

Opinion

Guest Column: A shooting victim's saga, and a search for reconciliation

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Can you imagine waking up and not being able to lift your arms? Can you imagine waking up and needing someone to help you get out of bed because you cannot walk? Can you imagine one day being a healthy 21-year-old basketball prospect, the next day being a paraplegic?

I'll answer these questions for you: you can't imagine this reality unless you live this reality. You don't understand this situation unless you are the person confined to a chair, waiting for someone to feed you, waiting for someone to give you something to drink. Your imagination has its limitations. This is one of them. You can't imagine being a paraplegic trapped in a chair after being shot in the neck.

I enjoy "blogging" and have been unable to make time the last two weeks to tap the keyboard. I blog because I simply love writing. If there is one thing I love more than writing it is doing something to change what I might express through my writing. Sometimes I write for pleasure; other times I write for action. My purpose for this blog should be obvious.

I met a young man named Shakiyl (pronounced like Shaquille O'Neal) about three months ago. I had been invited to attend a Philadelphia 76ers basketball game with Shakiyl and several other young men from a Philadelphia area housing development.

It took only a split of a split second for me to connect with Shakiyl. He rolled his automated wheelchair into a community center - his mother not far behind - and smiled a wonderful smile. I watched his mother wipe his face for him. She tucked money into his shirt pocket.

I'm not quick to feel sorry for people; loose emotions can be a sign of personal immaturity and often insulting to their target. Furthermore feeling sorry for someone should be a temporary state, a pause of respectful acknowledgement, a transition into doing something about something.

I didn't talk much about his condition on night of our first meeting. But in the last two weeks of intense interaction, Shakiyl and I have shared many ideas and thoughts. At first, Shakiyl talked about writing a book, doing some presentations about violence. With all due respect, I told him, those things are easy.

I made another proposition.

"What if we sought out the person who shot you and attempted to reconcile with him?"

Shakiyl looked at me like I was out of my 46-year-old mind.

"I don't know about that," he said politely. The person who shot Shakiyl was never arrested or publicly - conclusively - identified.

"I don't know if my shooter is that type of person," Shakiyl continued.

"You're right," I told him. "You don't know. Do you want to find out?"

Still looking at me sideways, I could tell Shakiyl was intrigued. "What the hell is this guy thinking?" he seemed to be asking himself.

So I told him what I was thinking.

"I never thought my father would come forward publicly with me and talk about the things that he did to my mother," I told Shakiyl. "But he did. We don't know that person who did this to you. We don't know if he's in need of a change in his life. There's only one way to find out."

In the last two weeks, Shakiyl and I have been putting together a team of concerned and committed supporters. We've done a radio show together. We're doing more radio shows, newspaper articles, blogs and community forums. We are going to make this an international issue.

I don't expect that everyone will understand what we're doing. I don't expect that everyone will support what we are doing. There really are only two people that matter: Shakiyl and the person who shot him.

Impossible is what has not happened yet. I believe in the impossible. It's my life's work. It's how you experience the power of the God you say you believe in.

On the so-called practical side of things, we have asked help from select national attorneys. If the person who shot Shakiyl comes forward, we want him protected through client-attorney privilege. WE DON'T WANT HIM TO GO TO JAIL. In so many ways, this individual is already in prison. In many ways - like so many others - he is spiritually deceased.

Bear with this next point: we call Shakiyl's shooter "Lazarus." I'll let you look up the reference and take it from there.

We are not making threats to Lazarus. We don't want tips from the community. We are not asking for the participation of local, regional or national bureaucracy. We don't want Lazarus to feel any pressure other than the pressure of inner turmoil. Shakiyl and I believe in Lazarus. We believe he can and will come forward through his own resolve.

Justice? What about justice you ask? Justice is best served in most situations through direct attempts at restoration. I agree America's got one of the best legal, judicial concepts on the planet and in history. But it doesn't always work. One sized-justice does not fit all.

So back to Shakiyl. You should see his smile. You should hear his voice at the thought of reconciliation with Lazarus. You should feel his energy at the thought that the person who shot him might come forward and help replace horror with hope.

You don't believe this is possible? That's your problem. You don't believe this is proper? That's your problem. All that matters is what Shakiyl and Lazarus wants.

In a video message to Lazarus, Shakiyl tells him that the two of them could start "a revolution."

Wow.

You don't agree. Stay away from the action. You think this is silly? Question yourself. Shakiyl and Lazarus have powerful work to do.

And a final note to Lazarus - wake up! The world needs something to believe in!

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