

Our Children are Dying; They are Being Killed©

(Children Killing Children)

*By Judy Martin (11/15/00; updated 8/23/02)
Survivors/Victims of Tragedy
Black on Black Crime*

Until May 23, 1994, I had two wonderful sons. Then my youngest son, Christopher Martin, was killed during a carjacking. He was sitting in a car that someone else decided they wanted. A young man got into the car that my son and a friend of his were sitting in and started shooting. The carjacker began shooting as soon as he got in the car, which was a coward's act. He missed Chris' friend, who was then able to get out of the car, but he shot Chris in the chest, pushed him out of the car and ran over him as he drove off. The murderer was caught within a few weeks, and now he is in jail for a long, long time. His family is changed forever. My son is dead and the lives of his family and friends are changed forever. Two families have been devastated and harmed forever.

Words cannot fully express, explain or describe the emptiness, despair, pain, anger, rage, devastation and loss that a parent feels when they lose a child. The death of a child, especially through violence, is not comparable with the death of anyone else, no matter how close they are to you. I wonder what the statistics are for the deaths (either naturally or through suicide) of parents after they have lost a child to violence. I know that I was almost one of those statistics.

In Greater Cleveland, Ohio, there have been over 800 babies, teenagers, and young men and women from birth through the age of 25 who have been killed since 1990. (These statistics are referenced on Exhibit A, which is attached hereto and incorporated herein.) This total is also approximately 42% of the total number of homicides since 1990, and is almost twice the number of people who were killed during the Vietnam War from Cuyahoga County. If names of all the children who have been murdered in the United States since 1990 were listed on a memorial wall, it would be twice the size of the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

Since 5/23/94, I have become involved in various organizations that work toward the end of violence, such as, Black on Black 2000 (Art McKoy, Willie Horton, Willie Edwards, Ernie Harris and others), VOICES (Delores Walton, Iris Sullen, Ethel Jackson and others), Peace in the Hood (Khalid Samad and others), and recently, the Million Mom Group of Cleveland. I also founded a support group called Survivors/Victims of Tragedy in 1998. We meet at Antioch Baptist Church on the second Tuesday of each month at 7 pm during the months of September through May. Survivors/Victims is also a department of the Ohio State Association of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World, and is an affiliate of Black on Black.

The number of homicides have gone down in recent years due, in part, to the hard work of members of these organizations. During the times I have been able to speak at the schools with Ms. Walton & Ms. Sullen, I've seen the impact these presentations make on the students when we talk about the day our grandson or sons were killed and about the need to find ways to resolve disputes other than with guns or knives. Ms. Walton also takes the same message to the

detention center. The presentations always are powerful and to the point. When we speak to the students, we hope that our messages of non-violent resolutions to disagreements are heard. There are almost always tears. Whenever possible, a casket is brought to emphasize the point that DEATH is final, and once the lid of the coffin closes, it does not open again.

During the year following my son's murder, I started compiling lists of kids killed from public records in Cuyahoga County. The numbers astounded me. Before Chris was killed, when I heard of the death of a young person, I always felt sorrow for that family, and at the same time hoped that it wouldn't happen to our family or anyone else, for that matter. But although it seems bad at times, until you are directly affected, the homicides only seemed to be happening now and again, or at least somewhere else. But as the lists grew and the names of more and more kids were added, I thought, "We are at war! Our children are killing each other." Back in late 1994 or during 1995, the members of VOICES discussed the idea of building a Memorial Wall with Mayor White, who was mayor of Cleveland at that time, and he referred us to an architect whose office prepared several different designs for our consideration. Nothing concrete ever materialized after those meetings or subsequent efforts.

In 1997, at the urging of Art McKoy of BB2000, I was able to have a portable Memorial Wall built through the generosity of two companies that donated material and services. Wherever the Wall goes, it makes an impact. Almost anyone who looks at the Wall will see the names of their children, friends or children of friends who have been killed. If over 800 children have died in Cuyahoga County, Ohio since 1990, how many children have been killed all across the United States? As mentioned before, if we had a Memorial Wall with all the names of children who have been killed nationally, I am sure it would be twice the size of the Vietnam Memorial Wall.

The Memorial Wall is always at the candlelight vigils we have with the family and friends of a murdered child. At all of the vigils, we talk about the need for peace and the need to resolve disputes through discussion - not with weapons, which usually results in death. Brother Samad has a saying that goes like this: "Before you Shout it Out, Shoot it Out or Fight it Out -- Peace it Out, Work it Out, and Talk it Out." There have been so many vigils and marches since 1994. I know our messages, foremost among them: LOVE, COURTESY, RESPECT, TOLERANCE, PATIENCE, STOP THE MADNESS, STOP THE VIOLENCE, SAVE OUR CHILDREN, GANGS AND DRUGS MEAN DEATH, USE YOUR BRAIN -- CHOOSE LIFE NOT DEATH, have reached a lot of children and adults.

This year, Art McKoy pointed to an abandoned building across the street from his barbershop and said, "we should put a Memorial Wall on that building." So, I called lumber companies, printing shops, and sign shops. As a result of those calls and the assistance of many people from the community and a couple organizations, on August 2, 2002, we dedicated a Memorial Wall/Wall of Sorrows that lists the names of over 800 children and young adults who have been murdered in Cuyahoga County, Ohio since 1990. It is 4' x 30' and is on the Memorial Wall Building at 14748-70 Euclid Avenue, East Cleveland, Ohio. Parents have also put pictures of their children on the building, along with flowers and other mementos. Harry Bell, a local artist, also donated his time and painted four beautiful murals on the building. Various community organizations are also putting boards with their names and/or logos up on the building.

We need more organizations and parents to join together to stop this slaughter. Too many of our children seem to have lost feelings of love and respect for themselves and others. If you don't feel your life is worth much, or that you will die before you can graduate from high school, it's much easier to shoot, stab, or beat someone else to death. We have to let all of our children know that they are important, precious and loved, and not just the children of our immediate family, but also the children of the neighborhood and every child with whom you come into contact.

Also, creating hysterical laws that put young people on death row or in prison with older men or women who are long-time criminals will not help in the long run. If we continue warehousing people for first-time, non-violent offenses with lengthy sentences, without providing intensive counseling and educational courses, we will continue to reap the consequences of the loveless and soulless society that we are becoming.

In our continuing effort to save our children, we need more involvement, dedication, caring, and love. We need the participation of more men and women, parents, clergy, social and community workers, churches, school employees, and all the politicians who say they have been elected to serve the people. If we come together, maybe our children will begin to feel safe again and I can stop adding names to portable Memorial Wall.

On August 2, 2002, I was able, with the help of many, to dedicate a Memorial Wall on a building in East Cleveland at 14748-70 Euclid Avenue. Many families have put pictures of their children on the building and Harry Bell, a local artist, painted some beautiful murals.

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Exhibit A

The following are the statistics* for Cuyahoga County, Ohio:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Homicides</u>	<u>Homicides in the 0 to 25 Age Range</u>
1990	221	99 = 45%
1991	236	88 = 37%
1992	222	91 = 41%
1993	218	96 = 44%
1994	180	74 = 41%
1995	166	76 = 46%
1996	144	59 = 41%
1997	121	47 = 39%
1998	123	47 = 38%
1999	106	46 = 43%
2000	94	39 = 41%
2001	<u>110</u>	<u>47 = 43%</u>
Total	1,943	811 = 42%*
2002		28 through 11/02

* This also includes approximately 25 deaths that resulted because children were playing with guns.