



Gunned-down Flatlands teen's favorite book was about flying

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Read more: http://www.nydailynews.com/news/ny_crime/2011/07/19/2011-07-19_gunneddown_flatlands_teens_favorite_book_was_about_flying_hes_among_stars.html

When the gunman began firing from the other side of the playground fence, 15-year-old Dequan Mercurius instinctively ran for the bright red doorway to the palace of peace and learning he happily attended in his younger years.

Over this portal to Public School 119 are the bywords, "Knowledge...Tolerance."

To the right, "The Future is Through This Door."

To the left, "This Way to Your Dream."

Dequan had gone on to middle school and then high school, but he and other neighborhood kids of all ages used the playground in the off-hours.

Dozens of kids scattered in all directions as the gunman ran along the outside of the fence firing in some indiscriminate gang insanity Saturday evening. Another PS119 graduate, a 13-year-old, was hit first, in the hip.

"It feels hot!" the youngster exclaimed.

A bullet passed between some climbing bars and struck Dequan under his arm. His blood splattered in front of the doorway through which he had passed so many times as a youngster.

His favorite book back in the second grade had been "Tar Beach" and he had asked his teacher to read the lines about flying among the stars.

"I will always remember when the stars fell down around me and lifted me..."

He now could do no more than stagger to the middle of the playground, which had been painted with a huge pair of hands cradling a world on which a peace sign was superimposed.

He collapsed and lay struggling for breath on this icon of global tranquility, gazing up at the evening sky where he had once imagined flying.

His eyes rolled up into his head and he was beyond saving as the paramedics carried him across a playground where terrified youngsters had dropped earphones and hats and



backpacks and wallets.

A custodian remembered that Dequan was always the one who would help when the playground closed for the night, telling the other kids it was time to go, even helping to pick up the trash.

As news of the tragedy spread, Lisa Fernandez, the principal of PS 119, went to Dequan's house. His younger sister, Natallya, is a rising third-grader at the school. She wrapped her arms around the principal's waist.

A half-dozen PS 119 teachers also came by after attending a spontaneous candlelight vigil at the playground.

They brought with them more of the spirit of a school that ceaselessly strives to live up to the words around its portal, that teaches empathy as the true way of the world, that remains a true champion against violence. Students there take a daily **Peace Builders** Pledge.

"To right wrongs, help others."

PS 119 kids once raised \$1,000 in pennies for a foundation named after another murdered Brooklyn youngster.

They prepared letters of recommendation for their teachers in case the educators were laid off and had to find a new job. One student had just chalked a big heart along with a teacher's name on the playground floor when gunfire erupted on Saturday.

Yesterday morning, an emissary from the school brought Natallya a copy of the book that had been her brother's favorite when he was her age.

An aunt put little stars next to the lines that he had asked his teacher to read again and again. She suggested maybe Natallya could read them at the funeral.

"Anyone can fly. All you need is somewhere to go that you can't get to any other way. The next thing you know, you're flying among the stars."

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Joe Marino for News

Memorial on E. 37th St. near Avenue K is set up for Dequan Mercurius (below), who was killed on Brooklyn school playground Saturday. The teen was fatally shot, and another boy injured.