



DIRECTIONS: As you read the following introduction and feature article from Time magazine, actively annotate the text paying special attention to new information that you did not read about in Yummy. Think about why Neri omitted these details.

To Our Readers

By ELIZABETH VALK LONG, PRESIDENT

Considering all the tragedy they come across in their jobs, reporters have to develop tough skins to survive. But when members of TIME's Chicago bureau fanned out in the city last week to reconstruct the short, shocking life of Robert Sandifer, known as Yummy, their journalistic reserve was sorely tested. In an intense three-day period of reporting, the Midwest bureau chief Jon Hull and reporter Julie Grace trekked through Robert's former neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, talking to friends -- and more often enemies -- about the slain 11-year-old. They searched out family members, spending time with both Yummy's mother and his grandmother. They pored through worn folders on Robert at Juvenile Court and the Department of Children and Family Services. Joined by photographer Steve Liss to produce this week's cover story, they found themselves as moved as we think readers will be by their work.

Grace was particularly shaken by the interviews she did with Robert's former neighbors. "It's depressing to hear them talk about murder as if it's an everyday thing," she says. "And it's just heartbreaking to talk to 10- and 11-year-olds who don't expect to live past 19. As I was leaving Yummy's block, a woman called out to me, 'When are you coming back? You've gotten to be my friend.' Sometimes stories get to you; this one left my stomach in knots." Hull, who wrote our cover story last year on kids and guns, realized after all his digging that Robert's death was sadly predictable. "After three days of reporting," he says, "I still couldn't decide which was more appalling: the child's life or the child's death."

Integral to the coverage were Liss's evocative black-and-white photographs. Liss, who has covered presidential elections for TIME since 1976 and has taken 18 cover photos -- including last year's on the Midwest floods -- was called in from vacation in Boston. Flying to Chicago, he went

immediately to the scene of Robert's murder, where he found that someone had placed a single red rose. Later he joined Hull and Grace to retrace the steps of Robert's life. Most poignant of all was the funeral on Wednesday. Liss, who volunteers as a Big Brother, was struck that the victim, no matter how troubled, was just a little boy. "His grandmother kept wailing that someone should have been there for him, and I know that's true," says Liss. His photos of the scene, he says, were quite simply "the saddest pictures I've ever taken."

Murder In Miniature

At the age of 11, "Yummy" Sandifer killed and was killed. His short, violent life is a haunting tale.

By NANCY R. GIBBS

On a bright September afternoon last week, the mothers of Chicago's South Side brought their children to a vigil for a dead boy they had never met. They wanted their kids to see the scrawny corpse in the loose tan suit lying in a coffin, next to his stuffed animals, finally harmless. The big kids dragged the little kids up to look at the stitches on his face where the bullets fired into the back of his head had torn through. The only picture the family could find for the funeral program was a mug shot. "Take a good look," said the Rev. Willie James Campbell. "Cry if you will, but make up your mind that you will never let your life end like this."

Parents hoped to haunt their children; maybe fear would keep them safe. Lynn Jeneta, 29, took her nine-year-old son Ron. If he got scared enough, she decided, "maybe then he wouldn't be lying there himself one of these days." She pushed him right up to the coffin. Ron tried to stay calm. "Some kids said Yummy looked like he was sleeping, but he didn't look like he was sleeping to me." What exactly then did he look like? "Kind of like he was gone, you know?" His composure melts. "When Mama pushed me forward, I thought I was going to fall right in the damn coffin. That gives me nightmares, you know? Can you imagine falling into a coffin?"

Many who knew Robert ("Yummy") Sandifer better mourned him less. "Nobody didn't like that boy. Nobody gonna miss him," said Morris Anderson, 13. Anderson used to get into fistfights with Yummy, who received the nickname because of his love of cookies and Snickers bars. "He was a crooked son of a bitch," said a local grocer, who had barred him from the store for stealing so

much. "Always in trouble. He stood out there on the corner and strong- armed other kids. No one is sorry to see him gone."

Nor, it seems, was anyone very surprised. The neighborhood was still grieving its other dead child, the girl Yummy allegedly killed two weeks ago, when he was supposed to fire on some rival gang members but shot 14-year-old Shavon Dean instead. Police descended on the gang, and Yummy became a liability. So he became a victim too. When he was found dead in a bloody mud puddle under a railway viaduct three days later, an entire city shuddered and clutched its children and looked for lessons.

The mayor of Chicago admitted that Yummy had slipped through the cracks. Just what cracks were those? The sharp crevices that trap children and break them into cruel little pieces. Chicago's authorities had known about Yummy for years. He was born to a teenage addict mother and a father now in jail. As a baby he was burned and beaten. As a student he often missed more days of school than he attended. As a ripening thug he shuttled between homes and detention centers and the safe houses maintained by his gang. The police arrested him again and again and again; but the most they could do under Illinois law was put him on probation. Thirteen local juvenile homes wouldn't take him because he was too young.

Before they grow up, these children can become walking weapons. One very mean little boy didn't grow up, so he became an icon instead. The crimes he committed -- and those he suffered -- shook the country's conscience in a way that violent acts with far larger body counts no longer do. "If ever there was a case where the kid's future was predictable, it was this case," says Cook County public guardian Patrick Murphy. "What you've got here is a kid who was made and turned into a sociopath by the time he was three years old." Yummy's mother Lorina called him, without irony, "an average 11-year-old." The courts and cops and probation officers and psychologists who tracked his criminal career all agree. "I see a lot of Roberts," says Cook County Circuit Judge Thomas Sumner, who handled charges against Yummy for armed robbery and car theft. "We see this 100 times a week," says Murphy.

The proof is in the paperwork -- worn folders inches thick, filed at the public guardian's office, the courts, the police headquarters and now the medical examiner's office. Yummy's files are indistinguishable from the records of thousands of other urban American kids. The evidence -- if

more evidence is really necessary -- is overwhelming: when a child's brain is flooded, the child eventually drowns.

That was the verdict of a psychiatric evaluation last November. "Robert is emotionally flooded," the confidential report reads. "His response to the flooding is to back away from demanding situations and act out impulsively and unpredictably." The examiner asked him to complete the sentence "I am very . . ." "Sick," Yummy replied. The examiner saw a child full of self-hate, lonely, illiterate, wary. When he heard a walkie-talkie down the hall, he jumped from his seat, afraid of police. "You tryin' to trick me," he accused the examiner. There was not much doubt about how he came to be that way -- only about whether anyone or anything could save him.

Yummy's mother was the third of 10 children from four fathers -- she never knew her own. When she was 15 she had her first son Lorenzo, then Victor, then Yummy and eventually five more. She dropped out of 10th grade, found an apartment, went on welfare and nursed a crack habit. For a while she tried living with Yummy's father Robert Akins, who was convicted of drug and weapons charges. They soon split because he had "a rather angry and hot temper," she told a social worker.

So, apparently, did she. The first charge of child neglect was filed in 1984, when Lorina failed to follow doctors' orders for treating two-year-old Victor's eye condition. He eventually went blind. The following year 22-month-old Yummy arrived at Jackson Park Hospital covered with scratches and bruises. A few months later it was his sister, this time with second- and third-degree burns. Lorina explained that the toddler had fallen on the radiator. An emergency-room nurse told the court that the injuries did not quite match the story. Someone probably held the child on the heater, the nurse testified.

The courts finally moved in a year later, when neighbors told police that the five children were routinely being left at home alone. By the time they removed the kids, Yummy was a bundle of anger and scars. He had long welts on his left leg; police suspected he was beaten with an electrical cord. There were cigarette burns on his shoulders and buttocks. "I never beat my kids," Lorina insists to this day. She says the scars were caused by chicken pox, not cigarettes. "I gave him all the attention I could," she says of Yummy, but admits there were distractions. Now 29, she has been arrested 41 times, mainly for prostitution.

"He shouldn't be dead," she says, sitting in her living room the day after his funeral. There is a white bucket in the corner with a live frog he caught a few weeks ago. "He liked to fish," she says. "People think he was a monster, but he was nice to me." She says she saw him regularly; he called her Reen instead of Mom, and, she admits, "he was always blaming me" for his problems. "They could have saved him and rehabilitated him," she insists. "When he started taking cars, they should have put him away then and given him therapy."

From early on, the child-welfare workers had little hope for Lorina as a parent. "There is no reason to believe that Lorina Sandifer will ever be able to adequately meet her own needs, let alone to meet the needs of her growing family," a psychiatrist reported to the juvenile court in 1986. And so Yummy and his brothers and sister were placed with his grandmother, Janie Fields, whom Yummy took to calling Mama. Her prognosis as a care giver was not much more promising. The psychiatric report described Fields as "a very controlling, domineering, castrating woman with a



rather severe borderline personality disorder."

Neighbors in the black working-class neighborhood called Roseland still remember the day Janie Fields moved into a two-story, three-bedroom house with her brood: nearly all her 10 children and 30 grandchildren lived with her at one time or another. "They are dirty and noisy, and they are ruining the neighborhood," complained a neighbor. Residents launched an unsuccessful petition drive to force Fields out. "All those kids are little troublemakers," said Carl McClinton, 23, who lives down the

street. "This is the kind of neighborhood where we all look after each other's kids, but they are a rougher breed."

The neighborhood kids describe two different Yummy Sandifers. There is the bully, the extortionist, the fierce fighter who would take on the big kids and beat them. "Yummy would ask you for 50 cents," says Steve Nelson, 11, "and if he knew you were scared and you gave him the money, he'd ask for another 50 cents." Erica Williams, 20, a neighbor, says, "You really can't describe how bad he really was. He'd curse you completely out. He broke in school, took money, burned cars."

Others recall a sweeter side. Lulu Washington sells discount candy out of her house, just across from Yummy's. "He just wanted love," she says. For that, he could be disarmingly kind. "He'd say thank you, excuse me, pardon me." He loved animals and basketball and had a way with bicycles. He once even merged two bikes into a single, working tandem. Those were the good times. "It always meant trouble when he was with a group," says Ollie Jones- Edwards, 54. "If he was alone, he was sweet as jelly."

Yummy liked great big cars, Lincolns and Cadillacs, says Micaiah Peterson, 17. "He could drive real well. It was like a midget driving a luxury car." Sometimes he hung out at the local garage, learning about alternators and fuel injectors. When he wasn't stealing cars, he was throwing things at them or setting them on fire. "What could you do?" asks McClinton. "Tell his grandmother? She'd yell at him, and he'd be right back on the street. If the police picked him up, they'd just bring him back home because he was too young to lock up. He was untouchable, and he knew that."

His odds of reaching the age of 12 dropped sharply when he fell in with the local Black Disciples gang. Several thousand or so gang members in Chicago are spread out across separate fiefdoms, led by "ministers" in their 30s and 40s who are always recruiting children. There is plenty of work for everyone: car theft, drug running, prostitution, extortion, credit-card fraud. Police suspect that gang leaders use the little ones as drug runners and hit men because they are too young to be seriously punished if they are caught.

On the other hand, they aren't likely to last long. "If you make it to 19 around here, you are a senior citizen," says Terrance Green, 19. "If you live past that, you're doing real good." A Black Disciple named Keith, 17, describes the role the youngest members play: "He's this small little punk but wants a name, right? So you make him do the work. 'Hey, homey, get me a car. A red car. A red sports car. By tonight. I'm taking my woman out. Or hey, homey, go find me \$50. Or hey, little homey, you wanna be big? Go pop that nigger that's messing with our business.'"

Yummy averaged a felony a month for the last year and a half of his life; 23 felonies and five misdemeanors in all. Ann O'Callaghan, a lawyer and assistant public guardian, met Yummy once, last December in court. She was astounded by his size and demeanor. "Some of these kids we represent are ominous characters. But I had to bend over, and I was like, 'Hi! My name is Ann, and I'm your lawyer.' I couldn't believe it." Yummy wasn't the least bit intimidated by the courtroom. "It was like he was just sitting there waiting for a bus."

Last fall Yummy was placed with the Lawrence Hall Youth Services, which runs homes for troubled teenagers. He ran away in February and went back to his grandmother until June, when he spent two weeks in a detention facility. In July, Yummy and his cousin Darryl went on a church trip to Six Flags Great America, an hour north of the city. "Yummy couldn't get on most of the rides," Darryl says. "He was too small." On another day a neighbor, Ida Falls, took Yummy and 12 other kids to the local police station to see a film on crime. The cops asked her not to bring him back because he got into fights with other children. On Aug. 15 he was charged in another burglary. By Aug. 28 he would be firing the fatal bullets -- and it would be too late.

Falls' niece Shavon Dean lived around the corner from Yummy and had known him growing up. One August Sunday night she was sitting in the kitchen eating Doritos, while her mother Deborah was out back grilling ribs and chicken for a family barbecue. Shavon slipped out for a few minutes to walk a friend home. She never made it back.

George Knox, a gang researcher at Chicago State University, believes Yummy was sent on a specific mission of revenge sparked by a drug feud or a personal insult. "If it was just an initiation ceremony, he'd do it from a car. But to go right up to the victims, that means he was trying to collect some points and get some rank or maybe a nice little cash bonus." Yummy opened fire with a 9-mm semiautomatic into a crowd of kids playing football. Sammy Seay, 16, was struck in the hand. "I hit the ground," says Seay. "It was the second or third shot before I knew I had been shot. So I got up and I just ran, trying to save my life." Shavon was struck in the head and died within minutes. "Shavon never got a chance, never got a chance," her mother says.

Yummy spent the last three days of his life on the run. Gang members shuttled him between safe houses and abandoned buildings as police swooped down on the neighborhood, searching for the shooter, followed by a flock of reporters. Gang leaders felt the pressure. "He was like a trapped animal with everyone after him," says Knox. "He was the hunter, and then he was the prey."

Maybe Yummy figured out that the gang's protection was not worth much. Janie Fields last spoke to Yummy Wednesday afternoon before he died. "He said, 'What is the police looking for me for?' I said, 'I'm coming to get you.' I had clothes with me 'cause I knew he was probably filthy and dirty. My heart was racing. I said, 'You ain't done nothing wrong, just let me come and get you.' " The

phone went dead. She went to 95th Street, where he said he would be. "He wasn't there."

But he appeared that night on a neighbor's porch, visibly frightened, asking that she call his grandmother so he could turn himself in. He asked if they could say a prayer together. The neighbor went to make the call, and when she came back, he was gone. The police can only guess what happened next. Derrick Hardaway, 14, and his brother Cragg, 16, both honor students and fellow gang members, found Yummy and promised that they could help him get out of town. They drove him to a railroad underpass, a dark tunnel marbled with gang graffiti. Yummy's body was found lying in the mud, with two bullet wounds in the back of his head.

Now it's the Hardaway brothers' turn. Authorities say gang leaders, who can easily order hits in any prison in the state, may have the Hardaways targeted next. Both boys were arrested and are being held in protective custody. As for the other children in Yummy's neighborhood, when they are asked what would make them feel safer, most give the same answer: getting a gun. Among other things, it would protect them from the children who already have them.

There were those who were missing Yummy last week, those who had seen the child and not the killer. "Everyone thinks he was a bad person, but he respected my mom, who's got cancer," says Kenyata Jones, 12. Yummy used to come over to Jones' house several times a month for sleep-overs. "We'd bake cookies and brownies and rent movies like the old Little Rascals in black and white," says Jones. "He was my friend, you know? I just cried and cried at school when I heard about what happened," he says, plowing both hands into his pants pockets for comfort before returning to his house to take care of his mother. "And I'm gonna cry some more today, and I'm gonna cry some more tomorrow too."