

Phoenix Teens - News & Views

By **Aprelle Alexander-Williams**
Special to the Phoenix



Black-On-Black Violence: A Teen's Perspective

I believe that Black-on-Black violence is the most senseless phenomenon in the world. Not only are we destroying each other, but an entire race as well.

One of the reasons I say "we" is because most of this violence takes place among young Black males between the ages of 16 and 32. I'm 16 and this whole thing is very scary.

As a teenager I know that life can be hard, especially for Black teens, specifically, Black males. But as hard as living is, it is very easy to get a gun off the streets, cheap. Unfortunately, as teens, we want the easy way out. We want instant gratification. This is why many of us are drawn into the quick money that drugs offer - not realizing that the quick money can mean an equally quick death.

The need to be accepted is another reason "we" are seduced into life-threatening situations. This need is one of the big reasons gangs are formed and teens join them. It is all such a waste.

On a personal tip, I have most recently been affected by this vicious cycle of violence. A close friend, we'll call him J.C. for the sake of anonymity, was gunned down in a senseless act of violence. Life was viciously stolen from his body after 18 years. I have always

been told that we have our entire adult lives to work, that our teen years are a time for learning and fun. J.C. has lost this time to a 12-gauge shotgun and another Black "brother." Hence, two lives have been taken: J.C.'s to the bullet and the other "brother's" to the penal system.

Now, more than ever, we are living in a world where we have to watch our backs. You never know who's packing (a gun). J.C. never had a chance because the other "brother" was supposed to have been his best friend! Who do you trust? Where has our carefree adolescence gone? Why should we live in constant fear of our own people?

Every time a school function is planned, I hear statements like, "You know n____rs don't know how to act," or "My momma won't let me come 'cause she says a bullet don't know no name or color," etc. This is sad, folks.

We can't even begin to enjoy our youth. This cycle of violence needs to stop before we wake up one day, look around and there's nothing - a race of people destroyed from the inside. One thing may survive this self-inflicted genocide - a roach. I understand that they would survive a nuclear explosion!

Brisbon Builds Dreams For G'boro Projects' Youth



About Our Teens

By **Cathy Daniels-Lee**
Phoenix Staff Writer

When asked to share his childhood memories, Ervin Brisbon still vividly remembers the poverty he experienced, and the sense of hopelessness he felt as a young boy.

"It was hard. I remember getting surplus food and being ashamed. I remember not having lunch money and watching other children buy their lunch. I remember the riots in 1969, the burnings, and the whole mess."

Brisbon and his five siblings grew up in low-income housing in Greensboro during the sixties. His mother was the head of their household, and his father was absent. Brisbon remembers doing well in elementary and middle school. However, by the time he entered high school, the evil forces in his environment had started pulling young Brisbon in the wrong direction. Eventually he dropped out of high school and turned to drugs and alcohol.

"I didn't have any aspirations, and nobody told me I should. So, I looked for death, and I looked for destruction. In the projects you don't have aspirations. You just live from day to day."

However, today Brisbon is a changed man. He has earned a high school equivalency diploma. He is productive, articulate and soft-spoken, although he is the first to admit he has quite a temper. Brisbon is the founder of Dreambuilders, a non-profit organization designed to help youth who live in public housing.

I asked Brisbon what took him off the road of "death and destruction" and made him want to become a positive role model for disadvantaged children.

Brisbon replied, "After reading the biography of Malcolm X, I realized I had a responsibility to make things better. The purpose of Dreambuilders is to bridge the gap

between the home, the community and the school."

Dreambuilders, which is currently based at Morningside Homes in Greensboro, helps children with their homework, teaches them responsibility, and increases their self-esteem. This small but determined organization touches young lives, giving the children hope, encouragement and vision.

However, like most non-profit organizations, money is always a major concern. Brisbon relies on donations from churches, businesses and individuals to sustain Dreambuilders. Yet, even though his financial resources are sometimes limited, Brisbon's commitment is steadfast. Although he and his wife have three children, Brisbon wants to do more than just make a better life for his own family. Brisbon is determined to touch the lives of many and to make a positive difference in his community.

I asked Brisbon what advice he would give a young child growing up in the projects today.

Brisbon's response was, "I would just tell them to always look for truth. And what I mean by that is that you should always try to educate yourself as close to the truth as possible. What is the truth about what I need to do to make my life better? What do I need to do to know the truth about how I am supposed to act as a man or a woman? There are signs and places where you can go to find truth. The church is one of them."

Furthermore, Brisbon says. "Never, ever believe that because someone treats you a certain way that you can't do exactly what you set out to do."

Although he may be considered controversial by some, Brisbon is definitely committed to improving the quality of life for youngsters growing up in public housing. His commitment and dedication to helping children is a positive example for all of us.

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