

They're all my own

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by birth and adoption

White Mom

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Full disclosure: I'm wildly under-qualified to talk about racism. I'm a white mom. I live in a small predominately white town in mostly white New England. I have a white husband and gave birth to two white baby girls. For most of my life, what I knew about Black America, I mainly learned from school and TV. Slavery. Lynchings. The Civil Rights movement. MLK. Segregation. The N word. All the awfulness. I thought it was America's ugly past. I believed the world was so much better, and that we as a nation had come so far. I knew that the racists were still there, but I thought we could see them, and denounce them. The skin heads, the KKK, my husband's grandfather. They were so blatantly awful in what they said and did. They were wrong. It was all so obvious.

Then I woke up.

I had to. My husband and I adopted two black boys. By then, we knew much more about the reality of racism in today's America. We read. We listened. We prepared. Raising them would be different from raising our white kids. Like other parents of black boys, we would have to give them The Talk. So much harder than the facts of life talk, although this talk too, was a fact of life. We would make them understand that they would not always be judged and treated like their white peers. That they could not always count on second chances, or the benefit of the doubt.

When our boys joined our family, they were just little guys. Crazy adorable. We were met by smiles almost everywhere we went. The reality of racism still felt far from us. Far from our beautiful boys. I think we somehow believed we could always protect them with the fierceness of our love.

Then they got bigger. They are 15 and 12 now and looking a lot more like black men. Their world is shifting. Strangers aren't smiling at them, or at our family like they used to. I see them being watched more closely when we are in stores. They have been on the receiving end of the N word. They have overheard racist jokes told by kids they thought were friends. They have been assumed to be good dancers, fast runners, non-swimmers and all kinds of other stupid stereotypes.

They see the news. They know their names. Trayvon Martin. Michael Brown. Eric Garner. Sandra Bland. Alton Sterling. Philando Castile. John Crawford. Tamir Rice. And so many more. They saw the behavioral therapist being shot while laying down with his hands up. Each time it happens they hear us say, "You need to know this. You need to be careful. You need to always remember this." They tell us they know. They get it. Don't worry. They also know that being careful won't always keep them safe. And that we will always worry.

The news isn't the only unpleasant thing they see. My Facebook feed can be pretty unsettling. Memes that pop up while they're sitting next to me, often catch their eye. Some blatantly ugly stuff (a pic of a black crowd with a black girl holding a Black Lives Matter sign, the meme says "If Black Lives really mattered to you, you'd be gunning down gang bangers and dope dealers instead of cops"). Others, slightly more subtle "All Lives Matter!" "Blue Lives Matter!" (and of course they do, but when they are the knee jerk reaction to Black Lives Matter, they get the message). I'm tempted to turn my computer the other way. I want to shield them, but I don't. This is our world. This is how a lot of people think. Even people that we like.

And because they don't live under rocks, they have also heard from the black guy from Tucson, who was pulled over, and had a great experience with the police, even though, he was wearing a hoodie and legally carrying a gun. I wish Tucson Guy would explain to all of us why Philando Castile didn't have the same experience.

After the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, President Obama said, "There's a big chunk of our fellow citizenry that feels as if because the color of their skin they're not being treated the same," he added. "And that hurts. And that should trouble all of us."

I hope the day comes soon when this does trouble all of us. That no matter the color of our skin, or color of our children's skin, we would all simply say it. This happens. This is not okay. That

we would understand that acknowledging this, is not saying we are against police. That it's not one or the other. That we can support and value our law enforcement, while condemning police brutality and unjustified killing. That no one would be offended by the words Black Lives Matter. Because they do.