Daryl Davis is a black man who has made a name for himself befriending white supremacists. Davis learned about racism at a young age. In 1968, the ten-year-old boy was marching in a Boy Scouts parade when people started throwing rocks and bottles at him. He thought that they must really hate the Boy Scouts until he realized none of the other boys was getting hit. Davis was the only black Boy Scout marching that day. When he got home, his parents explained that there were people in the world who hated him because of the color of his skin. From that day onward, he became fascinated with racism.

Davis grew up to become a professional blues musician, and that’s when his fascination became something else entirely. It all started at a gig in 1983. He had just finished playing when a white musician approached him and paid him a compliment. They hit it off, and the man told Davis something surprising. He said he had never conversed with a black man before. When Davis asked why, he said he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan. The Ku Klux Klan – or KKK – is a white supremacy group that dates back to 1866. They are notorious for having terrorized and killed black people from the mid-19th century up until the mid-20th century. Although the reviled group has drastically diminished in numbers, they are still alive in small pockets.

Amazingly, Davis and the KKK member kept in touch and became friends, often meeting at Davis’s gigs. One day, Davis told him that he wanted to meet Roger Kelly, a leader of the KKK in Maryland where they lived. His friend warned him against it, saying that he would be killed. But Davis had a question that he wanted to ask Kelly and he wouldn’t take no for an answer. He wanted to know how a person could hate someone that they didn’t know.

Davis met with Kelly. Kelly brought an armed guard and there were some very tense moments. But after their conversation, Kelly shook Davis’s hand and told him to stay in touch. This surprised Davis. He hadn’t expected to make another friend, but soon Kelly was visiting him at his house.

Davis soon befriended two other KKK leaders from Maryland. And when Kelly became the national leader of the KKK, Davis started going to their rallies. He did this to learn about them and to allow them to learn about him. He thought that if they knew him and liked him, they would begin to question their beliefs. And if he challenged them respectfully, they might change their beliefs.

It seems that Davis was right. Eventually, Kelly and the two other KKK leaders in the state of Maryland quit the white supremacy group. Soon after the leaders quit, others followed suit. According to Davis, the KKK no longer exists in Maryland, and it happened because of his efforts.

Of course, not everyone agrees with Davis’s methods. In fact, many believe that he is hurting the cause more than he is helping it. Some critics say that instead of helping bigots, he should be helping his own people. They believe that he is sitting down with the enemy and giving racists tacit approval by befriending them. They say it allows racists to justify their beliefs and see themselves as reasonable.

Even so, Davis is sticking to his guns. He believes that the best way to work through an issue is to talk about it openly and honestly. He claims to be responsible for changing the hearts of two hundred white supremacists, so he must be doing something right.

At only 19, Derek Black was a rising star and the pride of his father, who was a leader in a movement called White Nationalism. White nationalism is a very small, but growing racist movement, which is trying to create a white nation by removing people of color.

Derek was indoctrinated from birth with the racist ideas of his family. They taught him that the USA was meant for white people and that non-white citizens were a threat. They wanted him to change the nation.

Soon Derek too became a leader in the white nationalism community. He had his own racist radio program and warned that white people were losing control of the country. He encouraged infiltration of the government. People respected and followed him.

Then Derek went to college. He did not want to be ostracized for his beliefs, so he hid his true identity while continuing to appear on racist radio programs. Before long, he had a group of new friends at school including a Peruvian immigrant and an Orthodox Jew.

College was going well for Derek until a student learned of his background and posted about it on the school’s website. His peers were angry and sent him hateful messages.

But then Matthew Stevenson, the Orthodox Jew that Derek had originally befriended, decided that anger was not the answer. He decided to invite Derek to a traditional Jewish dinner, which he hosted every week. The dinner included people from a variety of cultures and religions. Instead of judging, excluding, or trying to change Derek’s mind, Matthew decided to include him and treat him like anybody else. He felt uneasy at first, but he soon became friends with the dinner group.

Soon, Derek was questioning his beliefs. He tried to remind himself why he believed in white nationalism, but the movement seemed increasingly ridiculous to him. Soon, he decided that he could not support a movement that told him who he could and could not be friends with.

After college, he rejected white nationalism publicly. But people still recognized him as a leader of a racist movement. This made life hard for Derek so he has been doing everything he can to distance himself from his past. At first, his father had difficulty believing Derek’s decision, and then he felt betrayed by it. It has been difficult, but both Derek and his father have been taking steps to bridge the divide in his family.