

Teenager's note foretold his shooting death

He wrote "Lamont Adams was gunned down" on a paper napkin his grandmother found. The next night, he was killed.

Natalie Pompilio, Inquirer staff writer

Lamont Adams must have known they were coming for him.

The night before the 16-year-old was killed just blocks from his North Philadelphia home, he wrote a few lines on a white paper napkin at the dinner table, then left it behind when the meal was over. His grandmother Jennie Clark found the note later that evening.

"**Lamont Adams** was gunned down, son of Daneen Adams and James Edward Mathis," it read.

Clark, shaking, went to her grandson's room and confronted him with his own words.

"He said, 'Oh, Grandma, I was just writing' and he took it out of my hand," she said, imitating the slightly impatient tone the boy used.

But it was more than that.

On the night of Sept. 23, Adams was walking near 26th and Cambria Streets when a vehicle pulled up next to him. A man stepped out with a .45-caliber handgun. He shot Adams, then stood over the fallen body and fired at least a dozen times more.

Then the gunman got back into the vehicle and sped away.

"It was powerful hate," said Clark, 56, wiping tears. "Why didn't he come to us if he was in trouble? Why didn't he tell grown people? He didn't tell me. He knew I would have sent him away if he did." Clark had been raising Adams since he was an infant.

Almost seven months after Adams' death, Philadelphia police are still seeking his killer. Detective Jim Burns said investigators "have positive movement" on the case and expect to resolve it.

"Some cases are a little more difficult than others," Burns said. "Sometimes it is difficult when people have a fear of coming forward. That's an obstacle we have to overcome."

Violence isn't new to this neighborhood. Adams was struck down only blocks from Peirce Elementary School, where 10-year-old Faheem Thomas-Childs was shot and killed in February 2004. In February 2005, in a home only a half-block away from where Adams was shot, a 67-year-old woman, her grandson and another teenager were killed.

Reluctant witnesses aren't new to the neighborhood, either. After Thomas-Childs' murder, city officials said the lack of people willing to describe what they had seen that day stymied their investigation. Police arrested two men but say as many as five more might have been involved in the gunfire that littered the streets around Peirce with dozens of shell casings.

Yet there is one difference between Adams' slaying and the others: His death received very little media attention. Thomas-Childs' name became an anti-violence rallying cry. The murder of Willie Mae Alston, 67, angered many in the city. Adams was virtually ignored: "Police yesterday released the name of a person killed Thursday night in a street

shooting in North Philadelphia,” began one four-sentence news story about his death.

“It made me feel like, ‘Just another little black boy gone. Who cares?’” Clark said.

She has publicly begged for witnesses to come forward in her grandson's slaying, taking her plea to Strawberry Mansion High School, where Adams was a junior, and to her neighbors.

“A lot of people are scared,” she said. “But if they don't start coming forward, they're going to feel the same pain I'm having. You think it won't happen to you, but it does.”

The motive behind Adams' killing is still unclear. He was not involved in illegal activities, his family and police say. There was no dispute about a girl. He did not owe anyone money.

But the word on the street is that Adams was killed because he was a snitch, reporting an illegal dice game to police—then leaving with his winnings before they arrived, Clark said.

But he did no such thing, his grandmother said. He preferred to stay inside and play video games. He was the neighborhood comedian, “the next Eddie Murphy,” he was fond of telling her. She called him the “Prince of 27th Street” because everyone knew him on the stretch of road where he grew up.

She is still saving money for his headstone. When it is installed, it will read “Farewell to the Prince” and show a smiling picture of Adams.

“He had the prettiest, whitest teeth,” Clark said.

Clark did everything she could to keep her grandson safe. She took a job in his school to keep an eye on him. She met his friends and watched what they did together, knowing

when they tried beer but relieved they were staying away from drugs. She still has an “Ident-a-Kid” card—complete with his photo and fingerprint—from his elementary school days, a precaution in the event he were snatched away from her.

“Nothing I did kept him safe,” she said. “I thought because I was in church and I lived right and I never harmed anyone, I thought God would protect us.”

She still worries about him. Just this week, Clark said, she was ripped from her bed by the sounds of gunshots outside. It sounded like men were walking down her block, just shooting and talking.

“I was terrified,” she said, “and then I realized he wasn't out there.”

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