



Video Story Transcript

Memorial: Youth Violence Then and Now -- Part Two

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Link to YouTube Video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CfifI xj-FpA>

Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

The first thing we heard was that he'd been shot. I stayed on the phone with YCS friends long into the night. It was as if we held a phone vigil. Maybe we could pull him through. Cecil and Joe had been to a dance in their neighborhood that night and they were walking home and this other kid, older a little bit. They didn't know him. Walked up to them and said, "Where are you from?" And Cecil, just as any good, Catholic, Chicago kid would, he answered, his parish, Sacred Heart. "BOOM!" Just like that. The kid took out a gun and shot him. Cecil's chest lay open to the moonless sky. We didn't know many details, we just heard that Joe didn't know what to do. I mean stay with this friend or go run for help. There were no cell phones back then. And I just keep picturing Joe with Cecil, then running to get help and then like a film thrown into reverse, running back. And then, "No, no! We should get help." And running, just not knowing what to do.

I'd never been to the wake of a young person, a teenager, somebody my age. When we got to the funeral home, women with hats and powdery cheeks and older women smelling of perfume were milling about. And I was in grief before I even walked into that main room because I realized that Cecil had grown up much as I did. Leaned into the body of mothers and aunties and grandmas. The soft flesh of women's arms wrapped around him, falling asleep in the heat of their bodies. And I knew with surety that the dividing line, that color line, in our city separated me not only from my black friends but from the familiness of my black friends. And then I saw, uh, Joe and as high as his face could lift and a smile was how far it fell. His skin hung loose over his jaw. "Thanks for coming," he said. Still the master of ceremonies, we YCS kids, white, black and brown walked to the casket together.

We stared at Cecil's body of brackish dust. Part death, part Cecil, still. He looked like a jewel floating on the white, pleated linen below him. He looked so young, like a child. Way too young to be dead. I saw that dead

people looked a lot like. White people may be a little more pasty, chalky, white. Black people may be more ashy gray. But both as far away as the deepest stone at the bottom of Lake Michigan.

The adults, they knew the manners of death. They held out holy cards to people. They, they prayed their Hail Marys and Our Fathers. But we kids were lucky, we were young, we didn't have to say things like, "Oh, he looks good." No, we just stood there silent...shattered. Maybe it was me, I don't know, who broke first. I don't know who fell on me and who I fell where my body began or where it ended. I just know the room melted away as we cradled each other in front of Cecil McClure's casket.

It's as if we just wanted to crawl into each other's comfort. To hold each other as we felt the truth of it. Our friend is dead. Our friend dead. Our friend is dead. The truth beat against our hearts like a drum.

"Terence Hollands, Delvonta Porter, Devon Varner..." the reading, the memorial reading of the names continues. Four thousand children shot, 263 children dead. The only response to a child's grave is to lie down before it and play dead. The same youth performers came out into the sanctuary again. My same teen, my sentinel, at my side, appeared and she gestured for me to stand up. And all over the sanctuary, the teens were leading us outside for a profession, procession, a procession through our neighborhood to reclaim our streets. To put an end to violence.

A musician, one of the violinists, led that procession. Playing a song, now a refrain, we had heard often in the service, so everybody began to sing. "Pour out your heart like water for the lives of our children. Let justice roll like an ever-flowing stream." We turned a corner and television cameras appeared. It felt like an obstruction, kind of obscene. You know, we've been in the quiet of the sanctuary, then the quiet of the night and then, boom, these bright white lights. Like a self-conscious kind of spectacle. But also, you know, lending a kind of layer extra layer of importance to the ritual. I mean we did want people to know. To know so that maybe we could believe that the denial was over. People were coming together because it was in our power to change things.

When their procession was over, I hugged my teen goodbye. I thanked her. And I went to walk to the parking lot to get my car but I thought, "No, I'll go in the church and a look. I'll just see." I went into the church and I found it. The sign-in book was still there. I found my name and I checked yes. Yes, I had lost a loved one to violence. Yes, I will work for peace. Have to commit to peace. For all the children still living, growing and dreaming in every neighborhood across this nation.

Yes.