

ONE FAMILY VS . GANGS THEIR HOUSE HAS BEEN SHOT UP

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Tuesday, April 20, 1999

Author: SUZETTE HACKNEY FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER; DAVID MIGOYA
CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REPORT

Sleep didn't come easy for the Tobar **family** before this weekend. Now, it's nearly impossible.

After spending three years fighting back against neighborhood **gangs** and toughs, the Tobars were the victims of apparent retaliatory attacks over the weekend that left **their** home riddled with bullets and the windshields of **their** car and van smashed.

One bullet lodged in a wall two feet above where 8-year-old Aaron was sleeping. Two homes of relatives living nearby also were struck by bullets.

Still, the **family** said Monday that it isn't moving.

"We're going to protect and defend as much as we possibly can here," said Loretha Tobar, 38, who lives in the east side home with her husband and three of **their** four sons.

They spend nights checking and double-checking locks and ducking and dodging bullets.

Shots were fired into **their** home Saturday and Sunday nights. And bricks smashed the windshields of **their** vehicles. Police arrested five people Monday in the attacks, including 15-year-old twin boys who live in the neighborhood. Charges could be filed today.

Neighbors were still jumpy Monday night despite the overt presence of plainclothes police. Residents peeked out of barred doors and kept a close eye on anyone or anything that didn't belong.

Like the Tobars, neighbors are committed to ending the senseless violence.

"It's everybody's fight," said a 48-year-old man who did not want his name published. "We are his neighbors and we're going to support him."

The man's live-in girlfriend said the violence they've witnessed in the year since they purchased **their** home **has** left them afraid to even barbecue in **their** backyard.

"This is our first **house** and I'm scared to go out the door," the 42-year-old woman said. "It's just not right."

Police Chief Benny Napoleon vowed Monday to step in and extend comfort and protection to the **family** and swift justice to the Tobars' harassers.

"We will commit the resources to ensure **their** safety," Napoleon said. "No thugs are going to take over our neighborhoods. We are just not going to let innocent people be victimized. We must have people feel confident that when they step forward and assist us, that we are going to step forward and ensure that there are no repercussions."

On Monday afternoon, police **gang** squad members were walking the neighborhood, near 7 Mile and Schoenherr, to offer deterrence. Police cars -- marked and unmarked -- drove by the Tobars' home on Pelkey every few minutes.

The Tobars think the **gangs** are striking back because the **family has** led a fight to take back the neighborhood. They attempted to start a neighborhood watch program. Whenever they see **gang** activity, they call police. They report the license plate numbers of those who come into the neighborhood to buy drugs.

"There are so many warring **gangs** in this area and unfortunately so many kids who could get caught in the cross fire," said Loretha Tobar. "I've never **been** quiet about what goes on here and I've never showed any fear."

Loretha Tobar said she is trying to clean **up** her neighborhood because of her children. She wants to raise sons Aaron; Antonio, 14; and Andre, 17, without having prostitutes use abandoned homes on her street to conduct business and without young thugs gambling in nearby driveways. Though she doesn't regret her actions, she fears for the safety of her children.

Both she and her husband work afternoon shifts. The kids have safe **houses** in the neighborhood to run to if they need protection. On Monday, the three children -- exhausted and scared -- stayed home from school.

In the aftermath of the weekend attacks, Loretha Tobar was tired and shaky, but still defiant.

"I don't think that I'm so brave. I'm just doing what I feel I have to do for my **family** , to make it safe for them. I just know that this is something that **has** to be done."

The oldest son, 22-year-old Alvin Jr., is in the Marine Corps, stationed in North Carolina. He is on standby to go to Kosovo.

Alvin Jr. always acted like the protector of the **family** . He was the rock when a younger brother was threatened and his coat was taken when he walked home from school. He took charge when **gang** members **shot** the **family** dog in the backyard.

Loretha Tobar was relieved to get a call Monday afternoon from Napoleon, who promised the police would make her problems go away.

"I believe they're doing everything they can. It's just a slow process, and in the process some of us might end **up** dead. It's sad to say, but things might happen quicker if the morgue had to come out here."

Another Detroitier who tried to fight back against crime in his neighborhood was the target of a 1995 firebombing.

The Rev. Roosevelt Williams, who led a crusade to rid his west side neighborhood of drugs, died after his home was firebombed by vengeful drug dealers. Williams, 68, died in November 1996, but the fire instantly killed his 73-year-old wife, Eva, and **their** 6-year-old granddaughter, Natasha. They were sleeping when a Molotov cocktail was hurled through **their** front window.

At the time, police said drug dealers felt Williams, head of his block club, was behind police raids of crack **houses** .

After the fire, Williams was moved from nursing homes to hospitals, but the retired minister never regained consciousness. Two people were eventually arrested and convicted for the murders.

Malcolm Klein, director for the Center for Research on Crime and Social Control for the University of Southern California, said a **family** such as the Tobars would be better off leaving the neighborhood than fighting.

"What she's dealing with is not wonderful common-sense behavior. It's irrational behavior," he said. "A **gang** member just **has** to feel like he's fighting back. He **has** to shoot into her **house** . It doesn't even matter if he hits someone.

"I would get the hell out of there."

DAVID MIGOYA contributed to this report. SUZETTE HACKNEY can be reached at 1 -313-222-6672.

Caption: Photo PAULINE LUBENS/Detroit Free Press

Loretha and Alvin Tobar Sr. check damage to one of **their** two cars Monday after a weekend in which **their** Detroit home was fired on and **their** car windows smashed. One bullet lodged in a wall above where 8-year-old Aaron was sleeping. Five people have **been** arrested.

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: NWS

Page: 1A

Index Terms: FAMILY; DRUG ; GANG; LORETHA TOBAR ; ALVIN TOBAR ; HARASSMENT

Record Number: 9904200203

Copyright (c) 1999 Detroit Free Press