

Grieving Mother on a Mission

By Mimi Towle

Twin 22-year-olds Albade and Obadiah Taylor were working on their stalled car on a busy Oakland street when they were fatally shot in February 2000. Their mother, Lorrain Taylor '86, MHR '88, first heard the news from her youngest son, Greg, who called her at home.

"He told me to stop what I was doing and pray for strength," says Taylor. A newscast, he said, was reporting the murder of two young men with the same birthday; one had a small tattoo on his left shoulder: "Obadiah."

"I never let my boys wear baggy pants or piercings," says Taylor, who grew up in a Pentecostal church where everything from nail polish to make-up was a sin. "But Obadiah did have that tattoo, so there was no doubt that the victims on the news were my boys."

Almost a decade later, their murders remain

unsolved, yet Taylor has turned the tragedy into an opportunity to reach out to the families of homicide victims. She uses her experience not only to help others get their lives back on track after such a devastating loss but also to campaign against violence.

From her cramped Hayward living room, Taylor runs 1000 Mothers to Prevent Violence, an all-volunteer nonprofit organization that offers understanding and

a glimmer of hope to families directly affected by violence. Taylor has reached out to hundreds of families in crisis, sometimes bringing them donated groceries, other times letting them know about resources she wishes she'd known about after her sons' deaths. Above all, what she provides is emotional support—with a hug, a smile, and sometimes a prayer.

"I saw this gap in the community where I knew I could make a difference," says Taylor, a high-spirited gospel singer and community activist. "Mothers (affected by violence) are a faceless issue."

Taylor's organization also sponsors COPE (circle

of prayer and empowerment) support groups and connects families with legal aid, professional counseling, financial advice, and moral support. Taylor also visits Bay Area prisons to encourage inmates to change their ways, speaks at public rallies against violence, and has taken an anti-violence stand through song on her gospel CD, *Gumbo For My Soul*.

For many survivors of violence, however, the grief is so debilitating that it becomes difficult to even get out of bed. They often have to be reminded to do the simple life-sustaining things such as sleeping and drinking water, says Cristina Barron, victim advocate at the Carole Sund/Carrington Foundation, which awarded Taylor with its namesake award. "The event eclipses everything else that goes on in their world," she says.

Pamela Green, a minister in Oakland, understands that all too well—her son Antoine LaVelle Nelson was murdered several years ago. "When you lose a son or daughter you are in limbo," she says. "It has a residual effect...It can make you, break you or take you—literally it can take your life. Surviving depends on the support you have."

Green found that support in Taylor, who visited Green several times, often bringing her food and understanding.

"Lorrain is a beautiful person inside and out," says Green. "Her heart really goes out to her work and to the people with whom she has contact to be sure we get the things we need in terms of support, emotional and financial."

Green is now studying criminal justice so she can help families in her situation navigate the potentially intimidating legal process. She still attends the monthly COPE meetings.


"It helps me tremendously to hear other family members' ordeals and to make me realize that I'm not alone," says Green.

It took Taylor awhile to understand that after her sons' murders.

"After the funeral for Obadiah and Albade, the phone calls ceased, I was left alone...and when I say



Reaching Out: Lorrain Taylor '86, MHR '88, provides support to the families of homicide victims through 1000 Mothers to Prevent Violence, which she runs from her Hayward living room.



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alone, I mean alone,” Taylor says. Friends and family had always looked to her as the strong one, but “I didn’t have that kind of strength,” she says.

Immediately following the murders, she did have enough strength to get Greg, her youngest son, out of the Bay Area and away from the violence she saw around her. Through a college networking group, she found Southern Texas University, which accepted him and 10 of his friends. Yet instead of thinking about the tragedy and coming to terms with it, Taylor opted to double her caseload as a social worker, often working late into the night. She also cancelled her cable access program, *The Lorrain Taylor Show*, which had dealt with social issues, including gun violence.

Taylor had been silenced by her tragedy.

Just a few months after her sons’ deaths, however, Taylor was asked to participate in Oakland’s version of the Million Mom March Rally. She was reluctant to get on stage so soon after the murders, yet a prophetic dream involving Albade persuaded her to take that step. It was on this stage that she began turning her personal tragedy into a public crusade against violence.

Yet despite public appearances, a full-time work schedule, and constant contact with Greg in Texas, Taylor’s grieving process hit rock bottom when an emotional breakdown forced her into the hospital Sept. 11, 2001. Her road to recovery began when she realized she couldn’t escape her fears and that she needed help. A grief therapist helped her deal with the pain and a weekly Bible study taught her that the key to her recovery was being around others, especially those who are


dealing with the murders of their children: “I began to find true healing through reaching out to other mothers.”

“I’ve told my story so many times, and every time I tell it, I feel pain,” says Taylor, her eyes filling with tears. “Sharing my experience allows others who have been affected by violence to trust me. They know I’ve been there.”

It’s that experience that allows her to help others grieve in their own ways. One mother Taylor works with wears the ashes of her son in a charm around her neck; another keeps her son’s ashes in an urn and takes him out for walks. Many drink or take drugs to numb the pain; some turn to suicide. In all instances, Taylor connects them with the resources and people who can help.

She has also taken her anti-violence anthem to high-profile appearances alongside Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and lower-profile get-togethers, including church meetings, community gatherings, and groups of prisoners getting ready for parole.

Seeing the impact on mothers like Green, along with her faith in God, is what keeps Taylor going even as her living room becomes too cramped for day-to-day operations of her organization. Her staff is comprised of a handful of volunteers, all of whom have firsthand experience with surviving violence. Taylor has taught herself how to put up her own Web site and recently earned a certificate in nonprofit management, all with one goal in mind—to help those suffering after the tragic loss of a loved one.

“We don’t have money,” says Taylor, “but we have hands and abilities.” 

For more information on Lorrain Taylor or 1000 Mothers to Prevent Violence, visit www.1000mothers.org.