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Jonathan Harvey: 'Violence is nothing a teenager should ever get used to'



Jonathan Harvey, 16, walks along his route to school in Engelwood. Last spring Harvey was robbed at gunpoint. His iPod and cell phone were stolen on his way to the CTA bus stop one evening after basketball practice. Yet Harvey blames himself for the hold up. "I was mad at myself. That could have easily been avoided," Harvey said. "I was lagging, I was walking slow." (Tribune photo by Abel Uribe / October 14, 2009)

By **Kristen Mack**, Tribune reporter

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On the street, he's Jay. At Urban Prep, he's Mr. Harvey.

Jonathan Harvey, an Englewood-area junior at Urban Prep Charter Academy for Young Men, navigates two worlds.

At Chicago's only public all-boys high school he's told he is an exceptional, strong, beautiful black man. In his neighborhood he does his best to blend in. To survive, he has to switch up his behavior.

"If I'm at school, acting the way I do in my neighborhood, that wouldn't be acceptable," said Harvey, 16. "If I'm in my neighborhood acting the way I do at school, I wouldn't have any

friends."

Some of the teens from his block have classes in the same building, on 63rd Street and Stewart Avenue, but attend a different school, TEAM Englewood Community Academy. That program has a different culture and way of doing things. Some of the danger that confronts students coming or going from both schools is fueled by competition between them.

"It's hard to share," said Peggy Korellis-Byrd, the principal at TEAM Englewood. "We have different cultures. When you have two separate groups, there is competition."

The tight quarters contributed to heightened tensions throughout the school year and erupted in a brawl last June. Students pulled fire alarms to empty the building for a school-on-school scuffle. No one was seriously hurt, and students at each school have a different point of view about what led to the fight.

Though they may disagree about some things, the students all have strategies to stay safe when they are on the way to or from school.

Avoid direct eye contact. Walk fast, but not too fast, you don't want anyone to think you are scared. Keep one hand free, so you can swing back if someone hits you. Above all keep your mean mug on.

Shunetta Brown has her own methods. She leaves an hour early to avoid other students, and the problems that can come with them.

Her morning routine is choreographed down to the minute -- up by 5:45 a.m., a breakfast of Sugar Smacks or Cinnamon Toast Crunch by 6:04, and out the door by 6:28 to catch her 6:37 bus.

Along her dark morning walk she passes five abandoned and boarded-up houses. Her step is swift and perfectly timed so the bus is at the stoplight when she turns the corner. During her 17 minute ride she looks out the window or talks on her cell phone to avoid engaging fellow passengers.

"It's like, in the morning, people are so rowdy, I don't want problems," said Brown, 16, a sophomore at TEAM Englewood.

She said she created the custom because she was jumped last year by three girls when she was on her way home. "My guard is always up, but that day I wasn't prepared," she said. "That put a mind set in my head of being afraid. That damaged me a little."

Despite Brown's military-style precision, her mother worries.

"I don't think she's as cautious as I would like her to be. I know her mind is strictly on catching that bus to school," said Catherine Griffin, 70, who has cared for Brown since she was 23 months and adopted her when she was 9.

The dangers are the same but the safety strategies slightly different for Harvey and his classmates at Urban Prep.

They shed their dress shoes, ties, white collared shirts and blazers after the last bell and put on sneakers, ball caps, oversize jackets and hoodies. They sag their pants a little lower and add an extra bounce to their gait.

"They wear their camouflage when they leave school," said Dennis Lacewell, Urban Prep's co-principal for academic programs, who paused at his choice of words. "Using that language makes it sound as if they are walking through a battlefield."

This summer school administrators and community representatives met to discuss how they can keep kids safe. They instituted a parent patrol and provide security long after the school day ends. The Rev. Gerald M. Dew, whose Antioch Baptist Church is across the street from the schools, encourages his parishioners to stand on their porches and provide an extra set of eyes.

"There is power in presence," Dew said. "No one person can man the whole area. This is everybody's problem, and we have intersecting circles of influence. If you sweep around your front door, I sweep around mine and our neighbor sweeps around his, then eventually the block is clean."

Still, as much as students try to stay out of harm's way, violence finds them.

Last spring Harvey was robbed at gunpoint. His iPod and cell phone were stolen on his way to the bus stop one evening after basketball practice. Harvey blames himself for the holdup.

"I was mad at myself. That could have easily been avoided," Harvey said. "I was lagging, I was walking slow."

Now he gets rides from his mother, who rearranged her work schedule because she didn't want him to fear going to school. Although he learned to "toughen up and watch my surroundings," on the days he has to ride the bus, he said "violence is nothing a teenager should ever get used to."



Shunetta Brown

(Tribune photo by Abel Uribe / October 12, 2009)

Shunetta Brown, 16, eats breakfast early to catch a 6:37 a.m. bus to get to TEAM Englewood Community Academy. During her 17 minute ride she looks out the window or talks on her cell phone to avoid engaging fellow passengers. "It's like, in the morning, people are so rowdy, I don't want problems,"