

DEVIN SESAY AND FAMILY

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Devin Sesay

Before June 13, he was excited about his upcoming freshman year at Atherton High School. He was also relieved because his big brother, Devin Sesay, a rising Atherton senior, would teach him the ropes at his new school.

The brothers would walk to the bus stop together every morning. On the first day, they would be sporting new shoes that Devin, a smart dresser, would find online.

***DEADLIEST MONTH OF 2019: JUNE**

15 homicides, the highest number of murders in any month in the past five years and more than twice the seven homicides in June 2018.

Everything changed on June 13 for the boy, 14, and his close extended family whose members first came to the United States 27 years ago to escape war-torn Liberia in West Africa.

On June 13, Devin was shot and died on Roselane Street in Smoketown, three doors down from the family's home. He was 17. Family members said Devin had been walking home late at night from playing basketball in nearby Shelby Park when shots were fired from a passing car.

Devin's family – his grandfather, mother and four brothers, his aunt and cousins – are dealing with devastating shock, grief and anger over his murder, while also coping with other major life adjustments.

A few weeks after Devin's murder, his mother, grandfather and brothers moved to a brick ranch house and new school district 13 miles away in southern Jefferson County.

“I was afraid for the boys,” said their mother, Maima Karneh, 41, a certified nurse assistant who works nights at the Home of the Innocents, not far from Smoketown.

Her boys and other children often hung out at their home, inside playing video games, outside on the porch or nearby throwing a football or shooting hoops.

She liked having them around the house where they'd lived for 10 years, she said, because it meant they weren't on the street. She enforced stern rules, checked on her boys often by phone and Devin had never been in any trouble, she said.

Ten days after Devin's murder, another shooting solidified her decision to move. On June 23, Tyrese Garvin, 20, was shot almost directly across the street from where her son was killed. Garvin had been visiting his newborn twins at University Hospital. He died five days later in the same hospital where his twins were being treated. Three juveniles including a 14-year-old were charged with his murder.



Tyrese Garvin

"There was no way we were going to stay," Karneh said.

She and Devin knew Garvin, who was a senior when Devin was a freshman at Atherton and Garvin attended Devin's memorial service, a few days before he was murdered.

In their new home, Devin's portrait hangs in the living room near the front door and his brother at times stares at it. "It reminds me of how many good days we had," he said. "I was supposed to go to Atherton with him this year. He was supposed to show me the bus stops and everything and it just kills me." Instead his brother is gone, he's in a new neighborhood and attending Moore High School, and he said it doesn't feel right.



Devin's family and friends, in shirts bearing his image at a remembrance at an Atherton High School football game.

The school alerted his mother to concerns about him focusing and his grief and he and family members are receiving counseling. Two other younger brothers, 11 and 13, are attending Moore Middle School and said they are doing their best to live up to Devin's memory.

Devin's four brothers – the oldest is 21 - and a 10-year-old cousin were at home when Devin was killed and some of them heard the shots.

Karneh's 14-year-old son called her at work to report hearing gunfire and that Devin was not home. When Devin did not respond to her texts, "I knew it was him," she said.

Her sister, Sietta Karneh, said the family wants to keep Devin's memory alive. He was an outgoing, athletic, fun teenager with a slew of friends who have taken his death hard, posting remembrances on social media, his aunt said. She and her sister have raised their kids as one family. "I also lost a son," she said about Devin. "I can't get over how close to home he was when they took his life.... I can't get over this nightmare."