens from ambulances or police cars, or even helicopters flying around our neighborhoods, we feared for our safety. How were we supposed to live and learn in that kind of environment?

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Josue Cuellar was born and raised in South Central LA. He recently moved to Paramount, California. He is currently a student at Santa Monica College and plans to transfer to a UC school as Business or English major in the next two years. He enjoys eating popusas and has a pet frog. He is a dedicated member of the Student Writing Collective.

Photo: Alex Schnitzler