

How My Brother's Arrest Changed Me

By Toby Hilton

On June 1st 2020, my brother Nat and his friend were arrested in downtown Philadelphia on suspicion of domestic terrorism. They were at a Black Lives Matter protest following the murder of George Floyd. They were there with masks to protect people from spreading the virus. They also had a baking soda and water mixture which is commonly used to help people who get tear gassed. My brother wasn't at the protest to start violence. He was there to try and help the community.

On that day my brother and his friend weren't the only ones being arrested. There were so many more people taken by the police for doing nothing. He was one of the victims who was wrongly accused and badly treated.

My brother had a dollar bill in his pocket. When he asked for change he wasn't given it so he couldn't make a phone call to our parents. We didn't know where he was for many hours. We didn't know that he was being interrogated by the FBI because the police had accused him and his friend of being domestic terrorists. We didn't know he was in a state prison that had been shut down two years ago because conditions were too bad for prisoners to be there. We didn't know that he spent the night in a jail cell with a black man who had been so badly beaten by the police he needed Nat to keep him warm all night.

What we did learn after 24 hours of waiting for news and information from the lawyer who was helping our family was that the charges had been dropped. She said that in the years she's been working to help black and brown men get released from jail not once had she seen a judge drop all charges so quickly. My brother was let free because he is white.

I am a dark-skinned Latino. Ever since my white brother was arrested I started to pay more attention to racial injustice and protests across the country, I have become more aware of my actions. I try to avoid walking around with my hood up. I try to avoid walking around with my hands in my pockets. I try to avoid making eye contact with the police.

Living through all of this has made me worried, not only for myself but for my friends who are also people of color and for others in our community and our country who aren't white. I feel like things need to change although it might take time. I am hopeful that one day the justice system will treat all people fairly no matter the color of their skin.

Artist's Statement:

I started to write this piece sometime around the end of October. I worked on it in my home because I don't go to in-person school anymore. I wrote it on a laptop often with my dog's snout getting in the way.

My writing relates to being a teenager during this year because nowadays most teens that I know have strong opinions about my topic which is racial injustice and police brutality. I thought sharing my experience would show people that teenagers are aware of police brutality and the broken justice system. We teenagers are angry with how police are handling things. We want to see things change.

I don't want to live in a world where as a person of color I have to keep my hood down, my hands out of my pockets and my eyes on the ground. That is why I wrote this piece.