

YOUTH HAD HIS NEIGHBORS LIVING IN FEAR

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When the word got back that Tony Lamont Eaton was going to prison, "joy spread through this neighborhood like Santa Claus arriving on Christmas morning," said a 64-year-old Detroit resident.

He, like many of Eaton's older **neighbors** , requested anonymity before talking about Eaton, 16, who **had** developed a reputation **in** the west-side neighborhood as a break- **in** artist and a thief and gunman who preyed on everyone from small schoolchildren to the elderly.

"Some people said that if they saw him doing anything suspicious they was going to kill him," said the resident, a retiree who lives less than a block from the Eaton family house. The retiree said he believes Tony Eaton was responsible for a break- **in** at **his** home last year when about \$4,000 **in** household goods and jewelry were taken. "I was going to apprehend him or shoot him. If he **had** pulled on me, I would've shot him, pure and simple."

The man's bravado is not the norm **in** this community of mostly tidy, middle-class homes tucked just inside the Tireman- Livernois junction. Bravado, more often than not, is overridden by **fear** .

The people of this neighborhood and many other neighborhoods across the Detroit metropolitan area are angry and afraid -- and frustrated enough to make threats of violence themselves -- because of kid criminals who terrorize the streets and manage to stay giant steps ahead of the juvenile justice system.

Many **in** the Tireman-Livernois area refuse to even talk about Tony Eaton.

"The whole neighborhood was scared (of him)," said Brenda Sanders, 31, who described herself as a friend of Eaton's. "The reason that they won't talk about Tony is because they are scared. They said that if anything happened, Tony did it. And nine times out of 10, he did do it."

Those who talked often spoke also with empathy and sympathy about why Eaton, the youngest of seven children, ended up **in** prison. Mentioned most are **his** poor family environment, including the influence of **his** older brothers, two of whom are **in** prison. A third brother, Jackie, described by one law- enforcement official as a "one-man crime wave," was killed **in** a shootout at a suspected dope house nearby almost five years ago.

"Tony wasn't nowhere near Jackie," said a 26-year-old man who said he wasn't afraid of Tony but still asked not to be identified. But Jackie, he said, usually went outside the neighborhood to "do **his** dirt."

Tony, he said, stayed home.

Said the 64-year-old man: Tony Eaton "was a threat to the neighborhood. That's why you see all those bars and gates. He was dangerous.

"People," he said, "are relaxed now."

Tony Eaton grew up **in** a rickety 1 1/2-story white house with gray trim **in** the 6000 block of Eagle. Now he lives **in** prison.

The six-foot, 170-pound **youth**, who describes himself as shy and now sports a shaved head and a piercing stare, is Inmate No. 185177 at the medium-security Michigan Training Unit at Ionia, where he is serving time for two counts of assault with the intent to commit murder for shooting at two residents of the neighborhood.

Eaton was waived out of the juvenile justice system last June by visiting Judge Paul Mahinske, who wrote **in** the waiver opinion that Eaton was "beyond rehabilitation under regular . . . juvenile procedures."

Eaton, who **had** been admitted to the Wayne County **Youth** Home seven times and who **had** escaped from juvenile officials or juvenile facilities at least four times, "will continue to be dangerous to the public even if held **in** the juvenile system up to the age of 19," wrote Mahinske.

Eaton pleaded guilty to the charges **in** Recorder's Court and got an apparently inadvertent break when he was sentenced on Sept. 24, three days short of **his** 16th birthday, by Judge Vera Massey Jones to concurrent three-to-10-year sentences plus consecutive two-year sentences for using a gun during the commission of a felony.

According to court records, the sentencing guidelines established by the state Supreme Court recommended 10 to 20 years on both of the charges. The lesser sentence apparently was agreed to **in** error by the prosecutor handling the case, according to a spokesman for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, which has a policy of "no reduced plea, no sentence bargaining" **in** waiver cases. The incident is being investigated.

"Every time something happens people are going to say I did it," said Eaton during a recent prison interview. "That came from my family."

Eaton's parents -- Clifford, an auto worker, according to records, and Mattie -- moved to Detroit from Birmingham, Ala., **in** 1966. They divorced about 10 years later. She went on welfare. The sons began a long-term involvement with crime.

Dondi, 27, the oldest, is serving life for three counts of rape and three counts of armed robbery. Clifford, 23, is serving a six-to-10-year sentence -- plus two years for the use of a gun **in** the commission of a felony -- for three counts of armed robbery, bank robbery and assault with the intent to commit murder. He is listed by the state Department of Corrections as a "potential high assault risk." Jackie was 22 when he was killed **in** 1982. An uncle and cousin also have been shot to death, according to court records.

According to a pre-sentence investigation, Tony Eaton "was raised **in** a home where the father took little interest **in** the family and the mother was ineffective **in** providing discipline and order."

Detroit Police Sgt. Lemar Sneed, 51, who remembers chasing Jackie and Tony Eaton through the neighborhood, said that **in his** 30 years as a police officer he has "never met a family that was as crime-oriented."

Neither Clifford nor Mattie Eaton would say much about Tony's situation.

"I know Tony didn't particularly like how he was treated by police or how **his** brother was killed and nobody did nothing about it," said Mattie Eaton, who once described Tony as her favorite son and a gentle person. "I can't talk anymore. My husband doesn't want me to talk to anyone."

Said Clifford: "Nothing we say (will) help my boy anyway."

Said Tony: "When my brothers got locked up, the reputation moved to me. When something happens, people blame it on me."

Not that the reputation was always so troublesome to Tony Eaton.

According to court documents, when he was interviewed by counselors at W. J. Maxey Training School **in** Livingston County **in** 1985, Eaton said he got respect **in** the neighborhood because of **his** brothers' reputations, especially Jackie's death. The report found that Eaton "wanted to show he could be as bad as Jackie and even to develop a reputation like Jackie's."

According to the documents, Eaton bragged during a 1984 interview that he "was responsible for at least 50 other B&Es for which he is not charged."

But during the recent prison interview, Eaton said: "Yeah, I broke into some houses, not as many as they think I did, though. I took (Jackie's) death the wrong way. I took it like someone killed him so I'm going to be like him."

Neighbors said it all began much earlier than that.

They tell a story about a youngster, who, at age six or seven, was seen walking the streets carrying a large-caliber handgun and who would throw rocks at houses and curse loudly at adults, a youngster who at age 10 would ignore adults telling him to quit shooting **his** BB gun at other kids.

According to court documents, Eaton was described as a **youth** with a "low-normal level of intelligence" who, when attending school, was enrolled **in** special education classes; who supposedly **had** an eighth-grade education, but at 14 was reading at the level of an eight-year-old.

The reports tell of a kid who was detained by police at age six for malicious damage of property over \$100; who stole jewelry from **his** father **in** retaliation for having **his** bike taken away because he wouldn't attend school; who was on probation at 12 for breaking and entering and was made a ward of the state at 13 for armed robbery and assault and battery.

According to a pre-sentence investigation **in** a court file, Eaton once threatened to kill a student and a school department head with a broomstick.

He is, according to another court document, "a socially maladjusted youngster, who is emotionally constricted, self-centered, hostile and unpredictable." Said another: "Tony appears to have . . . no remorse for the victims."

Another report said: "Tony admits to becoming addicted to the excitement of criminal behavior and saw himself as being unable to stop the behavior."

During the recent prison interview, Eaton said he's lived "a dangerous life." He says he has been shot "a couple of times" and stabbed once by **his** sister **in** an argument about a television.

"I couldn't help but to grow up like this," he said. "This is all I know. The first time I touched a gun was when I was 13. A friend of mine **had** broke into somebody's house and came on my street with it. They gave it to me and I said, 'Yeah, this is mine.' I shot at a couple of people with it. I was just a kid. I **had** grown up this way and now I **had** a gun. I grew up **in** the wrong environment. That was my problem."

According to court documents, a juvenile officer from the Detroit Police Department's old 6th (McGraw) Precinct described Tony as "a real John Dillinger" and further commented that he needs "to be locked up with a ball and chain."

Said Tony: "I'm not a dangerous person. I'm a nice person. If you treat me right, I'll treat you right. I wasn't no angel, but I wasn't a little crook that everybody says I was, either."

To some he was much more than that.

"I believe Tony pulled a lot of B&Es," said Jim Allen, 18, who went to Munger Junior High School with Eaton. "Every time you would talk to somebody (about Eaton) that's all they could talk about -- 'My house was broken into or my car was stolen.' Some people are really scared. When they go out, they don't know where Tony's going to be."

Joseph Roberts, 18, who went to Munger with Eaton, said: "If other boys wanted to break into something, they would say, 'Get Tony, he's good.' "

Roberts said Tony would brag about how he and other **youths** robbed youngsters headed to and from school.

"He would grab kids by the neck -- **in** a choke hold -- and somebody else would take their stuff off," said Roberts. "If they wouldn't give it up, they would persuade them by choking them or putting a gun to their head."

Allen said Eaton and others would rob elderly people coming out of the Comerica bank at nearby Prairie and W. Warren.

"They'd send **in** a little kid, about six or seven, and he would come back out and tell them she's got this and this and this," said Allen. "When she came out, Tony and whoever he was with would wait for them to turn off the main drag and take their purse or whatever."

Sgt. Sneed said police received reports of such incidents at the bank.

Michael Whitney, 20, who lives on Eagle, near the Eaton house, said Tony was one of a group of kids who would steal cars and strip them **in** the garage of an abandoned house **in** the neighborhood.

Sneed said Eaton was a suspect **in** 10 to 12 armed robberies of truck drivers along W. Warren.

"He'd take anything that wasn't nailed down," said William Noles, 50, who lives down the street from the Eatons. Noles said Eaton was brazen enough to try to sell Noles a pistol and snow blower that **had** been stolen from a **neighbor** two doors from Noles' home.

"Did my **neighbor** know that?" Noles said. "Sure. But what good does it do?" Noles said he told the **neighbor** , but the **neighbor** apparently didn't do anything.

"If you're going to take it into your own hands, you better be prepared to take it all the way," said another resident who asked not to be identified.

Mark Johnson understands that.

Last spring, Johnson, 24, went to police, accusing Eaton of breaking into **his** house. A couple of days later, Johnson's house was riddled by bullets.

Johnson said: "I approached (Eaton) once to talk about breaking into my house because I knew he did it. I said, 'I want to talk to you about breaking into my house.' He said 'Yeah, I did it, so what are you gonna do.' He reached into **his** pocket and I said 'OK, OK.'"

"I was home one night after that and someone shot the windows out of my house. Bullets were flying everywhere. I **had** a three-year-old baby **in** there and my girlfriend.

"If Tony Eaton got back out, either I would be dead or he would be dead. I would have to protect myself, that's what police told me to do. If Eaton wants to stay alive the best place for him is **in** jail."

Eaton was arrested on March 20, after two shootings, including the incident involving Johnson. He was charged with assault with the intent to commit murder **in** both. Eaton was an escapee -- for eight months -- from a juvenile home at the time.

On March 5, police said, Eaton shot Carl Davis, 24, **in** the back of the leg after Eaton and a companion **had** gotten into an argument with Davis and another man. Davis and the other man **had** begun to walk away when Davis was shot, according to police.

Davis said that Eaton **had** shouted, "Man, you get out of my way or I'll shoot you," seconds before Davis and the other man began walking away. Davis testified that Eaton "crept up on us . . . and when I looked back, he was pulling."

According to court documents, Eaton admitted shooting Davis as he walked away. But during the prison interview, Eaton said a friend shot Davis.

"I didn't pull the trigger on Carl Davis," said Eaton, "My (friend) did. I told my man to fire him up. My man is stupid. He shot him and I went to jail for it."

Two weeks later, at 8:20 a.m. March 19, Mark Johnson was getting ready to climb into **his** pickup truck **in his** driveway when he saw Tony Eaton and another **youth in** the alley behind **his** house, according to the police report.

He told police that Eaton, standing about 25 feet away, raised what looked like a sawed-off rifle. He ducked under the dashboard a second before a single slug crashed through the front and back windows, shattering both. Johnson told police the shot missed **his** head by six inches.

That account, records show, is basically the same one Eaton gave to court officials when he pleaded guilty.

But when interviewed **in** prison, Eaton said Johnson was nowhere near the truck when he fired.

"I was just going to shoot up Mark Johnson's truck," he said. "I wasn't trying to shoot him. He was **in** the house when I shot at it. He lied **in** court and said I tried to shoot at him. That's bull----. He walked out (of the house) there after it was over. They wouldn't believe me because I'm a criminal. I've got a record. This guy works every day."

Said Johnson: "I took him to court on charges of attempted murder. Tony called me a bitch right **in** front of the judge. That didn't help **his** case any."

Neighborhood residents also say that on March 20 Eaton shot and wounded a 14-year-old girl.

Residents repeat the girl's version of how she was shot by Eaton during the attempted theft of \$100 FILA gym shoes.

Eaton and the victim's girlfriend -- and the police -- said the girl, who admits to playing hooky from school that day, was **in** a house **in** the neighborhood and was shot accidentally while Eaton was playing with a .22-caliber rifle.

Some people said they are still scared.

Davis, one of Eaton's shooting victims, said, "I really don't want to talk too much. I guess you've heard about **his** family's reputation. I've got my mother and father to worry about. They live around here. Yeah, I'm scared. Real scared."

Others say that although things have improved since Eaton has been imprisoned, he was not the sole perpetrator.

"He **had** a little gang -- seven of 'em," said William Noles.

"He **had** a gang," agreed another **neighbor** .

Some residents point to other houses **in** the neighborhood with other problem kids.

"Some of the other kids should be put away, too," says a man who asked not to be identified.

Said Eaton: "They're not scared of me, they're scared of their own kids. They're the ones who taught me this stuff. They think their kids don't do this stuff. Who do they think are doing it?"

Another resident, who asked not to be identified, said that you have to resign yourself to some things. And sometimes those somethings are Tony Eatons.

"So, you just put up with it," he said. "There are a lot of people here who cannot run because they've got no place to go. I want a nice, quiet neighborhood. But if I want to move, it shouldn't be because I am running from some hoodlums."

Eaton "was a bad boy **in** the neighborhood," said a 65-year- old man, who stopped working **in his** yard to talk to a reporter. He would not give **his** name.

He was asked if he was scared of Eaton.

There was a long pause, then a look of embarrassment.

"Yeah," he said.

Then he asked, worriedly: "He's **in** jail, isn't he?"

After being assured, he asked, timidly, one more question:

"For how long?"

Juvenile arrest, contacts rates for Detroit area

Figures show the number of arrests for 1985.

Crime Southfield Livonia Warren

Aggravated assault 1 15 20

Burglary 6 235* 68

Drugs 3 104 33

Homicide 0 0 0

Robbery 10 21 9

Sexual assault 0 5 1

Vehicle theft 53 42 19

Weapons 5 14 5

* Suspects and arrests

Number of contacts with police in Detroit precincts*

Crime 3 4 5 6 7 10 11

Assault 25 38 52 51 56 39 31

Burglary 12 36 63 31 34 22 50

Drugs 5 7 27 20 14 19 8

Homicide 0 1 1 1 1 6 3

Sexual assault 7 3 14 8 8 4 14

Robbery 29 19 49 32 37 33 23

Vehicle theft 7 2 14 8 9 5 6

Weapons 18 7 37 20 28 25 21

Crime 12 13 14 15 16 Total

Assault 40 21 52 51 122 578

Burglary 15 17 56 67 116 519

Drugs 3 29 9 8 8 157

Homicide 4 1 5 3 6 32

Sexual assault 11 5 10 14 20 117

Robbery 34 20 53 55 60 444

Vehicle theft 6 3 7 20 37 124

Weapons 24 12 26 29 36 283

* Based on 1985 precincts, New precincts were established Jan. 1, 1986.

CUTLINES

Tireman-Livernois area resident Joseph Roberts.

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Tony Lamont Eaton

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