

What Killed JoJo?

On January 19, our son 23 year-old son, Joshua "Jo-Jo" White was returning home with friends from work at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle school when he was shot to death in cold blood. His last words were "Peace, brother. One love". His killer escaped, and, as of this writing, he is at large. We, of course, want this man off the streets so he is unable to hurt or kill again.

To us, however, the real issue is not who killed Jo-Jo, but what killed him.

Part of the answer lies in who Jo-Jo was. He was born and raised in San Francisco, attending public schools. He grew to love the city for its progressiveness and its diversity. He had a passion for baseball and basketball, playing in nearly every field, gym, and playground in the city from Chinatown to Hunters Point. He enjoyed his work with children at the Recreation Center for the Handicapped, the Cross-cultural Family Center, Audrey L. Smith Developmental Center and, finally, at Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School. He was especially concerned with the effects that violence and inequality in our society have on these children.

He became a political activist as well, knowing we all have the right and the responsibility to make the world a peaceful, healthy, nurturing place where children of all nations can grow into peaceful, healthy and nurturing adults.

The hundreds of people who attended the candlelight vigil at the site where he was fatally shot, and the memorial service to honor and celebrate his life are a living testimony to the loving, hopeful and generous person he was.

How did Jo-Jo develop into such a person? We believe it was because he was allowed to. There is an African saying—it takes a village to raise a child. Jo-Jo had the good fortune to have a village to grow up in, from a relatively prosperous, peaceful, and loving family life to a community of friends from every neighborhood of San Francisco, from every sexual preference, race, class, political and religious point of view. That experience gave him an identity much larger than himself. It helped him become a man who didn't simply tolerate differences in people, but one who honored and loved the diversity in humanity. It provided him with an inner wealth that he carried to child-care centers and basketball courts from San Francisco to Havana, Cuba, an experience that propelled him to an even broader concept of who he was and what the human race is. That village grew from a small family to this global village called earth.

When Jo-Jo died he was truly a citizen of the world, an internationalist. One of his last political activities was to attend a fundraising meeting to defend the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal, another world citizen who is on death row in Pennsylvania for the crime of sharing Jo-Jo's compassionate, hopeful and generous view of humanity.

How does all this explain what killed this good son of ours?

Jo-Jo was killed by the same social system that he was trying to change. It's a system that takes food from inner-city school children so that wealthy corporate executives and stockholders can pay less taxes. It's a system that closes factories in South Central L.A. so that stockholders can earn greater profits from the labor of Malaysian children. The same system that cuts assistance to the blind, poor, the young and elderly to feed the hogs at the Pentagon feeding trough. It's a system that insanely proposes more violence and injustice - in the form of the death penalty and the "three strikes" incarceration frenzy - to end violence and injustice. It's a system that is dividing its citizens—white against Black against Asian against Latino against immigrant, old against young, men against women, and even parents against their own children.

The real criminals are the antisocial monsters who are defending and perpetrating a social system that is making war on the poor and in the process creating heartless and hopeless people like the man who killed our son. That man is as much a product of this inhumane system

as a Patriot Missile. He obviously had no village that might have given him the love and respect that would have made his horrendous crime impossible. Some people will argue that he had a choice between right and wrong. But if he was denied choices as a child, how could he learn to make the right choices as an adult? If we don't give a child a decent life, how can the child grow up to respect life?

If we had a just society, one that respected children in all their great diversity, one that offered real equal opportunity, liberty and justice for all, our son Jo-Jo would be here living a loving, hopeful, and generous life. And so would the young man who killed him.

Naomi White and Derrel Myers

Naomi White and Derrel Myers, "What Killed JoJo?" S.F. mid 1990's



'JoJo' at a childcare center in Havana, Cuba, 1993

Peace
If I could change the world
I'd dismantle all the bombs
If I could change the world
I would feed all the hungry
If I could change the world
I would shelter all the homeless
If I could change the world
I would make all people free
I can not dismantle all the bombs
I can not feed all the hungry
I cannot shelter all the homeless
I can not make all people free
I can not because there is only

one of me.

When I have grown and I am
strong I will find many more
of me.

We will dismantle all the bombs
We will feed the hungry
We will shelter all the homeless
We will make all the people
free.

We will change the world
me and my friends
all together, together
at last.

by JoJo White, 1984, age 11

