

I want my kids to be like Brandon Brooks

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

June 10, 2015

I'm a white parent, and I want my white kids to be like Brandon Brooks when they get older.

He's the teenager who [filmed the pool party incident](#) in suburban Dallas, at which a police officer violently restrained 15-year-old Dajerria Becton and pulled his gun on others. [That was smart of Brooks, and bold](#). His remarks to the press since then have been pretty perceptive, too.

For starters, **he recognized the racism that fueled the situation.** [Here's Brooks describing](#) the initial police response and the angry (white) parents:

The cops showed up, and the parents immediately started yelling, 'You need more cops, there's too many of them!' And most of the kids weren't even involved; it was a fight between a mom and a girl, which had nothing to do with all those other kids that she apparently needed more cops for.

Note his awareness of the loaded word "them" in the mouth of a white parent, as well as his dry amusement at the suggestion that dealing with a group of black kids means you're obviously gonna need some backup.

Then there's Brooks's awareness that the police treated him differently:

I was one of the only white people in the area... You can see in part of the video where [the officer] tells us to sit down, and he kind of skips over me and tells all my African American friends to sit down.

**When he got scared, his reaction was to bear witness.** It wasn't to run away or to avoid getting involved. Brooks openly filmed a cop pulling a gun on Brooks's unarmed, nonviolent peers. From [a different interview](#):

I was scared that someone was going to get shot, and possibly killed. So I knew I had to keep on filming, cause—I got really scared when he pulled out his gun.

That's quite a statement: he kept filming *because* he was scared. He was scared of what might happen, and he knew it needed to be documented.

Oh, and also **he picked up on the ways the different threads of a story can be used to marginalize and discredit people**. As in this exchange [with the first reporter](#):

REPORTER: Wow, so, I heard there was like this DJ Reign guy that was, like, tweeting out for the party, correct?

BROOKS: Yeah, he was hired by the people who hosted the party.

REPORTER: And that's how you found out about the party, correct?

No, it wasn't, says Brooks; he heard about it from the girl hosting it. She's a classmate of his, and she invited him to her party. [The party wasn't masterminded by outside agitators \(with turntables!\)](#), looking for trouble at a nice neighborhood pool. It was local kids, looking to swim.

Most importantly, **Brooks perceived himself as a kid watching out for his peers**. Not as a third party faced with the decision of whether or not to meddle in something between these cops and those kids.

And that's at least partly because *he knows them*. There's every reason to believe that Brooks—and Grace Stone, [another white teen who stood up for her black friends](#) during the incident—are great kids with great parents. But they're also white kids who go to school with a lot of black kids, and this simple fact shapes their experience, too. Brooks is the kind of white kid who uses the phrase “all my African American friends” without defensiveness or irony. It's normal for him.

I want it to be normal for my kids, too. I don't mean that I want them to maximize their opportunities to shoot viral videos of racist police misconduct. I don't even mean primarily that I want them to be personally enriched by the experience of knowing people who look different from them.

I mean that I want them to learn racial solidarity. And I know that personal relationships can do a lot to teach it. For me that's been—continues to be—a slow process of adult learning. I grew up around a lot of low-income people but very few people of color. While that doesn't condemn me to a life of ignorance and hatred, it does mean that my most formative years formed me well in other things but less so in this one.

Like Brooks, my family now lives in a racially diverse place. But before long, my wife's work will likely take us elsewhere. If we end up somewhere more homogenous, I'll worry about my kids. Not that they'll be bigoted, or unenlightened by abstract ideas about justice. I'll worry that when they encounter racism in action, they'll feel bad about it yet too easily perceive it as something that doesn't involve them or those close to them, as something happening to *other people*.

What Brooks understood—even at 15, even in a chaotic and frightening moment—was that it was something happening to *us*. He understood solidarity, and he did something about it.