

TWO BOYS SHOT , TOO LITTLE OUTRAGE - COMMUNITY'S REACTION CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN SAVING OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE

Detroit Free Press (MI) - Wednesday, March 7, 2007

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Has it really been nearly 34 years since Detroit felt real **outrage** ?

I'm not talking about blood boiling over water rates or over-the-top anger about the mayor's family riding in a Lincoln Navigator. I'm talking about something more important, like the death of **two boys** .

It has been more than a week since 13-year-old Orlando Herron and 11-year-old Darren Johnson were **shot** to death by thugs in some deal that surely involved drugs. We still don't know the whole story. A confessed wife killer has replaced them on the front pages and at the top of the newscasts.

The grisly death and dismemberment of Tara Lynn Grant so stole our attention that we forgot to care about the mundane drumbeat of murder that echoes every other day in the ears of so many of our children.

But what also got lost was the murder of **two boys** . Oh, the Detroit Police were on it, and within days had arrested half a dozen people in the case. We know those people. But what we don't know is how many other people are guilty of turning their heads, not stepping in or stepping up out of fear. They are so paralyzed they don't realize that a united neighborhood can shut down a drug house or save a school. A united city can run thugs out of town or save **boys** ' lives.

Detroit felt some sense of united **outrage** in December 1973 when 6-year-old Keith Arnold and 8-year-old Gerald Kraft were kidnapped one Saturday evening as they played outside Keith's babysitter's house. Gerald was visiting his grandmother down the street and just went to Keith's to play. He was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Keith was the target of kidnappers who eventually asked his mother and her friend for a \$15,000 ransom.

Within four days of the abductions, more than 100 Detroit police officers, 16 Wayne County sheriff's deputies, several hundred additional backup officers from both departments, and an untold number of off-duty officers were working full-time on what was described as "the most intensive investigation in the history of the Detroit Police Department."

Life valued even **less** now

Innocence died with those **two boys** that winter. And in the years since, the lives of Detroit's children have taken on **less** and **less** value. As a young reporter in other cities, I remember reading stories about children dying here and wondering what kind of city would let that happen.

Now what kind of city would continues to let that happen?

The **two boys** killed a week ago were the second and third children fatally **shot** in Detroit in the first eight weeks of 2007. Last year four children had been fatally **shot** by March 1.

The family of Orlando Herron and his teachers at Brenda Scott Elementary in Detroit declined to talk about him. The school refused to release a photograph. Police continue their investigation into his activities.

But Darren Johnson appeared to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. And Linda Gostomski, his teacher last year at Coolidge Intermediate School in Ferndale, said his death was a huge loss for the school and the city.

"He was across the hall in fifth grade. I still checked on him. The week after he died, they were going to put him up to sixth grade because he was doing so well," she said. "He was an excellent math student. He had a great sense of humor. He was a good writer. He was a real athlete. He loved basketball. He would write about sports and what he liked to do and why. ... He would always ask for more challenging work. He would come to me. I always told him he could be anything he wanted."

Gostomski said Darren wanted to be a teacher and play in the NBA. He was, she said, among the most popular kids in a school that has been overwhelmed with grief.

"He was a magnet for friends," she said, then read the required year-end letter that Darren wrote last May:

Dear Mrs. Gostomski:

You are special because you are a nice teacher and you have taught me new things in math. I learned that if you do good things good things happen. My goal in life is to be a good person and never do wrong things. I remember when we went to Lansing for a field trip. I remember when we had some ice cream because we won the penny wars. My favorite things about fourth grade is gym, math, art and music. I will miss all my friends and all the funny things people will do. I will miss you when I go to fifth grade.

Love,

Darren Johnson

Gostomski created a picture board of photos to give to her **two** student teachers last year. After Darren's death, she asked for it back.

"He left a hole in my heart," she said. "We just had a really good connection. It's been hard on the kids, **too** . But I wanted everybody to know that this was a really normal child who worked hard in school and hardly missed a day of school, just loved to work and do his best. He wasn't this drug runner that everybody was thinking he was."

Save the other children

Darren and Orlando are gone. But what are we going to do about the rest of our children, whose resources are stolen by unscrupulous money whores in the Detroit Public Schools, whose innocence is taken by thugs and drugs in their neighborhoods, and whose deaths are forgotten as we focus our attention on the story of the week instead of the story of our lives?

The death of Tara Grant was a huge tragedy, and, of course, we'd be compelled to learn what happened to her, have to know, need closure. But I want to know even more what happened to **two little boys** who were executed in a drug house.

They had futures, **too** .

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ILLUSTRATION: Photo

CAPTION: Darren Johnson

MEMO: OTHER VOICES

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Edition: METRO FINAL

Section: EDP; EDITORIAL

Page: 13A

Index Terms: column

Record Number: dfp0000399027

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