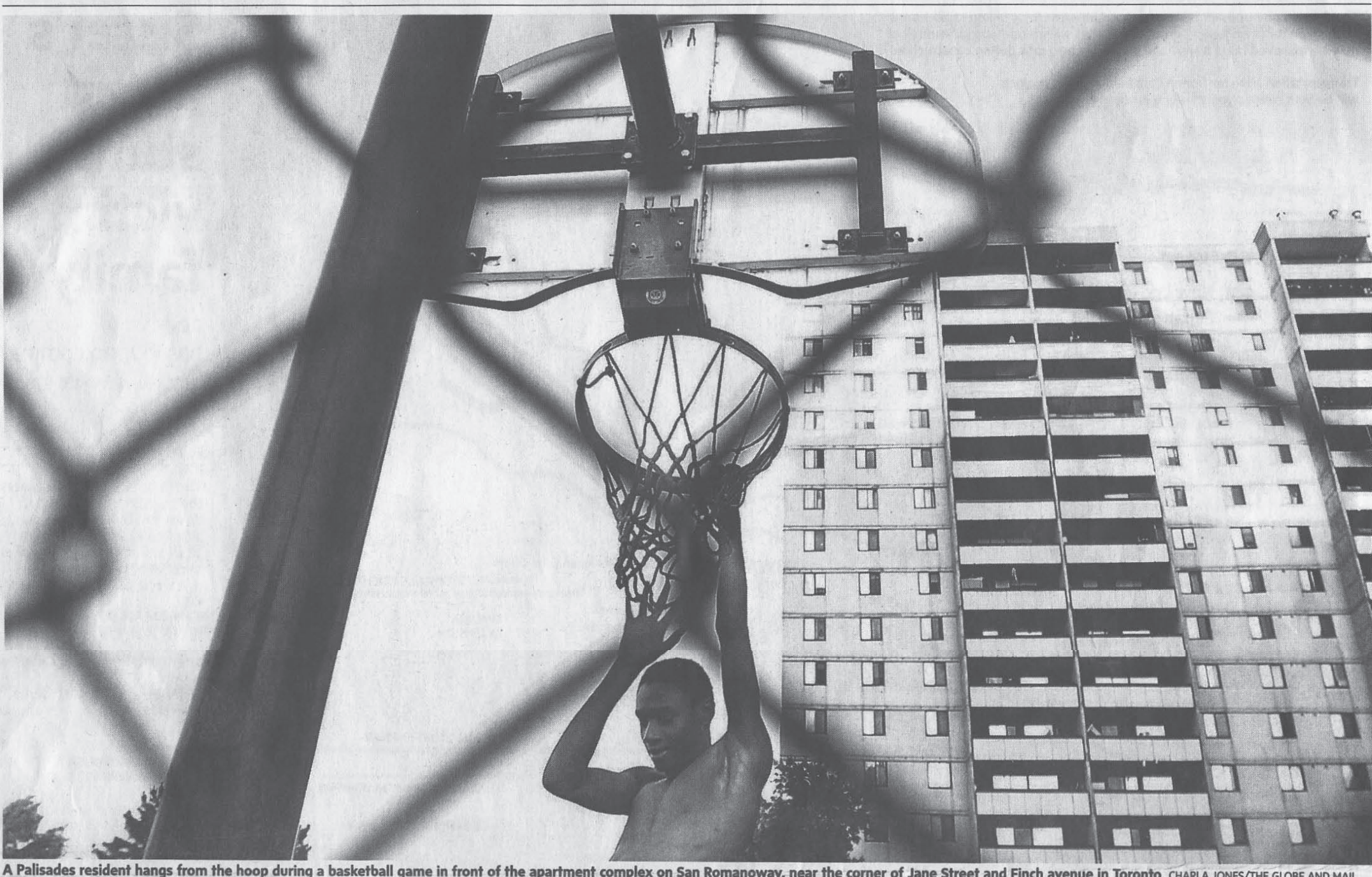


Welcome to Jane-Finch

CANADA'S TOUGHEST NEIGHBOURHOOD



A Palisades resident hangs from the hoop during a basketball game in front of the apartment complex on San Romanoway, near the corner of Jane Street and Finch avenue in Toronto. CHARLA JONES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Where boundary issues turn deadly

With the map redrawn by gangs, Joe Friesen writes, access to vital youth programs is blocked for those who need them most

Two months before Jordan Manners was shot dead in his school, the young man accused of his murder went to a local community group for help.

They didn't get it because they live in Canada's toughest neighbourhood, a place where guns are abundant and gang turf determines who can go where. One of the accused, a 17-year-old who dropped out in March and whose girlfriend gave birth a week before Jordan's death, said he had always struggled academically but wanted a program that could help him stabilize his life and finish his school.

"I'm slow," he told a community worker. "I know I am, I need a teacher who can be really patient with me."

The sad irony is that such a program already exists in Jane-Finch. But it's on the south side of Finch Avenue, which might as well be in another country.

The two accused are from the areas north of Finch that were targeted by police in this week's raids against the Driftwood Crips. The Crips have a sworn enemy in the Bloods, who live in the housing projects on Finch's south side, and they ceremoniously avoid each other's territory.

It's a segregation expressed mainly through clothing, blue for Crips and red for Bloods, and it has existed for a decade. Nor is it limited to serious criminals, but extends all the way to 13-year-old wannabes.

Last year, I spent three months writing about Toronto's Jane-Finch neighbourhood. I met a group of young people who provided a glimpse of what it's like to grow up here. Nearly two weeks ago, after Jordan's shooting death, I returned to the neighbourhood and spoke to some of the same teens again.

For all the headlines his killing produced, it was just one among many here, remarkable only because it happened at school. And although Jordan lived barely a kilometre away, he was from the north side of the divide, unknown in the south - I fault, police say, not by enemies but by friends.

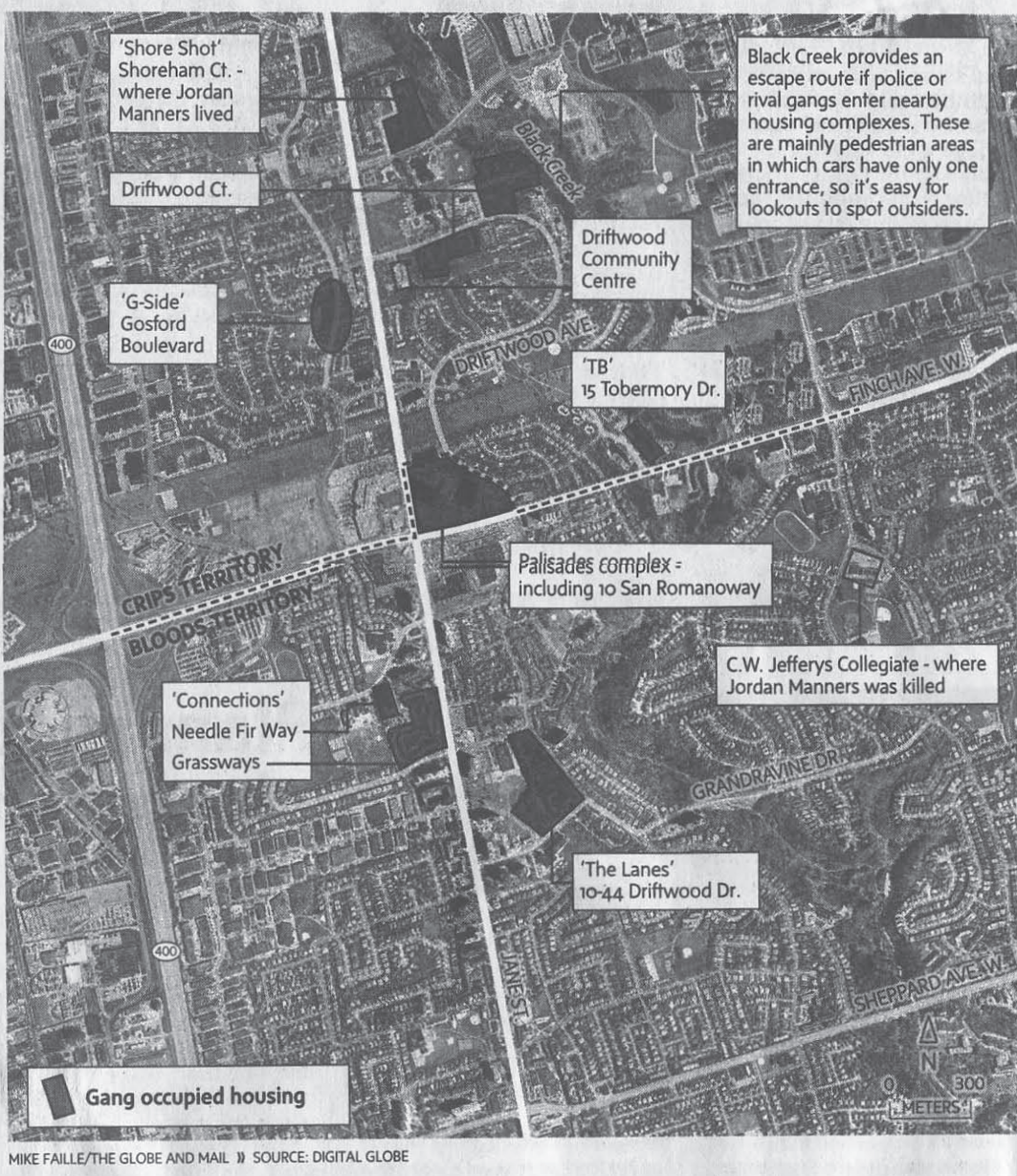
"I don't know the kid," one teen told me, "and I don't care."

CROSSING THE LINE
Most of those I spoke with live in the enormous Palisades apartment complex that sits at the corner of Jane Street and Finch Avenue. They are between 15 and 21 years old and consider themselves Bloods, an identity borrowed from the gang wars of Los Angeles.

On the Internet, they pass themselves off as hardcore gangsters. They want to look tough, and dress in baggy gang-

The great divide

In Canada's toughest neighbourhood, Finch Avenue separates the territories of two rival gangs. If you live on one side, it is not safe to wander into the other.



MIKE FALLER/THE GLOBE AND MAIL. SOURCE: DIGITAL GLOBE

HOW THE 'HOOD CAME TO BE

Jane and Finch is the result of three ideas that collided in the late 1960s: the need for public housing, the desire to experiment with urban planning, and the opening up of Canada's immigration policy to non-whites, Doug Young of York University says.

The growing city of North York was hungry for development of any kind, and an suburb a vision of a more urban suburb.

"The goal, which I think is an admirable one, was to produce a more urban, compact community where people would then maybe be better served by better transit, they would be closer to public services, and it would be visually more interesting," Prof. Young said.

Development happened almost overnight, as huge housing complexes were built on what had been farmers' fields. By 1970, recent immigrants from the Caribbean began moving to the area in large numbers, and the negative reaction in the rest of Toronto was swift.

Today, between 60 and 75 per cent of Jane-Finch residents are visible minorities. Nearly 25 per cent of dwellings are public housing, compared with 10 per cent in Toronto and 5 per cent in the rest of Canada. In the beginning, virtually all the units were reserved for the poorest families, a policy that was changed in 1973 to promote more mixing.

"You can argue that in hindsight

it would have been better to mix it up, if only to save the low-income families from the stigmatization," Prof. Young said.

By their very design, in the way they segregated cars and people by having pedestrian-only streets, the townhouse developments created public-safety problems. There were fewer eyes on the street, and police found the areas difficult to patrol.

"If Jane and Finch was built 10 years later, maybe it would look more like the St. Lawrence neighbourhood and be admired," Prof. Young said. "It has the density. It has the cultural diversity, so why is it not one of the best districts in the city?"

Joe Friesen

sta-style clothes, but few are deeply involved in criminal activity. The gang is a collective identity that provides a sense of security in a tough environment.

Lefty, a 16-year-old named for his smooth left-handed jump shot, was the first to explain the turf issues to me. We met on a warm summer evening last year as the sun slipped behind the Jane Street apartment towers. The leader of their weekly youth group had decided they should play soccer at nearby Driftwood Public School, which for the young men from Palisades meant going "up-top" into Crips territory. They were a little scared.

"What? We're going to Driftwood? Are you kidding?" Lefty said. "What if those Somalians come? They'll slice us up," someone else added.

The soccer game went off without incident. No one noticed that these teenagers, who happen to carry red bandanas, or "rock the red flag," had strayed outside their usual boundaries.

Sitting on aluminum bleachers in the park, Lefty looked over the Jane-Finch skyline. He said his friends aren't "real" gang members. They don't own guns, and they're not in a battle for the drug trade. But they have to look out for each other. That's how it is around here.

"You've got to be deadly," he said with a shrug. "You've got to be strong and brave, and you've got to be willing to fight."

He pointed east to 15 Tobermory Drive, a hulking public-housing high-rise, west to Gosford Boulevard, and then north to Driftwood Court and beyond to Shoreham Court. All four housing developments are Crips turf.

"We're surrounded up here," he said. The Bloods' allies are all south of Finch, he explained, in places like Connections and the Lane, also public-housing developments.

In their planning sessions, community workers refer solemnly to "boundary issues" that impede program delivery. When the police hold consultations with youth, they have meetings in each distinct area to prevent rival gangs from mingling.

It's as though the kids have redrawn the neighbourhood map and forced the adults to adapt. As a result, the teens from Palisades, who often complain of having nothing to do, don't use the well-equipped community centre that's a block away in Crips territory.

There was a time when the gangs of Jane-Finch all wore red, but there was a split in the mid-1990s and the groups to the north went their own way. Recently, the self-imposed seg-

regation has proved an effective buffer zone between the two groups, according to those who work closely with neighbourhood youth.

"The south guys don't want to beef with the north guys," one youth worker said. "The north guys are the killers."

The result has been a drop in traditional Bloods-versus-Crips animosity. But there has been a simultaneous increase in inter-gang strife, as young people from the same community feud among themselves.

The Crips, targets of the Project Kryptic raids, have gained a reputation as aggressive, trigger-happy stickup artists who generate a fair portion of their income through robbery. In the last few weeks alone, there have been several shooting incidents in the Shoreham and Driftwood areas. But the Crips lack effective top-down leadership. There's no system for redistributing income, as there is in traditional organized crime, for example, and small cliques have stronger loyalty to one another than to the gang as a whole.

The Bloods to the south have a more stable organization, in which senior leaders look out for the young people in their communities, encouraging them to stay in school and steer clear of guns. Some even deal drugs to put themselves through university, the youth worker said.

"The south side guys are the money makers," he said. "They're not into the guns because they don't want the heat the guns bring, and they have older guys to tell them how to act. They don't have that mentorship in the north."

TOUGHENING UP A GRAVE
Allen Benn was killed in April at the age of 20. Police say he was lured out of his apartment and set upon by a gang of people, stabbed several times and left to die.

He was the last person anyone expected to be murdered, and his friends say he wasn't involved in any serious criminal activity. Like most young people in the neighbourhood, he was affiliated with a group. The four people accused of killing him are his friends and fellow Bloods.

Justice, 21, is one of the senior members of the Palisades group and was one of Allen's closest friends.

"It was just over stupidity," he said. "It makes me sick. I can't even think about it."

He and a few other members of his crew piled into my car this week for the short drive up Jane Street to the graveyard.

"We made his grave look so tough," Justice said. "Wait 'til you see. It's the toughest one in Toronto." (Continued on next page)

him of abandoning the pregnant mother of his child. The woman was with a group of girls, one of whom was the embarrassed, forlorn-looking expectant mother.

The woman even showed him images of the baby's ultrasound to get his attention, but Justice was skeptical. He's pretty sure he's not the father, he said, because they broke up quite a while before she got pregnant. But he's willing to take a DNA test to find out, he said, and if it's his child, he'll take responsibility.

Justice's friends teased him for a minute or two, and then the incident was quickly forgotten as they took to the basketball court.

The game was reasonably good-natured until Jamal (not his real name) showed up, flashing his red bandana and picking on one of the weakest teens in the group, a thin, meek boy wearing a gold chain - a desirable status symbol.

"Why don't I just grab your chain? It'd be doing you a favour, teaching you to stand up for yourself, bitch," Jamal said. The young man looked terrified. Others intervened to prevent the robbery, but Jamal continued to push, accusing the teen of staring at him when he clearly was doing all he could to avoid him.

"Why you grillin' me? You trying to get at me?" Jamal said, circling him in an aggressive strut.

He threw a right hook that connected with the teen's jaw, landing with a dull thud. The teen staggered backward but didn't retaliate. All the while the others continued to play until a guy named Osman grew fed up and stepped between them.

"Just leave him alone. Can't you see he's not going to stand up for himself? Just leave, you're ruining the game," Osman said.

Jamal turned on Osman.

"Check the firepower," he said, and pointed to the back pocket of his jeans to suggest he was carrying a gun.

"Check the firepower?" said Osman, incredulous. "I survived 10 years in a war, motherfucker, so think I'm scared of you? Don't tell me about fire-power - punk ass bitch."

Jamal stared off, and the impression of the players had a lone man circling on a bicycle with one hand concealed in his pocket, standing at the court.

One of the players said he hates being inside the fenced court because there's only one

exit. The others started to disperse. It turned out not to be Jamal, but another young man he believed was carrying a gun and had a beef with some of the guys.

In the end, nothing happened, and those who never flinched mocked the others for getting nervous. "How's he going to come in here and bust shots?" one of them said. "No way, dog."

OPPORTUNITIES, GOOD AND BAD
Jordan Payne said the killing of Jordan Manners would serve as a wakeup call to governments. "In my view the dam is about to burst. There are inadequacies in the system," he said, referring to a litany of funding cuts in education and social services.

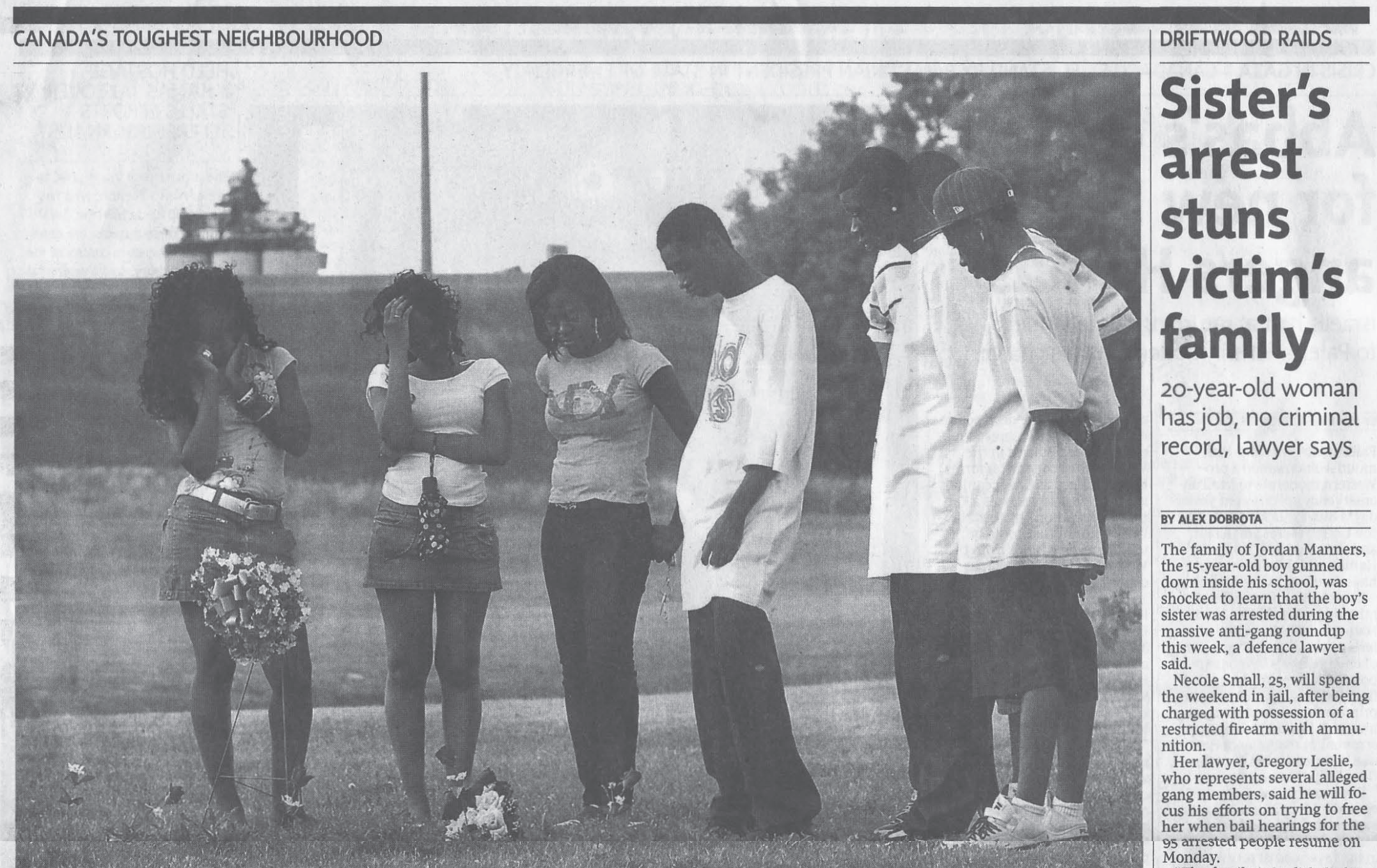
Ms. Payne runs the San Romanoway Youth Development Association, a neighbourhood resource centre. The deal is always open and teens are welcome to drop in for a meal, to use the computers or to get some guidance.

When you compare Jane and Finch with some of the city's other 13 priority neighbourhoods, she said, "yes, kids do die around here but let's look at the issue: Kids dying around here are young, black and male. They're primarily from single-parent households, led primarily by women who may have menial jobs or who rely on the state for survival. They live in apartment buildings, high-rises with other siblings. So when you look at those issues - poverty, marginalization, race and gender it creates elements of antisocial behaviour."

"We need to create opportunities for these students,"

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Friends visit Allen Benn's grave this week. The 20-year-old was stabbed multiple times in April. 'It was just over stupidity,' one acquaintance said. CHARLA JONES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

the whole cemetery." Justice was wearing one of the several Allen Benn RIP T-shirts that he owns (many kids in the neighbourhood wore similar T-shirts this week, some in memory of Jordan Manners, others in memory of Alisha Ashley and Monique McKnight, killed last week as police chased a stolen car.) The grave was decorated with a dozen red plastic roses. Justice and his friends fussed over the flowers, trying to make them stand upright in the dry, cracked earth.

"I can't believe he's gone. It's so weird," one of them said, looking down at the headstone.

"I know," Justice replied.

They shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other, occasionally bending down to brush away some dirt that obscured the epitaph. They placed coins around the bronze letters of his name for good luck.

"I'll bet you anything those coins are gone when we get back. Someone always steals them," Justice said.

As they wandered through the headstones, they named various people, all of them young, who are buried here and there. Their manner was a blend of solemnity and the peculiar pride of survivors.

"This place is going to fill up this summer," Kwame said. "No it's not. Are you stupid? They arrested everybody. It's going to be fine," Justice told him.

On the way home, those still in school discuss their coming exams. One is hoping to pass science, having failed badly the year before.

"How is it possible to get a 20 per cent when I went to class every day?" he asked. "I hate science."

BASKETBALL AND FIREPOWER
On Tuesday this week, the group was in its usual spot, lounging in front of the massive apartment tower at 10 San Romanoway, dribbling basketballs and antagonizing one another.

A woman in her 40s walked up and confronted Justice in front of his friends, accusing

him of abandoning the pregnant mother of his child. The woman was with a group of girls, one of whom was the embarrassed, forlorn-looking expectant mother.

The woman even showed him images of the baby's ultrasound to get his attention, but Justice was skeptical. He's pretty sure he's not the father, he said, because they broke up quite a while before she got pregnant. But he's willing to take a DNA test to find out, he said, and if it's his child, he'll take responsibility.

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DRIFTWOOD RAIDS

Sister's arrest stuns victim's family

20-year-old woman has job, no criminal record, lawyer says

BY ALEX DOBROTA

The family of Jordan Manners, the 15-year-old boy gunned down inside his school, was shocked to learn that the boy's sister was arrested during the massive anti-gang roundup this week, a defence lawyer said.

Nole Small, 25, will spend the weekend in jail, after being charged with possession of a restricted firearm with ammunition.

Her lawyer, Gregory Leslie, who represents several alleged gang members, said he will focus his efforts on trying to free her when bail hearings for the 35 arrested people resume on Monday.

"The family is in disbelief," Mr. Leslie said. "They can't believe that they would have arrested her, especially in those circumstances."

Ms. Small was sleeping over at a friend's home early Wednesday when police kicked open the door of the house in the troubled Jane-Finch neighbourhood. Police found a firearm in the house's basement, Mr. Leslie said.

The lawyer insisted his client has no criminal record and is working full-time. He plans to argue that she had no connection to the gun, since she didn't live in the house where it was found.

Jordan Manners was fatally shot inside C. W. Jefferys Collegiate Institute last month. The Manners live blocks away from Driftwood Court, the epicentre of Wednesday's raids.

Among the alleged gang members arrested during Project Kryptic were the Johnson brothers, Michael, Nadelle and Peter, known to police as the "three generals."

According to a source close to the judicial proceedings, police allege the three brothers are the masterminds behind the Driftwood Crips, the street gang targeted in the raids.

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