

# “George Floyd is everyone’s brother or cousin or uncle. Or grandson.”

The Bethlehem Gadfly George Floyd killing September 20, 2020

 *Latest in a series of posts responding to the George Floyd murder* 

*“The Community Engagement Initiative is [about] looking at the ways that we as a community can end systemic racism and create an equitable city.”*  
*Councilman Willie Reynolds*

*from Steve Kreider, “Your View by former Lehigh football star: Having a Black grandson finally made me think, ‘What is it like to be a Black person in the U.S.?’” Morning Call, September 18, 2020.*

(Headline in Sunday, September 20, *Morning Call* is “How having a Black grandson opened my eyes.”)

“Would you let your daughter marry a Black man?” It was the fall of 1985, in the Cincinnati Bengals locker room. I had just stood up to put on my shoulder pads for practice.

I was a 27-year-old slot receiver from a small school (Lehigh University) in Pennsylvania. Bobby Kemp, our strong safety, was asking the question from a distance of about 12 inches. Lots of teammates were watching.

“Um, yeah — but I would want her to know what all she’s getting into.” (Why’s he asking me this? Aren’t we friends?)

This wasn’t the first time Bobby had asked a question like this. A year earlier, just as I got up to put on my shoulder pads, there he was, 12 inches away, eyes flashing. I had been sitting at my locker, doing my usual nerdy thing and trying to get some reading done for my graduate school classes in finance.

This time the question was, “All this junk you’re always readin’ — have you ever read James Baldwin?” “Um, no. No, I haven’t.” (Why’s he asking me this? Aren’t we friends?)

So there I was, seventh year in the league, a few months from finishing a Ph.D., thinking the U.S. was headed in a good direction. Black players on the team were friendly to me. There were Black people making some progress in business and the professions.

In general, it seemed that people understood that it was bad to be racist. There was reason to be optimistic — confident even.

This is how I thought about things for a long time. And then in 2007 my college-age son fell in love with a woman who happened to be Black. I began to hear things I never heard before.

Speaking about Black friends who were engineering graduates from Princeton, holding high-paying jobs and driving BMWs and other high end cars, “Dad, you know they get stopped while driving around Princeton? In this fancy town? And they have to hold onto the steering wheel with both hands and be super courteous and sweat and hope and pray they don’t get shot. This happens all the time. It is a regular part of their life — this fear.”

And “Dad, the kids couldn’t tell you, but when you were coaching our little 10-year-old kids’ football team, when we would go to those games out in the rural counties, a lot of the Black kids were really scared. Their parents told them not to go there because there’s a lot of crazy people out there who want to kill them. They were really terrified.”

My son is now in his 30s and he and his wife have a son. My daughters live with their families in a well-to-do Philly suburb in Bucks County and have been encouraging my son and his wife to move close to them.

He asks me, “Dad, how do I tell them that my wife is afraid to live there?” “Dad, if you were a 22-year-old Black man, would you go for a jog in the neighborhood where you and mom live?”

It is worse than shameful that it took having a Black grandson to make me think, “What is it like to be a Black person in the U.S.?” To read James Baldwin. To start reading “Stamped From the Beginning” and “The Ways of White Folks,” etc. But that’s what happened.

We need to look at everyone as one of our family.

George Floyd is everyone's brother or cousin or uncle. Or grandson.