

November 26, 2002

Racquel Chatmon  
Douglas Clifton  
Plain Dealer  
1801 Superior Avenue  
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

Dear Ms. Chatmon & Mr. Clifton:

I would like to respond to some of the statements made by Mr. Fulwood in his column on Friday, May 17, 2002, regarding my participation at the Town Hall Meeting conducted by Peter Jennings on May 14, 2002.

I did not "seize" control of the microphone. I waited in line like everyone else and only spoke when it was my turn. I then introduced myself and some of the various organizations I am associated with (i.e., Survivors/Victims of Tragedy, Black on Black 2000, VOICES, Peace in the Hood and Million Mom March).

The following is the statement I wanted to present to the panel: "Our children are being murdered everyday. Murder is everywhere. We need the help of the media, both local and national, to help people realize that it doesn't just happen over there or only to someone else. We need more than 5 seconds of occasional air time and not just when there is a recent dead body. We need the media's help to inform the public and to create more proactive groups and programs. We need assistance in getting the word out that there are a few of us involved in efforts to try to save our children. We need more people. I don't want any more mothers to have their hearts cut into pieces like mine was on 5/23/94 when my youngest son was killed. In Cuyahoga County, since 1990, we have lost 824 children and young people between the ages of birth through 25. If you think of Cuyahoga County as a neighborhood in the U.S. and that all neighborhoods affect other neighborhoods, you soon realize that 100,000 children and young people have been murdered in the U.S. since 1990. That's more than we lost in Vietnam. Since 1990, 42% of the total homicides have been of kids from birth through 25. It happens everyday and no one is paying attention until 1 or 2 kids kill classmates and teachers. We need time on programs to talk about what is being done, what could be done, and to organize the parents and community to stop the hate and violence."

I did not ask the panel members to stop the killing or solve the problems facing our children and families today. I asked for their assistance in presenting information about organizations that are trying to spread the messages of peace, nonviolence, love, tolerance, and courtesy. I asked for their assistance to encourage more people to become involved in stemming the tides of violence that have taken so many of our children from us. I thought that by working together, we might be able to begin to solve the problems.

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He says that I understand how the media works. I'm not sure what he means by that, because our messages have seldom been heard. If my name has been in a few articles, it has been there along with Art McKoy, Delores Walton, Khalid Samad, Abdul Shahid, Iris Sullen, Ethel Jackson and others when we have marched, participated in vigils or memorials, spoke at schools, detention homes, community groups, etc. There were also plenty of times when there were no articles about our efforts. If my name showed up when my son was killed, you should know that I wish with all my heart and soul that Christopher had not been killed and, therefore, no articles would have been needed. In 1994, when a young man was killed, it seemed like the media assumed that it was because they were involved in gangs, drugs, or other wrongdoings. That wasn't necessarily true then or now. Our family stepped forward to talk to the media because my son was not involved in any of those things and we did not want it said that he was. He was just sitting in a car that someone else decided he wanted.

I pray that Mr. Fulwood never experiences this particular type of pain or grief. I wonder what kind of advocating he would do then. Who he would try to get to listen. But then, I'm just an ordinary type of person. I'm not rich, beautiful, powerful or connected to the movers and shakers. I don't have a pulpit to preach from; a newspaper that prints my opinion regardless of what it might be; and I don't have hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy space on TV or in newspapers. If I had that kind of money, I would build a Memorial Wall/Wall of Sorrows so that the families and friends of more than 800 children and young adults would have a place to go to place flowers, candles, or mementoes. A Wall that could serve as a wakeup call to the county, state and country and all parents that our children have been at war in this country, and we have not mounted a concerted effort to stop this war.

Wars anywhere are terrible and horrible tragedies based on greed, power hungry individuals, prejudice, hate, intolerance, economic deprivation, and brutality, among other reasons, and we should help bring peace wherever and whenever we can. Why can't we also bring that effort for peace and civility to our children. If I stood on the top of the tallest building in Cleveland, and yelled out as loud as possible, no one would hear. But, if the print and electronic media helped us out by giving voice and space to the need for all of our efforts toward peace, love, tolerance, kindness and courtesy, as well as the groups that are working toward those goals, more people would join. More groups would be formed. More partnerships created. And less children would be killed. None of us can solve this problem alone. Not me. Not reporters or editors either, but together a lot can be done. All we are asking is that you [the media] "collect, package and sell this information" so that all citizens are informed and, thus, empowered to work for change.

Very truly yours,

Judy Martin, Survivors/Victims of Tragedy  
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cc: Ted Henry  
Peter Jennings