

July 12, 2020

My wife, Camille, and I had a very disturbing encounter involving a neighbor and the Bloomington Police Department that we would like to share. You are receiving this information, because of your leadership and position in this community. I wanted to get these thoughts down while they were still fresh. The situation occurred as follows:

Camille received a call around 3:00 p.m. on Saturday, July 11th, from neighbors across the street. She was told that a man in a truck parked behind the car in front of our house (Camille's car), took photos of the license plate, and asked them if they knew who owned the car, because he was going to "wait for the owner to come out of the house." (The people who called Camille are the sisters of our deceased neighbor, and they were at her house to clean out the contents).

The sister who called Camille was **very distressed** by the threatening tone of the driver of the truck particularly after he indicated he was "waiting for the owner of the vehicle to come out of the house." She said, the man drove back around our block several times after that looking towards our house.

****It should be noted that neither Camille nor me had gone anywhere in the car since Friday morning and that our car had been parked on the street overnight.****

Camille told me about the call, and then I went across the street to speak to the deceased neighbor's sisters. They repeated what they shared with Camille. I returned home, and Camille and I began to discuss what we should do.

Within a few minutes, Officer X of the Bloomington Police, arrived in a police cruiser. As we came out to meet him, he indicated he was recording the meeting with his body camera. He said there was a report that "**your car** was seen in front of two houses on Brookshire Green, and the occupants were playing loud music and shouting obscenities at the people with the Trump signs in their yard." Thanks to our neighbor's previous call, we knew then that our neighbor had likely called the police.

We informed the officer that our car had been parked all night in front of our house, and we hadn't been anywhere all day. The officer then stated, "It's **your car**, we have it on video." We stated **again, that** was impossible, because the car had been parked **all day**, and that the ladies across the street called us to inform us that a big gray truck parked behind our car, took pictures, and told them he was "waiting for us to come outside" before leaving.

We identified ourselves to the officer, indicated we have lived on this block for 29 years, have never had the police called to our home, and were outraged that we would be accused of shouting obscenities at **anyone** in our neighborhood. We talked to him for about 20 minutes sharing that we were both active in the community, my role on the Public Safety and Community Relations Board, that we knew Chief Donath, Camille's work as an educator, and our relationship with all of our neighbors on Devon Road (our Cul de Sac.)

After the policeman **continued** to insist that it was **our car** due to the video proof, Camille demanded to see the video that showed "**her car with her plates.**" It was **only** at that point that Officer X

acknowledged that the video showed 2 to 3 young white males in the vehicle shouting and playing the music. We were **astounded** that we spent all of that time trying to defend ourselves when he knew when he arrived at our home that we **did not** fit the description of the car's occupants.

Why did Officer X not give us this "**important**" piece of information when he **first** arrived? Why didn't he **start** the conversation with something like, "a car matching the description of your car was used in an incident involving some young white males who parked in front of two residences playing loud music and yelling obscenities?"

Had he **begun** the conversation with **that** information, my wife and I would **not** have spent almost 20 minutes defending ourselves against these accusations, but would have understood that "**other people, in a car that looked like ours**", was the **real** issue in this situation.

Then Officer X noted that we have an anti-Trump sign in our yard, which *may* be the reason for the complainant to think it was **our** car. We told the officer that we have spoken to these people before, exchanged pleasantries, they have walked by our home with their children and pets (before we got our sign) and even knew that Camille's 94 year old mother lived with us. I requested to accompany the officer to speak with these people to discuss the falsified report and answer any questions they may have.

Officer X thought that was a "good" idea, and when we arrived at the home of the neighbors at xx Brookshire Green, their neighbors across the street who live at zz Brookshire Green, were also present. I told them their report was in error, and that I did not appreciate the police being called to my home. The male owner of xx Brookshire Green continued to question me on who was driving **our** car and stated that "maybe it was someone visiting us in our house." He stated he had a video. I went on to say we have tried to be good neighbors, but now we've had the police called to our home. I told him we are in the unique position of being the **only** African Americans in the entire neighborhood and were made to feel that this was a case of "Parking While Black."

The neighbor became enraged and said, "this is not about black and white," shutdown further conversation, and **demanded** we get off his property. The police officer then advised me to leave his property, and we went to the sidewalk. He continued to rant that there was no racial intent in his call, there was no prejudice in Bloomington, and I should be **more concerned** about the "black on black" crime on the South Side of Chicago. I replied that, "I grew up on the south side of Chicago" and turned away without further comment to avoid escalating to a more combative conversation.

The other neighbors from zz Brookshire Green introduced themselves, and I was able to have a more reasonable conversation with them on the sidewalk. The wife, who by this time was in tears, shared her fear of the incident due to concerns for her three young children. The context for her fears stemmed from a previous vandalism a few weeks ago of the first Trump sign they had in their yard. Both neighbors have had Trump signs and flags since 2019. I told the woman that although I have different political views I **did not** condone the vandalism of their sign, and that I supported their right to have whatever political sign they wanted to have in their yard. I even phrased it as, "I would defend your right to have your sign." At that point her husband told me he appreciated my saying that. The neighbor from xx Brookshire Green had walked away during this exchange and then returned. He showed me a fuzzy photo on his phone of a car (without occupants) that looked like Camille's car. It

had **no visible license plate** as he had falsified in his original call to the police. I never received an apology from the male owner of xx Brookshire Green for calling the police on us.

Here are what we view as the serious issues that need to be addressed:

1. Officer X's approach to us indicated that he **already** assumed that **our** car was involved in this incident. He did **NOT** approach us in an investigative manner, nor give my wife and me the benefit of the doubt. He **accused** us immediately by stating, "It's **your car**, we have it on video". Much later we learned that he **did not have a video of our car** in front of the neighbor's home, but had a fuzzy photo of a similar car and a separate photo of our license plate which was the one taken by our neighbor when he drove to our home. Had Officer X simply stated: "We have a report of a vehicle matching the description of your car that was seen..." we would have **no** complaint with Officer X. He also **should have stated in the beginning** that he **knew** the description of the **people** in the car, but **did not** share that information with **us**, thus causing us to defend ourselves for almost 20 minutes. The officer, not having both sides of the story, should have approached it as an investigation, rather than an accusation, to determine truth from conjecture. We feel this is a training matter for the Bloomington Police Department and want to file this as a complaint.

2. The neighbor at xx Brookshire Green filed a false Police Report. The neighbor called the police to report that **our car** was the one parked in front of their home shouting obscenities and anti-Trump slogans and said he had the license plate on video. This was adamantly false. At this point, we feel somewhat threatened, because this neighbor drove around the block to park behind our car which was parked on the street in front of **our** house, took photos and indicated to our friends that he was "waiting for the owner of the vehicle to come out." We want the Bloomington Police Department to investigate a false police report which was reported against us. We also want to pursue any avenue possible against our neighbor for having made such a false report.

3. We have no problem with anyone's political philosophies or the signs they choose to place in their yard. The two neighbors on Brookshire Green have had pro-Trump signage in their yards since 2019. We were disturbed when we noticed that someone vandalized the sign in the yard of the neighbor at zz Brookshire Green a few weeks ago. That should not have happened. We drive past these signs every day. The sign we have placed in our yard has been there for 3-4 weeks. We have noticed more traffic on our street since we placed the sign in our yard. (There is typically very little traffic on Devon Road, because it is a Cul de Sac). Due to the nature of the current political discourse and tense climate, we are concerned that free speech is being threatened on **both** sides of the political spectrum. We want the Bloomington Police to increase patrols in our Rollingbrook subdivision and especially on Devon Road.

4. We are concerned with the racial components of this incident. Camille moved to Devon Road in 1991. I moved here when we were married in 1994. We have hosted gatherings for neighbors on our driveway and have welcomed everyone. We have never had problems with neighbors in the past. The neighbors in question moved to our neighborhood in the last few years. In the 29 years we have been in this neighborhood, the police have **never** been called to our home. We have always felt safe on our street and in this neighborhood. **Yesterday**, was the **first** time we felt unsafe. **Never** have we had **anyone** accuse us of being

un-neighborly. **Never** has anyone parked behind our vehicle and taken pictures of our license plates. **Never** has anyone threatened to "wait for the people who live there" to come out of the house. We **now** have to pause and wonder **if** we are safe on Devon Road and if our neighbors on Brookshire Green have ill-will toward us and will continue to be a threatening presence.

Camille and I have been bridge builders in Bloomington/Normal. Camille has lived in this community since 1972, first as an ISU student, then later as an educator in Unit 5 for 35 years. Her resume of educational, civic involvement, and activism is well known in this community. I have been active in this community since my arrival in 1994. I have been a diversity trainer for State Farm and been asked to facilitate many community dialogue sessions during difficult times. We have worked to make this community safe, inclusive, and a better place to live.

We have hoped and prayed that this type of thing would **never** happen to us or any of our family members. We did not think we would be victims of a police call to our home that did not **"begin"** by giving us the benefit of the doubt to **"address a situation"** versus **"being accused"** about what was **believed** to have happened. We also are very hurt by the racial and political insensitivity from our neighbors. We feel like we were the victims of **"two false accusations."** **One** was from the neighbor, and **one** was from the police officer who initially approached us by only **repeating** what he was "told" by the neighbor. **Not** being accorded the respect of the "benefit of the doubt" is what hurts the most, and that is why citizens of color feel like there are **two** systems of justice in our society.

We still have a **long way** to go in our community to address these issues.

Art Taylor