

# A MOTHER MENDS

Barbara Forte lost one son to murder, another to the lawlessness of the street. As fiercely as she mourns one, she defends the other. For three years, she struggled alone. Now she is able to talk about what happened. Time is healing the hurt and giving her new dreams. She wants to make a better life for her youngest sons.



George Forte - everyone called him "Tuff" - was killed three years ago Saturday.



LAURA MUELLER/Staff

Constant reminder: Barbara Forte stands before a drawing of her son Tuff, the most vulnerable of her four children. He died at age 10, shot to death at the kitchen table by a teenager seeking revenge against Forte's eldest son.

## Haunted by one son's death, another's crime

By RICKI MORELL  
Staff Writer

Barbara Forte named her second child George Garfield Forte, but everyone called him Tuff. He was 10 when bullets cracked the kitchen window as he sat down to his spaghetti dinner.

That was three years ago. That was Wednesday, April 22, 1992, three days after Easter.

"I just remember seeing the back of Tuff's head," Barbara Forte says. "And blood on the wall over the stove."

That night, she lost her most vulnerable child. Demont was older, and Mario and Toby were younger, but no one needed her quite as much as Tuff. He had been sickly since his lung collapsed at birth. Later, they discovered he was epileptic and mildly retarded. This gave him a sweetness of spirit.

It was Tuff who brought her the delicate porcelain bird from the "goody box" at school. It was Tuff who'd sneak a kiss then tease, "I got some o' your sugar."

The bullets hit him in the head and neck

and pierced his mother's arm.

She watched him fall off the kitchen chair onto the floor.

Her arm stung as she crawled through blood toward him, then out the back door. "Somebody please help my baby," she cried, crouching on all fours on the concrete porch.

"Keep talking to him," she told her ex-husband as an ambulance took her away. "Maybe he's not dead."

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## A MOTHER MENDS

## Mother's double-edged sword of grief

## Strength

Continued from page 1A

Tuff died at 9:25 p.m. on the kitchen floor of 18194 Earle St., a two-bedroom Fairview Homes public housing apartment where he had lived with his mother and brothers since he was 6.

He lay on the floor with his head toward the living room and his legs crossed at the ankles. It was a spring evening. He was wearing a white Chicago Bears T-shirt, blue jean shorts and high-top sneakers. In his pocket, he had 6 cents and a raised ball.

Tuff's murder was the last deadly act in a feud that had been building for years between Tuff's older brother, Demont, and Demont's childhood friend, Stan Burton. That Wednesday night, Demont killed Burton, 16, who had two bags of crack cocaine on him. To retaliate, Burton's friend James Givens went after Demont.

Givens killed Tuff instead. Because of this, Barbara Forte became a singular figure, the mother of a murder victim and a murderer. As fiercely as she mourns one son, she defends the other. If she dared to love one less, she'd blame him for the other's death.

Barbara Forte still lives in the apartment where Tuff was killed. Each morning, when she walks out the back door to her car, she walks past bullet holes in the door and kitchen window.

These bullet holes made her cry. Now they make her angry and determined to do better for herself and her surviving sons.

Barbara Forte has a son in Fairview Homes for nine years. She was born in rural Hendersonville in 1934 in Southside Homes, an other public housing complex. She is 39, a 1974 graduate of West Mecklenburg High School. She has long straight hair, freckles and one dimple when she smiles.

Her last name is her father's last name and it means strong. She has worked as a day care aide, a teacher's aide, a nurse and as a maid to help support her children — Demont, Tuff, Mario and Quatrovici, whom everyone calls Tolly.

She has known her ex-husband for 20 years, and was married to him for less than one.

She loves to cook and sew, says grace before every meal and has a meticulous sense of humor that eases the sadness in her eyes. On Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday, she goes to auto body repair class at Central Piedmont Community College. At her age, it is staggering. She went beyond the fifth-grade level. She does this so she can get off welfare sooner.

She does this for Tuff.

## The mourning begins

On Wednesday, April 23, 1992, hundreds of people, black and white, filled the pews of the Berran Seventh-day Adventist Church. They were friends and neighbors, teachers and politicians. They were shocked that their child had been killed. And they were afraid that soon they would no longer be shocked.

"We do not get a grip on life and our city, it might be our week when another will be outraged," says Rev. Preston, who preached, his voice rising and falling. "There will be no place of safety. We must be concerned now. We must turn our heads, back to the streets, back to the grounds, and not into barricades."

Tuff was buried in a white suit in a white coffin in Mecklenburg Memorial Cemetery in Huntersville. His Aunt Virginia sent a wreath made entirely of candy. His parents lay flowers in the shape of a skateboard.

When the official mourning was over, Barbara Forte stood with her older sister, Diane, near Milton Road. After about a week, she needed some clothes so she went to a store. She stood outside the apartment with its detested screen and read for hours.

It was like this demon was whispering to her.

She ran inside but couldn't say 30 grand, some clothes and left. A month later, she came back for good.

It was a calm May morning. She walked quickly past the kitchen and ran upstairs to her bedroom, where Tuff's school picture peered out at her from the wall. He looked so safe in his gray boxers and glasses.

She was finally alone with the double-edged sword of her grief.

Tuff was dead at 10. Demont was charged with murder at 16. And she, she was still stuck in the same bullet-riddled apartment with two more sons to raise.

## 'You killed a 10-year-old boy'

Jonathan Givens hadn't been to church in a year. But two days after he killed Tuff, he knelt on the floor of his Mecklenburg County Jail cell and prayed. God forgive me. He was sorry he had killed a



PHOTO BY LAURA MULLER/OUT

The kitchen where Tuff was killed: Barbara and her youngest son, Toby, make cupcakes. Three years ago, Tuff was shot to death

here. Bullet holes in the window remind Forte of her loss, but they also make her determined to do better for her family.



precious gift: Tuff brought his mother this delicate porcelain bird from the "goody box" at school. At 10, he loved school and sports and was just beginning to notice girls.

"Not like that. Close up. It just didn't—my head up. I just wanted to start shooting at everybody, start shooting that whole block up." He grabbed the rifle and ran after Forte. He jumped the fences separating West Street from Fairview Homes and ran toward the Forte apartment.

"Come out," he called to Demont. "I'm a freak for a gun," he says. "I like the steel part. It make me feel good inside. I don't know why."

## Inside the West Street house

Demont Forte went talk about what happened the night Tuff was killed. He said police he and Stan Burton had a running argument

because Burton wanted him to sell drugs. Givens says he, Burton and Demont Forte ended up inside a house on

West Street. Burton and Givens sat side-by-side at a love seat. Forte sat in a facing chair. Burton had the M-1 behind his back. Forte had a .38-caliber pistol he said he found in the house.

They were smoking joints. Then, something happened. "I saw Demont Forte hold police Burton put a clip in the rifle and pointed it at him. Forte got up, fired five shots at Burton and ran."

Givens says Burton never threatened Demont Forte. As Givens watches Stan go down, he saw two large holes in his friend's chest and something slipped. For all his fascination with guns, Givens, 16, had never seen someone killed.

It was a little after 9 p.m. Inside the Fortes' apartment, Mario, 13, was watching TV. Toby, 13 months, was asleep on the couch. Tuff was pretending to wash his hands in the sink. He eyed his mother slyly as she gave him his plate of spaghetti. He got away with dirty hands again.

Usually Tuff sat in the seat closest to the sink. On this night, he sat on the other side, the side closest to the door.

## Gunsights hit the apartment

Givens backed up toward the clothesline. He flipped the safety and with his eyes open, fired first at the door, then the window.

He fired one clip, eight shots. Then he reloaded and fired another eight before the gun jammed.

He stepped back into the light, unarmed it and reloaded again. He fired seven more times. Two bullets hit Tuff. One hit Barbara Forte. Givens heard her plead, "Somebody help my baby."

"I don't give a f---," he muttered. He didn't run. He just stood there. Somebody said the police were coming. He said he didn't care. "I'll shoot out the police."

Then whatever he snapped, suddenly snapped back.

He ran across the street to his apartment and threw the gun on the roof. He caught a bus to his son's apartment at Southside Homes. After a while, an uncle put him in his van and they drove the early morning streets. His uncle, like a father to him, asked, "What the hell you doin' you, knowed what the hell you doin'?"

"I killed Demont." "You killed a 10-year-old boy."

Givens' head dropped into his chest. Tears rolled down his cheeks. At 1 a.m., he walked into the police station and turned himself in.

Givens pleaded guilty to second-degree murder on Oct. 26, 1992. He is serving life-plus-15 at the Foothills Correctional Institution in Morganton. He would not be eligible for parole before 2012.

"Sometimes I wish I had never shot the house. I wish I had tripped or something happened. If the police had stopped me. But I did. No use to hide it."

## 'He was too Tuff to die'

Barbara Forte's second baby was born at Charlotte Memorial Hospital on Sept. 27, 1981, at 6:28 p.m. Seconds later, doctors whisked him away.

"Where's my baby?" Barbara Forte cried from her log.

When they wheeled her in to see him for the first time, she leaned on the floor of the neonatal intensive care unit.

He had tubes in his mouth and needles in his veins. He cried, but no sound came out. His fine brown hair was shaved. When she came to, she touched him gently on his forehead and hands, the only places on his tiny body not covered with tape.

He spent six weeks in intensive care for his collapsed lung. She pumped her breast milk, froze it and brought it to the hospital for him.

When he came home, he got sick again in three weeks. This time it was pink eye. He stopped eating, and had to go back to the hospital.

When he came home for good, George Garfield Forte had a new nickname: Tuff.

"Because he was too Tuff to die."

Barbara Forte loved all her children equally, but Tuff would always be special.

He was about 2 when he broke his leg. He ran into a car while flying a kite. He was 6, in kindergarten at Irwin Avenue Elementary School, when he had his first seizure. When she came from work to pick him up, she found him curled in a fetal position at the front door.

Before they reached the doctor, his eyes turned back in his head and he began shaking. It was epilepsy. On Mother's Day that year, Tuff got sick again. He stayed in the hospital for 14 days. His fever was so high, his skin blistered and turned the color of tar.

"What's wrong with my baby?" Barbara Forte asked the doctors and nurses.

They said he had an allergic reaction to his medicine. They called it Stevens-Johnson syndrome, a sometimes fatal inflammatory disease affecting children.

"Is he going to die?" she asked. They didn't know.

When Tuff finally began to get better, the first thing he wanted was for his mother to climb in the hospital bed with him. Then, he asked for a candy apple.

King of the goody box

Tuff was sweet and naughty, tender and stubborn.

He was so eager to get to school in the morning, he'd sleep with his clothes under his pajamas.

He loved pickles and hated cucumbers. If his mother was making potato salad, he'd steal the hard-boiled eggs and run out the back door, leaving a trail of yolk behind him.

He loved money. Once he showed up at kindergarten with a \$20 bill he had pinched from his father's pants. Sometimes, he'd ask people for change when the "candy lady" drove through Fairview Homes. They'd buy him a snow cone and he'd suck out all the juice.

Because his seizures caused bean damage, Tuff was called "trainable mentally handicapped" and attended a special class at Billingsville Elementary School. Tuff was king of the class goody box. "Excellent!" he'd say, munching on Ninja turtles. If it wasn't his turn to bring home a trinket, every morning he'd bring a Fruit Roll-up to share at snack time. He'd hand out pieces to his classmates until there was nothing left for him.

One day, Tuff had 15 seizures. But he rarely betrayed her. Once, when his eyes turned back in his head he told his mother, "I'm scared. I can't turn them back."

Monday, he did everything the other boys did. He loved sports and he was just starting to notice girls. One day he called his mother to call him on the phone at 7:30 a.m. just to say hello. He'd sneak out under his bicycle across Oaklawn Avenue to visit her.

He loved to batter up his teachers. If teacher assistant Deltra Best came in with new shoes or earnings, he'd always say how pretty they were.

Tuff told Best gathered his things in a brown envelope and gave them to Barbara Forte. Inside were drawings and stickers, medicine and the glasses he used to wear.

'If I could move into a house'

Three weeks after Tuff died, the Charlotte Housing Authority sent Barbara Forte a letter listing her rights. The letter, dated May 12, 1992, told her she could sue because of the criminal activities of members of your household.

Those were the rules. She had lost two sons to the lawlessness around her. Tuff would never be back. Demont, out on parole, had been barred from Fairview Homes, would live with his father. And now, she was about to lose her house.

She decided to fight the eviction.

On May 14, she requested a transfer out of the apartment where Tuff died. It was denied.

On May 22, she wrote a note—"requesting a change of rental of my four sons: George, who is deceased, Mario, Quatrovici and Tuff." She was charged with murder.

In the blank space titled "What I want from the hearing," Barbara wrote: "I want to get my son's transfer and try to move, and if I could, move into a house."

In the space titled, "As the hearing, I want to hear what the judge will say at the situation as you were me."

On July 17, Forte set her foot on a tremendous amount of stress and anxiety. Since the death of her son George, Forte was killed 4/22/92 in the kitchen. Bullet holes on the outside and inside are a constant reminder of his death."

On July 17, Forte set her foot on a tremendous amount of stress and anxiety. Since the death of her son George, Forte was killed 4/22/92 in the kitchen. Bullet holes on the outside and inside are a constant reminder of his death."

It is written in pencil on white loose-leaf paper.

"Again I say."

"Why should I write this note? Your son wasn't killed because he was going to die?"

"Your son didn't kill Mimes did?"

"Your heart doesn't hurt Mimes do?"

"You don't have to live with the pain of a bullet in your arm — But I do."

She won't go to Southside

On Aug. 4, after a doctor's note confirmed her emotional fragility and the housing authority decided not to evict Barbara Forte, her request for a transfer was approved.

She accepted the keys to an apartment at Southside Homes on South Tryon Street. But when she got there, she got scared. On Sept. 4, she returned the keys and was allowed back into her apartment in Fairview Homes.

Her feelings were complicated. Though she wanted to escape the memories of Tuff's murder, she couldn't face the upheaval of moving into a place that seemed just as dangerous. She now lives in Southside Homes and doesn't want to

Life plus 15: Jonathan Givens, who pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in Tuff's death, is serving his sentence at the Foothills Correctional Institution in Morganton.

Please see Strength next page

A MOTHER MENDS

# Facing world again with new hopes

## Strength

Continued from preceding page

"I couldn't go back there. It would be no improvement."  
She dreams of a future, a public housing complex on Milton Road with rustic wood, green grass and private decks. She wants to live in peace, in a place that isn't beset with drugs and guns, a place where her young sons can grow up safe.

## 'Always somebody worse off than you'

Barbara Forte's struggle with the housing authority mirrored her deeper struggle with herself.  
The kitchen haunted her. She'd run in, make a sandwich, run out, and eat it upstairs in the bedroom. "I couldn't find no peace inside myself," she kept saying. "Why did I put the plate on that side of the table?"

One very bad day, a stranger at the Food Lion on Sunset Road stopped to ask what was wrong. Forte looked into the woman's face and, right there in the canned meats aisle, she started crying. They talked for about 20 minutes. "There's always somebody in a situation that's worse off than yours is," the woman told her.

The woman was a Jehovah's Witness. She came to the apartment a few times for Bible study. Once, she brought her "blessing oil." To the kitchen, she poured the oil. The woman touched everything—stove, faucet, sink, table, cabinets—with the oil. She made a cross with the oil, then said some prayers.

Barbara Forte wasn't sure how much she believed. But it worked, because after that she could stay in the kitchen long enough to cook a meal.

It was another year before she could make spaghetti.

## 'Tuff is back!'

A few months after the kitchen was blessed and right after Barbara Forte finally had the bullet removed from her arm, she was looking out her back door and onto the playground. She saw a little boy, light-skinned, with big ears and a box haircut.

"Tuff is back!" she called to her ex-husband in the living room. "He's back. There go Tuff. There go Tuff."

She walked mesmerized out the back door, crossed the street and came to a stop in front of the little boy. She stared at him.

"What is his do?" he cried. "Wh'd I do?"

"You look like my son."  
"For real? I look like him?"  
The little boy's name was Kelly. She doesn't remember how she ended up at his mother's house. She told the woman Tuff's whole story. The woman shook her head and clucked her tongue. "If you need him, just come get him," she joked. "You can have him."

After that, every time Barbara Forte saw the little boy, he'd wave and call, "Hey, miss! Hey!" And she would call back, "Hey, Kelly!"

Somewhat, these brief encounters soothed Forte's churning spirit. They weren't much, but they were a beginning. She was learning to face the world again.

## Demont pleads guilty

As 1994 began, Barbara Forte wanted to know Demont would go to prison.

On Jan. 26, a year and nine months after Tuff was killed, Demont Forte pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter for killing Donny Burton's son, Shan. He served four months in Mecklenburg County Jail, and

is serving four years in state prison. He has two mouths on probation with his father.

When Barbara Forte talks about Tuff, she's alive with his memory. When she talks about Demont, she sounds numb. She believes her son killed in self-defense. She says she knew the man who was killed between Demont and Shan Burton, and tried to get help from the housing authority, Demont's school and the police. In her heart, Barbara Forte knew something bad would happen.

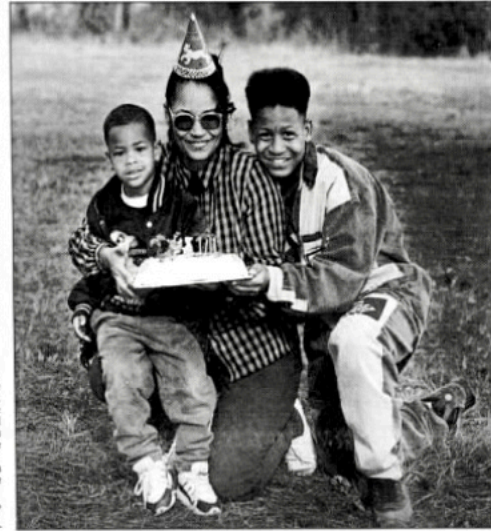
"Demont was like a dog that was tired of being kicked," she says. "If he hadn't done it, Shan would have killed him. We don't talk about it, and I don't want to." She says she's not a Demont. All he says is, "You're my Mama. And I sell him. It's not your fault."

"If you stop blaming him, you stop blaming everybody."  
Barbara Forte knows some people might blame her for Tuff's death. They might think she shouldn't be a good enough mother, that



Photo by LAURA MUELLER/STAFF

Learning job skills: Barbara Forte began learning auto body repair at Central Piedmont Community College in December. She dreams of opening her own shop.



To happier times: Barbara Forte, with Toby, 4, (left) and Mario, 12, celebrate Toby's birthday three weeks ago. The family is healing — and learning to laugh together again.

she should have loved Demont more thoughtfully and spoiled him less. To these people, she says she did, but she couldn't.

That wasn't enough.

## 'Keep going for Tuff'

Barbara Forte's alarm went off at 7 a.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 27, 1994. It was a school day.

"Happy Birthday, Tuff," she said to the photograph on her bedroom wall.

She walked downstairs with the picture, put it on the kitchen table and lit a long white candle. She sang "Happy Birthday" until she couldn't sing anymore. Then she began to cry. She lit the candle burning and went back to bed.

She kept Mario home from school, and Toby home from day care. They decided to make a birthday cake. Toby got the eggs out of the refrigerator and Mario cracked them into the bowl. Toby opened the oven, and Mario put it in the pan.

The cake had green icing because it was Tuff's 13th birthday and green was his favorite color.

They bought balloons that said "Happy Birthday, I Love You," and drove up U.S. 21 to his grave.

They stood there in the chill and lit the balloons from skyward. "Tuff, we love you," they cried.

As evening approached, Mario, Toby and their mother gathered around the kitchen table, where the cake's slim candles glowed. They closed their eyes, blew out the flames and wished for Tuff.

They toasted him with grape juice they pretended was champagne. And they ate the icing but left the cake, the way Tuff would have.

Forte faces the world

If there has been any good in Tuff's death, it has been in Barbara Forte's resolve to make a better life for herself.

It all came clear one day as she sat alone in her apartment. She realized she no longer had a sick child to care for. Would she spend the rest of her life staring at the wall?

She decided no. "I wanted to see if I was physically ready enough to face the world."

She got a job working as a motel housekeeper. At \$4.50 an hour, it wasn't much but at least she was out of the house.

Soon, it felt more like a dead end than a future path. Her supervisor made her uncomfortable. Once, she brought in a submarine sandwich she had made to eat with her co-workers. The supervisor, who was white, wouldn't eat any. Barbara Forte felt stabbed.

That's when she decided to sign up with a government job program and learn a skill.

On Dec. 1, she started auto body class at Central Piedmont Community College. Wearing a white mask, she carefully spreads putty on a dent, then sands it smooth. She dreams about salvaging her own repair shop.

"I'm excited. I'm getting out of the house. I feel like it's something

I can do. It reminds me of cooking. I feel like I'm finally seeing the sunshine. And they are the icing but left the cake, the way Tuff would have."

## New Year brings new goals

As Christmas, they were lucky because Steve sponsors donated lots of gifts for the children.

Christmas Day went well. She cooled a turkey. Three-year-old Toby got a bicycle. For hours, he thought it was meant for someone else, and wouldn't ride it.

On New Year's Eve, Barbara Forte got frightened.

It was near midnight, and Mario and Toby were waiting for the ball to drop on television. They had their sparkling grape juice ready for the toast.

Barbara Forte was washing dishes — because she didn't want to start the new year with dirty dishes in her sink.

Just about then she heard the shoves from outside. Seven sharp cracks. She dropped the dishes and ran upstairs. As she lay crumpled on the hall floor, whispering, her sons ran up after her. They nudged her back to comfort her.

"Do you want me to call the police?" asked Mario.

"No."  
After that, Toby fell asleep. She and Mario drank the grape juice, but it wasn't a toast. She couldn't spend the night in that apartment. So, she picked up Toby and told Mario they were going away.

At her sister's house near Milton Road, they watched airport tapes all night. Around 5 a.m. they came home. She wanted to salvage Happy New Year and these 1995 goals.

To have a home  
To see my children do good

To have a lot of money  
Be happy  
To keep going for Tuff

## 'It's time to move on'

Some days, it seems possible to live up to these goals.

At church one Saturday in March, she sat next to Mario and Toby, both wearing jackets and bow ties. They put their heads together over one Bible to sing "Holy, Holy, Holy." They knelt together to pray at the front of the church as they listened to the elder saying, "Because we woke up this morning, it's a good morning."

February and March were difficult, but she noticed she felt better.

Mario chipped the bone in his elbow, and kept getting in trouble in school. He was kicked out for throwing a glass bottle out the bus window at some teachers.

She knows he's angry about what happened to Tuff and, sometimes, he has to let it out.

"I can't be a man," she told him. "I can't be the best mom I can be."

Now he's at Reedy Creek Elementary and his teachers say he does well. They tell Barbara Forte that he seems to feel at home.

Mario and Toby, 15 months apart, used to share a room. Tuff slept in the bottom bunk, Mario in the top. "I'm Ruf and he's Tuff," Tuff used to say when new people came to visit.

"We used to play rasin'," says Mario, his eyes down, his voice low. "I tried to teach him how to tie his shoes. He didn't know how. I miss him every day."

## The healing power of time

Saturday was the third anniversary of Tuff's death.

The family has a new kitchen table. The old glass one, where Tuff was killed, cracked and Mario dropped a frozen dinner on it. And last month, Barbara Forte finally got rid of the clothes dryer pocket with bad wiring.

On April 2, she gave a birthday party for Toby, who turned 4. It was a full sunny, half windy Sunday in the park near her parents' house in Huntersville. The whole family gathered, children and grandchildren, aunts and nephews, and the dog Spike.

They blew up balloons and tied them to the jungle gym. She made Toby a Lion King birthday cake frosted in red, yellow and green and topped with tiny plastic animals. Her sisters teased that she was an artist.

Everyone clapped when Toby blew out the candles and made a wish.

Barbara Forte laughed more than she has since Tuff died. Three years ago, at a Mothers of Murdered Children meeting, she couldn't understand how the mothers laughed and joked when their children were dead.

Now, she understands.

"It's time," she says. "I can't live back there anymore. It's time to move on."

Now, sometimes when she's watching TV, she catches herself smiling, and she touches the corners of her mouth just to make sure it's true.

At these moments Barbara Forte thinks, "Don't cry for me. Be happy for me. Let the blessings I need to keep going."

She will always have Tuff. In her mind, he is standing there alive and healthy, with no scars and no worries. He is dressed, ready for breakfast, eager for school. He walks on her bed room floor, then walks over and gives her a kiss, smack on the mouth.

"Mama," he says. "I'm back."

## How we reported the story

The reporting for this story began three years ago when George Demont pleaded guilty to the murder of Donny Burton's son, Shan. Barbara Forte to talk about her 10-year-old son, but she declined.

In June 1994, Forte changed her mind. She called Morrel, saying she needed help getting to the Fairview Homes and wanted to talk her story.

Over the past four months, Forte has become more comfortable with the press. She sees the telling of her story as an assertive act, a chance to give control and make life better for her two young sons.

During these months, Barbara Forte has become more comfortable with the press. She sees the telling of her story as an assertive act, a chance to give control and make life better for her two young sons.

# Young victims, young killers

Barbara Forte and her family live in Fairview Homes, a neighborhood that has a violent crime rate of more than twice the city's average of 22.8 crimes per 1,000 population. Fairview Homes is part of a band of central-city neighborhoods ravaged by violent crime. Here, you're six times more likely to be murdered, raped, robbed or beaten than elsewhere in Charlotte. And in this part of Charlotte, more than 85% of those arrested for violent crime in 1992 and 1993 were men younger than 40. A third were younger than 25.

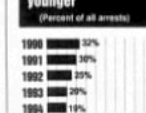


GEORGE BRESCHNER/STAFF

## Children 16 or younger murdered in Charlotte



## Charlotte murder suspects, 18 or younger



## In N.C., prisons

- 2% are 17 or younger
- 9% are 18-20 years old

SOURCE: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Dept., N.C. Dept. of Corrections

## The people in this story



Tuff and Barbara Forte.

Barbara Forte, 39, is a single mother who has lived in Fairview Homes for nine years.

George Forte, whom everyone called Tuff, was Forte's second child. He was 10 when Jonathan Givens shot and killed him April 22, 1992.

Jonathan Givens, 21, pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and is serving life-plus-15 years for killing Tuff.

Demont Forte, 18, is Forte's oldest son. He pleaded guilty to manslaughter and served four months for killing Shan Burton the night Tuff was killed.

Almeric "Shan" Burton, now 16 when Demont Forte shot and killed him.

Mario Forte, 12, is Forte's third child.

Quantavious Forte, whom everyone calls Toby, is 4. He is Forte's youngest son.