

I am a middle-aged white guy. I grew up in North Mississippi and South Alabama, all my relatives are from rural Mississippi. My parents divorced when I was 7 years old and my mother, brother and I lived in a housing project, "N***** quarters", a colloquialism of North Mississippi, for where the black people lived. I saw how black people were treated, and to some degree we were treated. I have been called "Wigger" and N***** Lover for having friends who were black.

I have known about personal and inter-personal racism all my life. One of my favorite football players growing up was Earl Campbell. I was very proud of a t-shirt I got as a birthday present with Earl's picture on it when I was in the second or third grade. I wore it to my aunt and uncle's house for dinner one evening shortly after I got it. I remember my aunt telling me I should be ashamed to walk in her house with a N***** on my shirt. Most of my friend's were Boston Celtics fans because they were predominately white. My stepfather was black, my mother's mother did not speak to her for more than three years and refused to acknowledge Michael once they started speaking.

Unfortunately, I was quick to see the personal and interpersonal racism existed but woefully ignorant of white privilege. I was taught, and therefore believed, America was the greatest country on earth; all men were created equal, and equal opportunity for all. What I have learned is I am a fish and white privilege is water. As fish are unaware of the water, I was unaware of white privilege, because it just is.

I have not been an angel my whole life and I have run afoul with the law. I am 6'1" and weigh about 220 pounds, some people think I am big. A policeman has never feared for his life when detaining me, despite my NFL size. We have seen numerous officers claim they feared for their lives while detaining men much smaller than me, too many times we have seen those men die as a result. Once, when I was arrested, the arresting officer apologized for placing me in hand cuffs and told me he would make them as loose as possible so I would not be uncomfortable.

I was placed on probation in 1994. Terms of my probation required abstinence from alcohol, no illicit drug use and report and pay probation fees once a month. I reported for a couple months then stopped going because I was drinking and smoking weed every day. After three months of not reporting

or paying a fine, I got a message on my answering machine from the probation office. It said something along the lines of come to the probation office tomorrow or we will send someone to bring you. The next day I dressed in a suit and went to visit my probation officer. He asked where I had been and why I had not seen him in three months. My story was I had a new job and was too busy to fulfill my obligation to the criminal justice system.

My probation officer asked me to follow him down the hall. I knew a drug test was coming and I was on my way to jail for a while. Instead, he took me to his supervisor's office, where he spoke on my behalf to have my probation end if I would pay my fine from the court, not even the probation fees. I was given until the end of the month to pay the fine and never had to report again.

I have known Black people who had their probation revoked because they could not pay fines or fees despite always reporting on time. I was in treatment with Black guys who were drug and alcohol tested every time they saw their probation officers.

My daughter just got her driver's license and is going out with her friends. She and I had the talk, "When you are out you represent not just yourself but our family, our church, your school..." I spoke to a couple of my black friends about the difference in the talk they give or got. Unfortunately, my privilege is not extended to my friends. They are fish swimming in water too, but their pond is quite different than mine.

My friend Jason called it a mantra, "if you are pulled over keep your hands on the wheel, make no sudden movements, always yes sir or yes ma'am". While we were talking, Jason said it was only very recently that he realized the talk his parents gave him was not universal. My friend Carmen, an IT professional for a local healthcare system, told me in detail the talk she had with her 21-year-old son, a junior at the University of Kentucky. "Hands at 10 and 2, windows rolled down, look the officer in the eyes at all times, ask permission before making any movements like reaching for the glove compartment."

My conversation with Carmen went deeper and I was nearly in tears as we discussed what it is like in her pond. We talked about the fear of being stopped in what I would call a routine traffic stop and

how she was engulfed with fear. She reiterated a couple of times that she knows all cops aren't bad cops but then she said "but how do I know if it's a good one or bad one when they pull me over, I was scared...it was just natural, I shouldn't have been scared but I was."

As we continued to talk, she told me about texting or calling her son daily when he is in Lexington, "not because I'm a helicopter mom, because I want to know he is alive, if I haven't seen him for a few days I tell him to snap chat me a selfie so I can be sure he is okay."

The last anecdote happened today: her son is home from school, he went to the neighborhood soccer field but left his wallet at home. On his return, she asked him why he did not take his wallet, he said he never left the neighborhood did not think he need it. At this point I started thinking, I know what she is going to say. "You need your ID; in case you get stopped you can prove you live here." I was wrong and speechless - she told him if something happens, they will need your ID to identify your body.

White privilege does not mean my mom did not have to work to make a better life for herself, my brother and me or I have not worked to achieve the successes in my life. It does mean I am playing with home field advantage in every game. The playing field needs to be levelled for all. When our children grow up our concerns should be the same. Black parent's greatest concern for their children beginning to drive should be an accident, not Driving while Black.

There was a time when I denied my privilege because I was woefully ignorant. To do so today would be willful ignorance.