

WHAT IF WE ALL FELT THE TERROR AT HOME?

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Thursday, September 11, 2003

Author: JEFF GERRITT

Our government is still hunting for Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and Sophia **Williams** is still looking for the killer of her 15-year-old daughter in Detroit.

The trauma and terror that drive a single mother to keep searching dark streets and after-hour clubs aren't much different than the collective trauma fueling America's hunts overseas. You get hit hard and feel you must do something.

Many Americans were willing to sacrifice lives and pay \$62 billion to topple the Iraqi government, and \$4 billion a month since to rebuild it, because they remembered those collapsing towers of death on Sept. 11 two years ago. Now President George W. Bush is asking Congress for another \$87 billion, and people are starting to ask what all that loot could do at home.

It doesn't seem to matter that Iraq had little or nothing to do with Al Qaeda or the killing of nearly 3,000 Americans. Iraq has been lumped into the war on terrorism, and people want action to make them feel secure again.

Williams ' daughter **Bryona** wasn't killed by foreign terrorists. Nor were any of the 17,000 Detroiters murdered in the past 30 years. Still, **Williams** and her 12-year-old daughter, Asisa, live in a kind of terror, suspicious of the outside world and unable to work or even relax.

Three weeks after **Bryona** was abducted in late March, her frozen body was found, nude from the waist down, in an abandoned east-side house. She had been strangled.

Since then, **Williams** and Asisa have lived on their own Ground Zero. **Williams** stopped working at a Meijer store when **Bryona** disappeared and hasn't worked since. Despite help from family, she can't keep up with the bills and plans to move soon to another state, hoping that a change of scene will enable her to work and get on with life.

"I don't know what to do," **Williams** told me. "How can anyone really function knowing that these people who murdered my daughter are still out there, knowing that they could do it to another child?"

She sees a therapist but finds herself distrusting and disliking people. Her daughter has become sullen and withdrawn; she's uncomfortable going anywhere without her mother.

Williams, frustrated by the inability of Detroit police to catch **Bryona** 's killer, took it upon herself to find him. Her street sources said **Bryona** was taken by a pimp called Showman, and she continues to visit illegal clubs, where underage girls dance, seeking Showman or information about the murder. **Williams** did not want her photo taken for this column because she feared it might blow her cover.

Crimestoppers is offering \$1,000 for tips; **Williams** is trying to raise another \$4,000 for the reward. "I pray every day that he's found, but not by me," she said. "I know what I'm capable of, and I don't want to leave Asisa."

Walk around **Williams**' home on Detroit's near west side, or any other poor neighborhood, and imagine what those billions spent in Iraq could do here, rebuilding the nation's cities. There'd be more cops to catch **Bryona**'s killer, maybe even to have found her while she was still alive. There could also be money for more teachers and smaller classes in schools, affordable housing to replace the abandoned buildings and vacant lots, rebuilt streets and sewers, and more recreation and jobs programs to give young people positive alternatives.

Three months ago, Wayne County Prosecutor Michael Duggan asked why we can't treat the deaths of people like **Bryona Williams** as gravely as deaths from terrorism. Truth be told, many people feel little connection. Urban neighborhoods, and the people who live there, are practically foreign to many people who live 30 miles away.

Because of 9/11, we all know what terror feels like -- and what it can move us to accomplish. We can't really afford to rebuild Iraq, but we're doing it anyway.

Maybe when we all feel a little of the terror that haunts Sophia **Williams**, we'll find a way to do the same at home.

JEFF GERRITT is a Free Press editorial writer. You can reach him at 313-222-6585, at gerritt@freepress.com, or write him in care of the Free Press editorial page.

Caption: Photo

BryonaWilliams

Memo: 9/11: TWO YEARS LATER

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: EDP; EDITORIAL

Page: 14A

Index Terms: SEPT11 ; ANNIVERSARY

Record Number: 0309110183

Copyright (c) 2003 Detroit Free Press