

## **HIDDEN VICTIMS WITNESSES TO VIOLENCE ARE LEFT DYING INSIDE KEVIN, 11, DREAMS OF A PLACE WHERE IT'S SAFE TO PLAY OUTSIDE**

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Sunday, May 17, 1992

Author: LORI MONTGOMERY Free Press Staff Writer

Kevin Collins studies maps in his sixth-grade geography book and wonders about faraway places that rarely rate mention on the evening news.

"You ever been **to** Maine?" he asks a visitor **to** his grandmother's apartment, his dark eyes bright and hopeful. "You think it's safe there?"

Maine or Rhode Island or South Carolina -- somewhere, Kevin figures, 11-year-old kids must be free **to** roam and play. He knows it doesn't happen in Detroit; his young life is maddeningly constricted by fear.

It wasn't always so. When Kevin lived in the house his grandmother owned on Somerset on the city's far east side, he knew everyone on the block. He rode his bike far and wide. And he worked at a car wash, where he made a few dollars and a few friends and stayed "outside till nighttime."

Three years ago, the mortgage on the house on Somerset could no longer be paid. Kevin and his grandmother moved **to** a flat off East Jefferson in the rough shadow of what Chairman Lee Iacocca recently called Chrysler's "new ghetto plant."

From the window of their comfortable home, Kevin can point **to** houses where drugs **are** sold and **to** houses where people merely use them.

Here, Kevin said: "I don't go too far. I go from school **to** here. I ride my bike on this block."

There is reason **to** be fearful. In mid-December, Kevin begged his grandmother, Christine Lewis, **to** spend \$85 on a pair of new, white FILA gym shoes. Lewis predicted the shoes would bring trouble. Kevin begged and begged and even agreed **to** be satisfied if he got nothing else for Christmas. He got the shoes. In the snow, he wore plastic bags **to** protect them.

Within days, the shoes were gone. Stolen at gunpoint.

"A man ran up on me, grabbed me by my back and said, 'Cut through this field.' And then, so I went through the field, and he said, 'Don't try anything or I'll shoot,' " Kevin said quietly, tucking his chin into his Desert Storm T-shirt. The man took his shoes and let him go.

"I went home barefeet in the snow," Kevin said, "walking and crying."

Barely three months later, two boys in Kevin's class at Remus Robinson Middle School were gunned down within 10 days. Demetrius Davis, 14, was shot **to** death March 14 after refusing **to** sell drugs, according **to** a **witness** ; Carlos Arnold, 12, died March 23 when his sister's boyfriend opened fire on Carlos' family before committing suicide. Carlos' 2-year-old sister Nakitra also was killed.

Both deaths sent Kevin **to** his grandmother's bed.

"I have nightmares about Carlos and Demetrius both," Kevin said. "I had another friend who died, but he didn't hurt that bad, 'cause I didn't know him that well. He was about 8. Then when Demetrius died . . .

"I threw my lunch away after I heard Demetrius died. He's so young," Kevin said. "I thought he'd live **to** be a man."

Kevin sometimes wonders whether he will live **to** grow up. So far, fate has been kind. Years ago, when his mother started using drugs, Lewis, 46, was there **to** take him in. But raising a child in today's Detroit is a far cry from the childhood Lewis knew in small-town Mississippi.

There, Lewis said: "You could send your child outside, let them play all day long, when they came in, they wasn't nothing but dirty. That was all you had **to** worry about."

Here, "Every time Kevin leaves, I make sure I know what he's wearing. I tell him don't even talk **to** kids in the class. I say, go **to** school, do your homework, do what your instructors tell you **to** do, get out of school and come straight home.

"I tell him not **to** try **to** meet new friends, **to** stick with people he been knowing all his life. Because I seen where kids get into a fight and they call their big brothers and they be 25, 30 years old and they come take over a little 2-year-old kid argument. And then it cause killing."

Lewis sighed.

"Kids is **dying** every day," she said. "I try **to** instill in Kevin just go ahead and get an education. But sometimes you wonder if an education be so important **to** put your kid's life in danger **to** send him **to** school **to** get an education."

On a recent gray Saturday, Kevin gulped down a cheeseburger and fries at a Coney Island on Jefferson. He was eager **to** get back **to** the flat for a round of chess, a game he just learned **to** play. Walking home, Kevin noticed a pile of empty Mad Dog wine bottles on the lid of the restaurant's Dumpster, the remains of someone's Friday-night binge.

"This is the ghetto," he said, recalling Iacocca's remark. "Or the get-out."

Caption: Photo JOHN A. STANO

: Kevin Collins, 11, walks home recently from Remus Robinson Middle School on Detroit's east side. From the window of his home, he can point **to** houses where drugs **are** sold. Kevin sits in his grandmother's home with little **to** do. His grandmother, Christine Lewis, prefers he only associate with children he's known for a while. Kevin, his cousins Keondra Collins, 3; Alicia Pope, 8, and Davon Stephens, 10, use cards **to** pick a dream basketball team. Kevin Collins seems a little perplexed as he tries **to** grasp the concepts of parallel and perpendicular lines in his sixth- grade math class at Remus Robinson Middle School in Detroit.

**Left** : Kevin plays while baby-sitting his cousin Edward Warren, 5. Below: Kevin plays basketball in his aunt Gloria Collins' backyard. Kevin, whose grandmother started raising him years ago after his mother became a drug user, washes dishes at the home of his aunt, Gloria Collins. Kevin naps at home. He has nightmares about two friends who were shot **to** death.

\*\*\*

Memo: CHILDREN IN THE CROSS FIRE; SERIES

Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: COM

Page: 1F

Index Terms: DETROIT ; CHILD ; VIOLENCE; REACTION ; DEATH

Record Number: 9201180945

Copyright (c) 1992 Detroit Free Press