

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE REPORT

JET

JAN 14, 2013

**IS YOUR
CHILD
NEXT?**

Jordan Russell Davis
1995-2012

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MOMENTS



• **THE FIRST TIME** I read about the shooting that claimed Jordan Davis' life, I lost my breath. I read the article twice because I was so confused: A middle-aged adult instigated an argument with a group of teenagers (children) over the volume of the music playing inside their car. And then, because the kids refused to adhere to this stranger's demand to turn down the radio, he pulled out a gun and fired at their vehicle... eight to nine times? For real?

This sad situation highlights the reality of life in America today. It's become a time when the easy access to weapons gives everyday citizens the power to decide between life and death for anyone who may cross their path—whenever it suits his/her fancy.

Personally, I'm tired of living in this climate of fear.

From mass killings in an elementary school to violence on a local street corner, there's never been a greater need for stronger gun control laws.

That's why, despite conventional publishing wisdom— that says magazine cover subjects must be celebrity-driven to sell— I have chosen to honor Jordan Russell Davis. To hell with convention.

By numerous accounts, Jordan was a wonderful kid on his way to becoming a good Black man. Our community suffered a loss the evening his life was cut short.

Unfortunately, no one can bring back Jordan, Trayvon or any of the other victims of the flawed Stand Your Ground law. But together, we can make a difference by keeping his story alive and actively working toward societal change. Now.

Yesterday's tragedy happened next door, but tomorrow it may be a lot closer.



Jordan's dad shares memories of the good times.

Mitzi Miller
Editor-In-Chief

E-MAIL: mitzi@jetmag.com TWITTER: [@mitzimoments](https://twitter.com/mitzimoments)

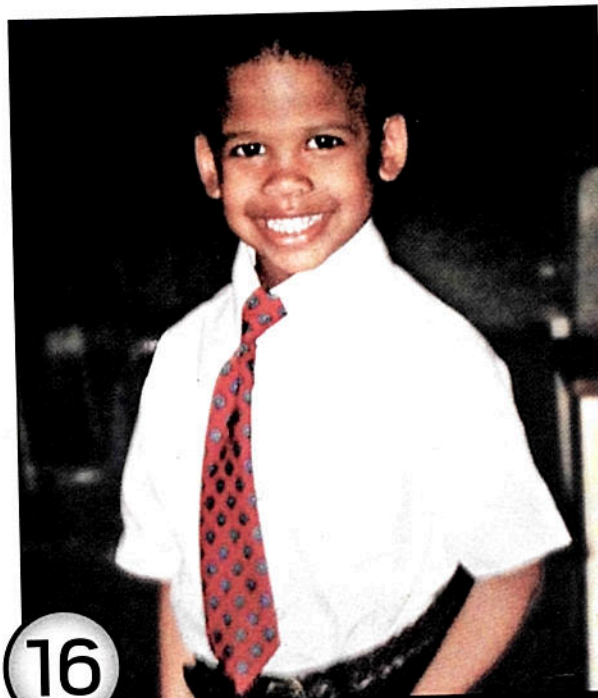
P.S. This issue's theme is Make Better. It's all about how to enact positive change from within yourself. Get started today! Log onto JETmag.com for a chance to win the inspiring self-help guide, *The Secret Gratitude Book*.

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Jordan Davis
A Parent's Worst Nightmare

"I will be out here stomping all over the nation, fighting for my son," —Ron Davis, father

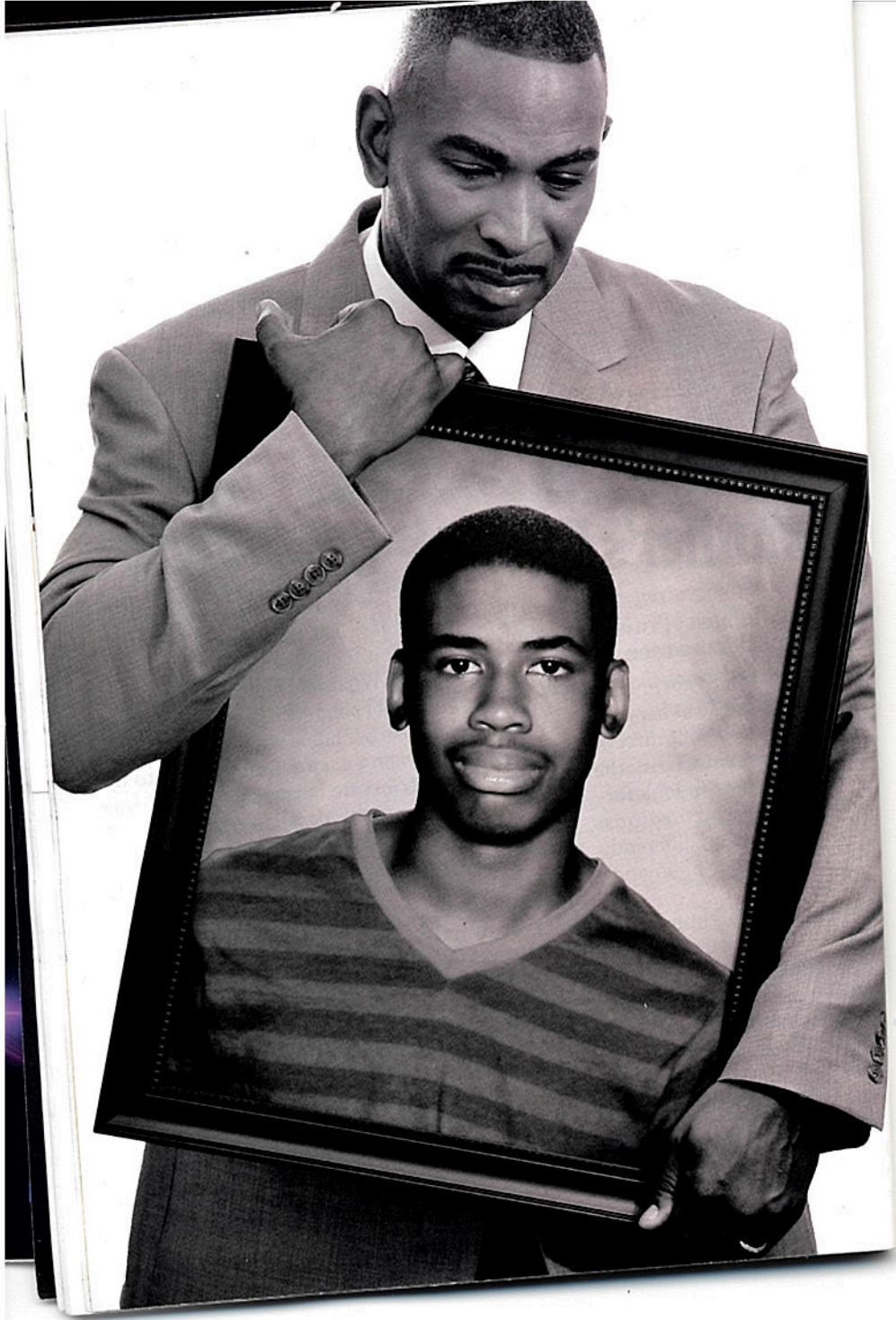
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PHOTO COURTESY LUCIA MCBATH

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JUST MONTHS AFTER THE SHOOTING DEATH OF TRAYVON MARTIN BROUGHT NATIONAL ATTENTION TO FLORIDA'S CONTROVERSIAL STAND YOUR GROUND LAW, ANOTHER BLACK BOY IS DEAD BY THE HAND OF A GUN OWNER WHO SAYS HE SHOT OUT OF FEAR. NOW, THE PARENTS OF *Jordan Davis* ARE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS—AND CHANGES TO A LAW THEY SAY ALLOWS FOR VIGILANTE JUSTICE.

STANDING OUR GROUND

EVEN AFTER the horrifying phone call that revealed his child might be lying on an emergency room table and the worry-racked half-hour drive to the hospital, Ron Davis held on to a sliver of hope.

He prayed that even if his youngest son had been shot, that he would still be okay. But when medical staff finally compared the photo on Davis' cell phone with the teenage body a few rooms over, and returned with a team of people—including a doctor, a chaplain and two police officers—he knew that every parent's worst nightmare had rushed to life for him in Technicolor.

The lifeless youth was indeed his son Jordan Russell Davis, a promising 17-year-old high school junior who had hopes of being a Marine. How his child died added rock salt and hot pepper to Davis' shattered heart: Jordan was shot and killed by a Florida man upset that the teenager and his friends were... listening to loud music.

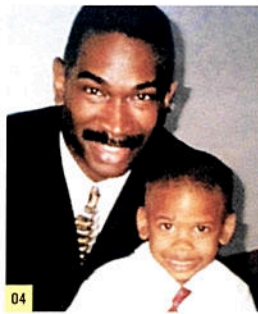
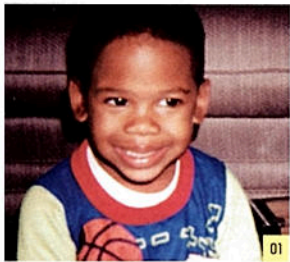
"When the doctor saw my tears, his eyes welled up," Davis tells JET in an emotional interview. "He said, 'He's such a nice-looking kid, but I just couldn't revive him. I'm so sorry, Mr. Davis.' That's all I heard. That's all I hear now."

"They said I could see my son, but because there was an investigation, I couldn't touch him," Davis recalls. "But when I saw Jordan lying on that table, I just grabbed him and I kissed him. They had to tear me away. And then I just sat there with him. He looked like he was sleeping, but we all know the finality of it."

IT IS THE permanence of Jordan's death, and a proclamation by an attorney that his killer, software developer Michael Dunn, may invoke the controversial Stand Your Ground defense, that has Davis and Jordan's mother Lucia McBath fighting to dismantle laws that allow ordinary citizens to carry firearms in public and shoot to kill without judicial repercussion. Their call for gun law reform comes only nine months after another Floridian, George Zimmerman, employed a similar tactic to justify killing 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, inspiring a nationwide referendum on race, the vulnerability of Black boys and our country's fascination with guns.

"I will be out here stomping all over the nation, fighting for my son," says Davis. He insists that while he supports a citizen's right to bear arms, he firmly believes "we need to change these laws back to 'when you shoot somebody, you're going to be held accountable.'"

BEING VENGEFUL IS NOT GOING TO BRING MY SON BACK. WHAT I WANT IS FOR US TO STOP ACTING LIKE WE'RE IN THE WILD WEST.

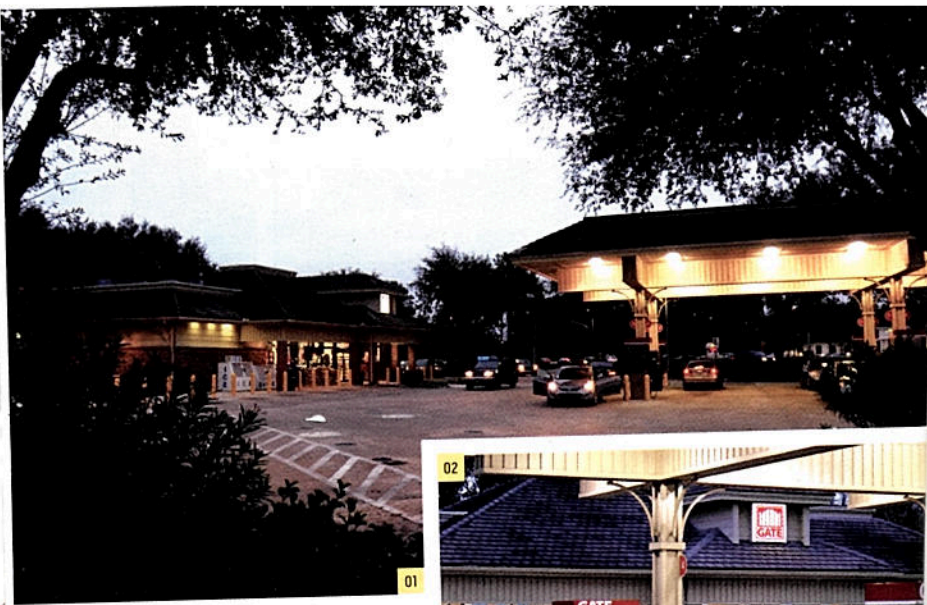


FAMILY FIRST: 1. Jordan, 3, on Christmas Day. 2. McBath enjoys Mother's Day with her son. 3. Jordan and his mom share time with their dogs, Teddy and Freckles. 4. Jordan's first Easter program with dad. 5. Annual trip to Disney World with family friends.

Indeed, it is accountability that Davis and McBath seek as they mourn their son, who died on Black Friday, Nov. 23, 2012, of wounds he suffered after being shot by Dunn in a Jacksonville, FL gas station parking lot. According to police, Jordan, having just finished hanging out with friends at the St. Johns Town Center mall, was sitting in the backseat of an SUV listening to music with three of his buddies when Dunn, accompanied by his fiancée, Rhonda Rouer, arrived to the gas station. While Dunn's companion went into the station's convenience store to purchase

wine, he got into a heated argument with Jordan and his friends over the volume of their music. When the boys refused to turn it down, Dunn, a gun collector with a permit to carry a concealed weapon, pulled out a handgun and shot at least eight or nine times into the car.

Dunn, who'd just left his son's wedding reception, then sped away to a local hotel. The next morning, after learning someone died by his hand, he drove more than 170 miles back to his home in Satellite, FL. Police used his license plate number, jotted down by an eyewitness, to locate and arrest the 46-year-old, who claimed he was about to turn himself in to local authorities. He has since pleaded not guilty to charges of first-degree murder and three counts



SCENE OF THE CRIME:
 1. Jacksonville, FL gas station where the tragedy took place.
 2. Business as usual weeks after Jordan's life came to an abrupt end.

of first-degree attempted murder. Dunn faces life in prison if convicted. A pre-trial hearing has been set for Feb. 6.

Calls and emails to Dunn's current lawyer, Cory Strolla, and Dunn's software firm, Dunn & Dunn Data Systems in Vero Beach, FL, went unanswered. But his previous attorney, Robin Lemonidis, claimed that Dunn shot up the car after the kids, whom he thought were gang members, verbally threatened him and pointed a shotgun at him through the back window. Police say they did not find any weapons in or around the boys' car.

Strolla has stated that he hasn't ruled out using a Stand Your Ground defense,

a Florida law that grants immunity to criminal charges and civil action for citizens who can show they were justified in using deadly force against a threat of imminent death or severe bodily harm, regardless of whether they could have retreated.

It is the potential for that defense that has reignited debate on gun laws and the efficacy of Stand Your Ground. Josh Horwitz, executive director of the Coalition to Stop Gun Violence, says it puts too much power into the hands of untrained gun owners, makes human life less valuable and allows people to think, "I can kill at will."

A Texas A&M study distributed

by the National Bureau of Economic Research backs up Horwitz's claims. The study, which examined homicides in 20 states with Shoot First laws, found an annual increase of 500 to 700 more homicides. FBI data also showed an increase in the number of justifiable homicides following the enactment of Shoot First laws, including in Florida where the rate rose by almost 200 percent.

Equally disturbing was a finding that when it comes to race, Stand Your Ground laws tend to favor Whites. Researchers at the Urban Institute investigating the racial impact of the laws found that when White shooters kill Black victims, 34 percent of the resulting homicides are deemed justifiable. Only 3 percent of deaths get a similar ruling when the roles are reversed.

While state justifiable homicide laws have seen some changes following Trayvon's death last February—legislation in Alaska and Iowa was shelved, and the American Legislative Exchange



Council said it would no longer push the measures—getting the laws repealed altogether will be an uphill battle against the powerful gun lobby. But sympathetic family members of victims have the potential to win over the public. This is what Jordan Davis' parents are banking on.

"This is bigger than Ron, me and Jordan," the teen's mother tells JET. "There are so many other people out there that have lost their families and no one hears their voice. We need to be that voice."

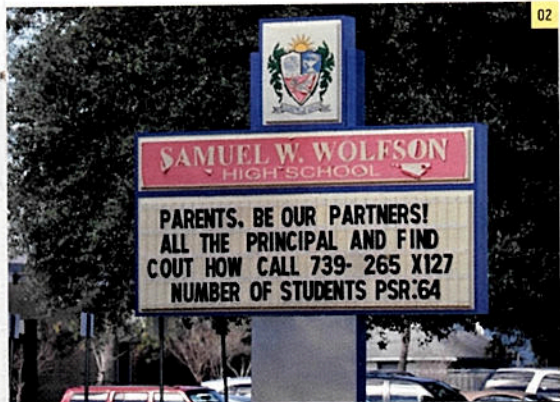
JORDAN WAS A good kid— a typical 17-year-old who had a penchant for skinny jeans, Vans sneakers, and football. His parents call him their "miracle baby," because he was the product of a high-risk pregnancy that came after McBath and Davis, then married, suffered several miscarriages. "I sat flat on my behind for nine months just to make sure that he got here," McBath remembers.

When McBath, a Delta Airlines employee, and Davis, a retired Delta employee, divorced McBath raised Jordan as a single mother in Marietta, GA. But when her son turned 15 she

WHAT'S NEXT: 1. Police mugshot of the accused shooter, Michael Dunn. 2. Jordan's high school makes a call for action from parents and concerned citizens.

AP PHOTO/JACKSONVILLE SHERIFF'S OFFICE, RICK WILSON/AP IMAGES

PHOTOS BY RICK WILSON/AP IMAGES



Jordan Davis

LOST WITHOUT YOU: 1. A Father's Day letter from Jordan. 2. The teen's shoes and belongings remain untouched. 3. Memories of the youngster with loved ones. 4. One of Jordan's last school photos. 5. The sweater Davis uses to help him cope with the loss. 6. The grieving father reflects on his son's passing. 7. Jordan's Florida bedroom.

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sent him to live with his father in Jacksonville so that Davis could help usher their child into manhood. In the two years that they lived together, the father and son built a bond that was unmatched; they went fishing and crabbing together and sat quietly among the palm trees and waterway in Davis' posh backyard, where they fed ducks while planning for the future. Jordan was set

to start his first job at a local McDonald's a few days after that fateful Black Friday; to help prepare his son for his employee orientation, Davis purchased a razor, with the intention of teaching him how to shave.

"All the things a father wants for his son, I wanted him to have," Davis says. "I wanted him to have his own apartment... I wanted to see him fall in love

AS NATIONAL DEBATE OVER THE RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS GROWS, THE UNITED STATES SEES A RISE IN GUN VIOLENCE

33,000 estimated annual shooting deaths by 2015

67.7% of 2011 homicides involved a firearm

88,000 US gun-related deaths from '03-'10

SOURCE: CDC; United Nations Office of Drug & Crime; FBI 2011 Crime Report



for the first time and get married and be there for that. He was being groomed to be a great adult who cares about the community and other people.”

The day before he was killed, Jordan showed his maturity when he agreed to give the Thanksgiving meal prayer. In it, he vowed to talk to God more often. “It was almost like a good-bye prayer,” Davis says. “I had never heard him speak that way.”

Now, Davis can't find rest. His miracle baby is gone. So searing is his anguish that Davis has resorted to sleeping with one of Jordan's sweaters, which still contains a hint of his son's cologne. “Every night is just so hard to sleep,” Davis shares. “But I keep that sweater with me and whenever it gets hard, I touch it and hold it close.”

He and McBath spend most of their days now giving interviews, organizing rallies and talking to kids about the need to love, rather than hate. McBath even started *WalkWithJordan.com*, an online petition aimed at getting the Obama administration to declare Stand Your Ground illegal under federal law. “I'm trying to get people to get back together and stop all of this,” Davis says, solemnly. “I don't have any revenge in my heart at all. The system takes care of that— that's between Dunn and the state of Florida, because being vengeful is not going to bring my son back. What I want is for us to stop acting like we're in the Wild West.”

“My son,” he adds, “left this Earth, but I want to make sure it was to make things better.”

THIS SPREAD: PHOTOS BY RICK WILSON/AP IMAGES
SCHOOL PHOTO: COURTESY OF LUCIA MCBATH