



## **Purpose Over Pain Seeks to Increase Safety, End Community Codes of Silence**

By Corey Hall – Bean Soup Times – 4/24/2014 Issue

Raising their sons, Annette Holt and Pam Bosley fondly reminisced together, once involved buying braces for them so that their teeth would be perfect.

As it turned out, this corrective work only helped the Cook County Medical Examiner positively identify their sons in the morgue, after they were both fatally shot. Holt's son, Blair, died in 2007 at age 16. Bosley's son, Terrell, died in 2006, at age 18.

Holt, Bosley, and other parents whose children's lives were lost to violence, were brought together by the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) program in 2007. These parents would soon unite to form Purpose Over Pain, a group that provides support for parents experiencing this tragedy while also providing guidance to the community youth.

These parents decided to do more than mourn their losses in silence, explained Tommie Bosley, Pam's husband. They decided, instead, to become community activists, to make a difference, to make their departed children's lives a legacy.

"Unfortunately, the group has grown, because the gun violence has continued," said Bosley, Purpose Over Pain's co-founder and president. "But the parents, along with their friends and family members, have taken a stand. They have said, 'Enough is enough. We may not have all the answers, but we're going to do what we can to stem the violence affecting our communities, and be there for others if they fall into this unfortunate situation.'"

For Holt, her involvement in Purpose Over Pain is an attempt to handle loss by making a difference. Helping other parents deal with their worst fears realized, she said, is an extremely difficult, long, and sometimes lonely journey. The connections created through these collective losses, she noted, have actually helped new families form.

"A lot of us are surrogate families, because we have lost so much along the way," she said. "And you need that one person, somebody you can call at any time, and say, 'Hey, I'm having a bad day,' or you just want to talk about your child."

Many times, Holt continued, people do not want to hear about her loss. They become so uncomfortable that some suggested she get over her son's death, as it happened years ago. While she recognizes people's discomfort, a family whose member has been lost through violence experiences a discomfort that is much worse.



"When you wake up in the morning and go to bed at night, your child is truly the first thing and last thing on your mind," Holt said. "Ron Holt (Blair's father) and I have said we're always going to do something to honor our son. I know for sure that our son would be saying, 'Mom, Dad, fight so that nobody else has to die like me.' I know that, because that's the kind of child we had."

Purpose Over Pain, Pam Bosley believes, is a movement everyone should join. Although most of its members are parents who have lost children to violence, reversing the violence epidemic will require everyone's involvement.

"We don't want another parent to suffer like we suffer every single day, as far as cases being unsolved, and not knowing what to do if your child has been murdered," said Bosley, whose son's killer has not been captured. "Our goal is to reach out and help others, because a lot of us didn't get it when it happened to us."

On Sunday, April 12th, Purpose Over Pain is hosting "Unsolved Cases." This forum, Bosley explained, is for people whose loved ones were murdered, and the perpetrator still has not been captured. Representatives from the Chicago Police Department and the State's Attorney's office will be present.

### **Being Safe on a Saturday Night**

This Saturday, April 26, Purpose Over Pain, in partnership with the group Brave Youth Leaders and Saint Sabina Church, will host Safe Saturday Night at The Ark of Saint Sabina, 1210 W. 78<sup>th</sup> Street, from 4-7 p.m. This event, Tommie Bosley explained, is designed to provide a safe, positive atmosphere through mentoring sessions and fun activities for the community's youth. Participants are invited to participate in three-on-three basketball games, chow down on some free food, groove to some the music, and enjoy other activities such as nail painting.

"We also want to talk to them about ways that they can stay safe; that's really the driving force behind 'Safe Saturday Night,' " Bosley said. "The basketball game and other activities are being used to attract the youth. Once we get them in, we can have the young people engage in meaningful conversation, where we can develop a strategy to combat this violence out here in the streets."

Communication between the Safe Night participants and the mentors will continue after this event through e-mail, word-of-mouth, and social media, Bosley continued. There were six Safe Saturday Nights in 2013, and Purpose Over Pain hopes to host this same vent monthly or every other month, depending on how much the group receives in sponsorship money. Whether there is outside funding or not, he said, these events will continue, even if the members have to fund them out of their own pockets.

### **Keeping It Raw; Keeping It Real**

Purpose Over Pain mentors instruct their students how to conduct themselves through "Roundtable Real Talk" sessions, Bosley said, but what they do when on their own is their choice. If a young person does



something that results in them serving jail time, he wants them to think about what they were told, what they did, and where they are now.

"When we sit down with the young men and women, we tell them, 'The choices that you make will impact you for the rest of your life,' " he explained. "We put it out there; hopefully, you will listen and not go down that (wrong) path. But if you do, you won't be able to say that nobody told you what would happen."

Purpose Over Pain also has a motto that its participants are encouraged to remember and abide by. It is discussed here by Ken Berry, a Purpose Over Pain member:

"Our motto consists of 10, two-letter words: 'If it is to be, it is up to me,'" he explained. "See, I don't want (our youth) to ever think there is something they can't achieve. They may have everybody in their life telling them about something they cannot do. No. That's not what we're about. We want to tell you what you can do!"

When asked about a memory from a previous Safe Saturday Night, Berry discussed a young man who asked for more food before leaving the event. At first, Berry did not understand why this seemingly simple request was being made, so he asked the brother what was up.

"And he told me, 'I don't know what I'm gonna to have to eat in the morning, so I was just wondering if I could get another plate to take with me,'" Berry recalled. "When he said this, it struck me, because when we were that age, we didn't have to worry about stuff like that. At these young ages, our youth today are dealing with so many different issues."

### **Purpose Over Pain's activism: What has worked; what hasn't worked, and how it may become better...**

Purpose Over Pain's efforts are rewarded, Tommie Bosley continued, whenever someone randomly approaches a member and thanks them for speaking in support of a loved one taken out by violence. He has also heard from youths who have been tempted to make an unproductive decision change their mindsets after hearing a member's words in a speech or one-on-one conversation.

These rewards keep the members involved, he said, even when their activism is challenged by reality. When Purpose Over Pain members traveled to Springfield and Washington D.C. to champion "common sense guns laws," as Bosley called them, their efforts were not successful.

"We had politicians look us in the eye and say they couldn't vote a certain way, because their constituents like guns, or say that (violence) is not a problem in their community," he said. "A lot of times, people don't make decisions because of what's right or what's wrong; it's because of where they stand politically, and what they have to lose or gain. That's frustrating."



Purpose Over Pain has also produced a video that addresses the “No snitching” code on the streets. “If you see something wrong and say something, you could be the next victim,” Tommie Bosley began, “but if you do not say something, you could become the next victim.”

*So...what should someone in this situation do?*

Bosley answers this question by quoting a line from an old Western.

“ ‘I’d rather go out standing up than on my knees,’ ” he said. “I cannot witness something and just sit there and be silent, because something bad may happen to me. Something bad is happening to our kids every day by them *not* talking.”

Many more lives would be saved, Holt said, if citizens would report the perpetrators. A child with a gun, she added, is a cancer in the Black community, which is already burdened with poor schools and unemployment. And then, when people allow gangs to “own” their blocks and protect murderers by remaining silent, matters become much more than worse.

“We have all these churches out here, and we have all these people who have ‘made it,’ and they need to come back, give back, and take back our communities,” Holt said. Pretty soon, there will be nowhere to live that is safe. We have to take back our communities. If we don’t...God help you, because you could be next. It could be your child or someone you love dearly, and there is no turning back. You could be in my shoes, and believe me, they are shoes you do not want to be in.”