

# Mom: Slain son would be alive had he been white

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## FULL TEXT

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) - The mother of a young black man killed by a police officer in an Alabama shopping mall said Tuesday she believes her son would still be alive had he been white.

"I think the whole scenario would have played out differently, I really do," April Pipkins said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Pipkins' son, 21-year-old Emantic "EJ" Bradford Jr., was shot to death Thanksgiving night by a police officer responding to a report of a shooting in a shopping mall at the Riverchase Galleria in Hoover, a suburb of 95,000 people south of Birmingham.

Police initially blamed Bradford, who they said had a gun in his hand and was responsible for shooting two people at the mall. They later retracted that statement and said it was unlikely that Bradford had done the shooting.

In a statement issued Monday, police said Bradford had a gun in his hand "during the seconds following the gunshots, which instantly heightened the sense of threat to approaching police officers."

Ben Crump, a lawyer representing the Bradford family, said there was a presumption that Bradford was the criminal because he was a black man. He said witnesses have contacted his law firm saying Bradford was trying to wave people away from the shooting.

Pipkins described her son as a loving, friendly young man. He went to the mall with friends on Thanksgiving evening.

She said she didn't find out what happened to her son until Friday morning when she returned a call from one of his friends who had tried to reach her during the night. She has tried to avoid images of the shooting, but accidentally stumbled across a picture on social media of her son dead on the floor of the mall.

"I did not want to see pictures of my son laying in a pool of blood and when I accidentally came across it I broke down. And I can't get it out of my head. I cannot get the scene out of my head of my child laying there, nobody around him trying to help him, just laying like a piece of trash where everyone can walk around and parade and post pictures of him on social media," Pipkins said.

Police still have not contacted her about the shooting, Pipkins said. She said her only official confirmation of his death came when she called the coroner's office herself.

She said the officer "should be punished for what he did."

Pipkins said her son attended Catholic school in Birmingham, but ended up getting his GED. She said he joined the Army and completed basic training, but had to leave because of a leg injury before completing specialty training. About 200 people attended a community vigil for Bradford on Tuesday night at Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church, where a racist bombing killed four black girls in 1963. Pipkins entered to a standing ovation.

Speaking from the pulpit, regional NAACP field director Kevin Myles said Bradford's killing was part of a pattern of police killing black men without cause.

"This is our personal Katrina. The helicopters are not coming, nobody is coming to bring us water. If we are to be saved we will save ourselves," he said, referencing the catastrophic hurricane that hit the Gulf Coast more than a

decade ago.

Pipkins collapsed in tears onstage as she began speaking at the church vigil. Ministers and a nurse surrounded her as congregation members prayed. Paramedics took her to a nearby hospital to monitor her condition.

Bradford's father, Emantic Fitzgerald Bradford Sr., also was overcome with emotion moments earlier as he described the pain of losing his son.

"I can't hear him say 'daddy' no more," said Bradford, who is undergoing treatment for cancer.

Questions over the shooting have sparked multiple demonstrations and a push by Bradford's family for authorities to release body camera footage and other video. Police have refused to make any of the images public.

The incident is being investigated by the Alabama Law Enforcement Agency. Hoover Mayor Frank Brocato has pleaded for public patience as the investigation continues.

After the church vigil, protesters with a bullhorn marched through Brocato's neighborhood chanting: "If we don't get no justice, you don't get no sleep." It wasn't clear whether Brocato was at home.

Credit: By JAY REEVES, Associated Press

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