

## **KIDS JUMP ROPE TO SONGS OF HEROIN GROWING UP IN JEFFRIES HOMES**

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"Starlight, Hootchie-Khan, R. D. one-two-three; Firecracker, Real Dope , Pony Down 'round and 'round...

**Jump rope song** lyrics composed of heroin "brand names," sung by children of the Jeffries Homes public housing complex

It is a gray, overcast Friday morning in the Jeffries Homes public housing project and a little girl, not yet old enough **to** be in school, intently pushes a big yellow toy dump truck along the sidewalk in front of Building 608.

The apartment building, a massive six-story structure near the intersection of Selden and Gibson, is the center of what police and residents say is a thriving heroin trafficking operation run by adults who employ teenagers and younger children as curbside heroin sellers.

ON THIS FRIDAY -- the first day of Police Chief William Hart's crackdown on the drug activity -- a 10-year resident of the Jeffries Homes, a woman in her sixties, allowed a Free Press reporter **to** spend the day in her four-room apartment. From her kitchen window, the woman can see much of Building 608 and the activity in the large open courtyard behind it. Over the past year or so, the people who live in the immediate area of the building have come **to** expect, if not accept, the presence of the drug peddlers.

But they say they cannot accept the effect the drug trafficking on their lives -- the climate of terror that has made some of them feel they have been made hostages in their own homes.

11:30 a.m.: The little girl with the yellow dump truck is still playing in front of 608. A few feet away, about a dozen teenage boys mill about. Most of them are dressed in green Army fatigue jackets and gym shoes. Occasionally one of them shouts "Good News, Good News , " the "brand name" of the heroin being sold today.

"These young ones are frightening," said the woman "They have no compunction about "taking you out' (killing you). Nobody threatens you directly, but if you come out of your building on almost any morning and see blood all over the place, that's an implied threat."

In the past three weeks alone, three men have been shot **to** death and another critically wounded during robberies in the immediate area of Building 608. The shootings and the daily gunplay residents complain about are all in some way drug- related, police say. The Jeffries Homes complex is just south of Wayne State University. The John Lodge Freeway runs through the complex.

Mrs. Z, the woman in the apartment, and two former residents who moved out last year because of the drug problems agreed **to** talk and spend the day with a reporter only if their identities were kept secret. All say they fear retaliation from the youths who sell drugs in the area from early morning until night.

DOWN IN THE COURTYARD, a car pulls onto the service drive off Selden. Three youths run **to** meet it, one leaning into the passenger window and talking briefly with the driver whose face cannot be seen. The youth then dashes off, disappearing inside Building 608. In less than a minute he is back at the car handing something **to** the driver. The car continues along the service drive as the youths begin shouting again **to** no one in particular.

"Good News, Good News."

Suddenly, a youth who is standing apart from the others inside the courtyard gives a hand signal, and the youths bolt as a group into the courtyard, disappearing single-file into a rear door of Building 608. A few minutes later, a police car cruises down the service drive. When it is gone, the youths return **to** their stations.

The little girl had continued **to** play the whole time, seemingly oblivious **to** the activity around her.

"It's a pattern," the woman said from her apartment. "They (the pushers) have lookouts all over the place -- hiding behind buildings and up in the windows. They're the first ones **to** know when the police show up."

MANY OF THE CHILDREN have been taught **to** run when they see the pushers running because the fleeing youths are sometimes being chased by police officers clutching holstered guns, the women said.

Others, like the little girl with the yellow dump truck, have come **to** accept all the running and chasing as normal.

The women hope the crackdown will work, but doubt it will have a long-lasting effect -- certainly not as long-lasting as the effect the drug trafficking has had on their lives and the lives of the children living in the project.

"After they (the children) see three or four shootings or see someone beaten with a baseball bat, they talk of the incidents as if they happened on television and not **to** real human beings," one of the visitors said.

EVEN THE MOST vigilant parents find that the flavor and the language of the dope business seeps into their children's play.

One of the former residents decided "it was time **to** go" when she heard her daughters, now seven and nine, playing **jump rope** and singing a **song** the lyrics of which were made up of the "brand names" of heroin.

Some of the hundreds of youngsters in the building remain inside their small apartments or play in the hallways after school **to** avoid contact with the pushers. But even there, there is little refuge. Addicts sometimes use the hallways and stairwells **to** sniff or inject their drugs, the woman says.

"**MOST OF THE KIDS** around here know what's going on," one of the former residents said. "I bet you couldn't find one child who's been here any amount of time who has not seen some kind of shooting or beating and God knows what else.

"If not that, then (they have seen) people running through here with the police behind them and guns being waved around. They're mutilated psychologically even before they get into their growth, and that's sad," she said.

The women believe the inability of the police **to** suppress the drug trafficking may have a more serious effect on the area children than the trafficking itself.

"They (children) see these dope dealers making the police look silly in the sense that they (the police) rarely catch anybody. And when they do, the people they arrest are right back out here in a couple of hours," one of them said.

12:45 p.m. The drug peddlers have suddenly disappeared. A police scout car pulls onto the sidewalk of the courtyard and the officers call over two women who are on their way **to** a maintenance building located a half block from Building 608.

The officers question the women about a report of a body being found in the area and a pair of boots someone has left in the snow a few feet away. The women say they know nothing about the body or the boots and the scout car continues along the sidewalk.

After questioning two other people crossing the courtyard, the officers drive off, waving away an EMS truck that has pulled into the courtyard behind them.

Two weeks earlier, police dressed in plain clothes quietly slipped into the area and suddenly whipped out their badges and rounded up about 35 people.

"Now that was really something," Mrs. Z says. "Those little guys (the pushers) didn't know which way **to** run, they didn't know who was the police and who wasn't."

Later, Lt. Eugene Rhodes of the police narcotics section said about 15 of the youths were taken **to** headquarters but police were able **to** hold only five of them because they were the only ones with narcotics in their possession.

1:15 p.m. The courtyard is swarming with uniformed police officers who are going from building to building yanking on the knobs of locked doors. "They must be having a raid," one of the women watching from the window says excitedly. Someone else comes in and announces that police with tracking dogs are combing the area. "They must be looking for that body," a woman at the window guesses. The little girl with the yellow dump truck is gone.

One of the women recounts an experience she and her two daughters had the night before they moved.

While returning home after picking up empty boxes at a store, their car was trapped in the middle of a nearby side street by a car and a jeep from which several youths were transferring guns, she said.

She sat in her car, she said, "wishing I was blind" for several minutes before the youths allowed her to pass.

A SHORT TIME LATER, back in her apartment, she said, she heard a barrage of gunfire coming from across the courtyard.

Police say much of the shooting occurs when young pushers run out of supplies and substitute "dummy" packs of heroin for the real thing, angering the customers. That is a common practice. Also common is the practice of drug peddlers robbing their customers.

"I never did think they were shooting at us, but a bullet doesn't have anybody's name on it," said Mrs. Z.

3:30 p.m. The courtyard and the walkways around Building 608 have been quiet for some time. The police officers with the tracking dogs have left. The lookouts are still in the courtyard. A few can be seen peering from around the corners of buildings. Groups of children pass through the courtyard on their way home from school .

Mrs. Z and her friends say the pushers are also contributing to the slow but deliberate destruction of the buildings that make up the complex.

According to the women, locks are ripped out of doors so the young pushers can gain easy access to the buildings in the event of a police raid; elevators are disabled to slow police in chases and laundry rooms in some buildings can't be used because washing machines and dryers have been vandalized by the pushers or their customers .

MERRICK MALONE, deputy director of the Detroit Housing Department, says vandalism at the project has reached epidemic proportions.

"We've replaced so many locks out there it isn't even funny," Merrick says.

He says the Detroit Housing Department, which operates the Jeffries Homes and the other public housing complexes in the city, is attempting **to** evict tenants who are suspected of being involved in the drug trafficking.

There is little else, he says, his office can do except refer complaints **to** the police.

His office says an estimated 1,300 low-income, elderly and handicapped persons live in the Jeffries buildings which ring the courtyard. Residents say from 30 **to** 40 percent of the units are vacant.

Police say drugs have been sold in the Jeffries Homes for years but the open street trafficking by gangs of youths is a relatively recent development. Officers say it began in the winter of 1980 after police cracked down on -- but didn't eliminate -- similar activity in the Brewster-Douglass public housing project, two miles east of Jeffries Homes. According **to** police, brazen heroin trafficking such as that in the Jeffries and the Brewster-Douglass projects occurs, **to** a smaller degree, at scattered intersections all over Detroit.

6 p.m. : It is almost nightfall. The courtyard is clear of children and the lookouts have apparently gone elsewhere. The selling in front of 608 has started up again.

Mrs. Z's buzzer sounds and she calls **to** a little girl playing in the hallway **to** answer it. The child, the seven-year-old daughter of one of the women who moved away, stands wide-eyed in the apartment doorway.

"Why don't you answer the door?" Mrs. Z. asks her.

"I'm scared," the child replies shyly.

THE CHILD has been like that since a badly beaten man fell into their apartment door a year ago after a cousin answered frantic knocking, her mother explained.

Nighttime, according **to** the women, is the most frightening time for those who live around building 608.

Mrs. Z, who plans **to** move soon from her \$40-a-month subsidized apartment, has often slept on the floor in her hallway, away from windows, on nights when there was heavy gunfire. About three months ago, she said, her nine-year-old grandson spent a weekend at her apartment for the first time. As he left with his mother, he told her: "Don't forget **to** duck, Grandma."

9 p.m.: A light rain has begun outside and the drug peddlers have taken refuge in doorways. The shadowy figures of the youths can be seen running back and forth from the curbside **to** the buildings.

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