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Reflection on We Have A Dream, St. Vincent de Paul Church community

We White people have all heard and read the accounts from Black parents about the stress of having The Talk with their children – mostly with the boys, I gather, about how to deal with encounters – especially with policemen -- that could send them to jail, or worse. Although I have not experienced this, I am always acutely aware of my own – and my family's – White privilege. There are many examples, but I want to tell you about one particular incident that stays with me.

I have three sons, all now in their 50s, strong, intelligent, curious, engaged in the world, and largely successful in the paths they've chosen. Of course, during the course of their growing to adulthood, each had his ups and downs, but nobody landed in court or jail.

One of them, for a time, grew marijuana on a small island in the Charles River, somewhere outside Boston. (No, I didn't know about this at the time.) At about the age of 16 or 17, he was somehow picked up by a policeman, with a bag of weed on his person. I don't know how much weed, but it was more than a nickel bag. Maybe I should add here that of the three of them, he was the least likely to come out with the kind of "witty" remark that could have been taken the wrong way. In any case, the result of this encounter was that the bag of weed was confiscated, and the young man was brought home, with an admonition.

No arrest. No appearance at police station or court. No record of this encounter.

A long time ago. Yet I still wonder: What if my boy had been Black? How much jail time? Would I still have all three sons?