

GOOD KID ON BLOCK LATEST VICTIM - BOY KILLED IN DRIVE-BY SHOOTING 3RD OF 4 CHILDREN IN FAMILY TO DIE

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Mellony Mack can't shake the image: her young neighbor's feet, clad in a pair of red, white and black Air Jordan tennis shoes, dangling from his porch just minutes after the home was sprayed with bullets.

Instantly, she knew it was **Antoine Belton**, the 11-year-old boy she called the good kid on the block, the one who was going places.

Antoine had become a statistic -- the 15th metro Detroit child 16 or younger to die this year from gun violence and the third of his mother's four children to die in a 7-year span. Older brother James Washington, another shooting victim, died in 1996 and a sister, Jasmine, was hit by a car and died in 1995, neighbor Cornelius Washington said.

Antoine's grief-stricken mother, Chiquitta Washington, collapsed Tuesday afternoon after making an impassioned appeal for her son's killers to come forward. She was in fair condition at Sinai-Grace Tuesday evening, said hospital spokeswoman Janice Cosby.

Antoine, 11, and his cousin Alphonso Martin, 17, were sitting on the front porch of **Belton's** west-side home in the 10000 block of Mettetal Street when three or four men inside a gray car riddled the home with bullets Monday night, Detroit Police Inspector Billy McFarley said. Seventeen shell casings -- possibly from an AK47 assault rifle -- were found around the intersection of Mettetal and Elmira, police said.

Antoine was struck in the neck. He was pronounced dead on arrival at Sinai-Grace Hospital. Martin was shot in the chest and was also taken to Sinai-Grace where he was listed in serious condition, Cosby said Tuesday evening.

Mack, who lives across the street from **Antoine**, said she called her children in from playing outside just minutes before the shooting. Then, she said, she heard at least 10 gunshots.

"I don't know what I would have done if my children were hurt," Mack said. "I've got to get out of this neighborhood."

Antoine would have been a student at Brooks Middle School when classes resume Tuesday.

He never fought or cursed in the three years she knew him, Mack said. He was always mannerly and willing to help others.

Just last weekend, more than 500 neighborhood children gathered at Dynamo Deli for a back-to-school rally -- one of the largest crowds at the annual event. Managers of the deli credit **Antoine**

with the rally's success. He passed out more than 1,000 flyers for the event.

"He was a leader," said Johnny Lewis, manager of the deli. "He was the kid we clung on to."

Added Temmika Wilson, who lives on the block where the shooting occurred, "It's always the innocent children."

Antoine's best friend, Jamika Stevenson, lamented, "All the kids have to die for something they didn't do."

Detroit police were trying to find suspects and determine a motive Tuesday.

Wayne County Prosecutor Michael Duggan pointed out that the home where the shooting occurred is two blocks away from an abandoned home on Mettetal where drugs are openly dealt.

That state-owned home has been raided five times for drug activity since May 2000, he said.

Duggan sued the state in January to shut it down. The state claimed governmental immunity and won in a Wayne County Circuit Court hearing in June.

Now, Duggan said, he is almost positive drugs will turn out to be related to this case.

"The drug dealers are completely in control of that neighborhood," he said. "Their attitude is 'You can't touch us.' It's extremely frustrating."

Police do not believe drugs are an issue, but they have not ruled it out as a possible motive. Police spokesman Sgt. Ricardo Moore added that two plastic guns that looked real were taken from the porch as evidence.

"As far as whether the fake guns played a role in this, we don't know yet," Moore said. "They looked very real."

Funeral arrangements are pending.

In the meantime, **Antoine's** west-side neighbors remembered him in their own way.

Neighbors cried and chanted prayers of healing and forgiveness during a candlelight vigil at **Belton's** home, where passersby placed stuffed animals, notes, pictures and other mementos. It will be a nightly tradition until **Antoine's** funeral, because "we don't want people to forget," Mack said.

Dynamo Deli, at 16301 Plymouth, will donate proceeds from Thursday's business toward a fund for **Antoine's** funeral, Lewis said.

Tyree Kirkland, **Antoine's** 10-year-old cousin, said he'll miss playing PlayStation 2 and swapping Pokemon cards with **Antoine**.

But he takes comfort in knowing that "at night, **Antoine** is the biggest star in the sky."

If you have any information, call 800-773-2587.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Letters to Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick about violence and children can be sent to: Mayor's Office, 1126 Coleman A. Young Municipal Center, Detroit 48226.

The Million Mom March is a national grassroots organization that works to prevent gun death and injury. For information, call 888-989-6667 anytime and leave a message, or go to www.millionmommarch.org.

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Caption: Photo J. KYLE KEENER/Detroit Free Press

Antoine Belton's mother, Chiquitta Washington, is comforted by her only surviving son, Dejwaun **Belton**, and neighbor Barbara Mack, 9, on Tuesday afternoon as she returns to her home on Mettetal Street on Detroit's west side for the first time since Monday night's drive-by shooting.

Antoine Belton, 11, in a family photo.

Neighbors of **Antoine Belton**, the 11-year-old killed Monday, walk by the scene of the shooting on Tuesday. Stray bullets pierced this metal porch awning four doors away. The view is through a bullet hole.

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