

Get Down! Get Down!

I thought the pops I heard were fire crackers. One, two, three, four, five in quick succession. A minute later, I heard a dog barking fiercely and my neighbor yell, "Get out of here! Get out of here!"

I ran up the stairs and out the side door to help. I figured it was just a vagrant, drunk and confused. I found a young black man climbing the steps of my back deck. I yelled at him, "Get the hell out of here!"

He said, "I'm shot. I'm shot. I'm shot."

He stumbled back down the steps. I yelled, "Get down. Get down. Get down." I could see the blood now. He wore a white t-shirt and even in the dark I could see he was covered with blood. I kept yelling, "Get down."

I was crouching and barking like a dog, get down, over and over. I didn't know if there were going to be more gunshots and I needed him to show me that he wasn't hostile. I didn't know if he was armed or not.

"Get down. Get down." He wouldn't listen to me. I wanted to tackle him and throw him down, but I couldn't tell where the wounds were and I didn't want to hurt him worse. All these thoughts went through my mind in slow motion. I kept barking, "Get down." It seemed like forever, but it was probably thirty seconds. He finally laid down in my driveway. I frisked him and all I felt was blood. I couldn't tell where the wounds were.

I screamed for neighbors to call 911. I screamed for my wife to bring towels. I was scared this young man was going to die. He was bleeding from his head. Sheila ran out with towels as I dialed 911 on my cell phone. It was busy. I couldn't see where the bleeding was coming from. I yelled to Sheila to turn on exterior lights, "I need light, I need light." I propped up his head with the towels. There was too much blood. I didn't know what to do.

"Where the hell are the sirens?" I yelled. "Why don't I hear sirens?" I was cursing and swearing, mad as hell that help wasn't coming. We live in the inner city just minutes from hospitals and fire departments. I asked him who he wanted me to call. He gave me a number for his mother. The first call went unanswered. He gave me another number. Meanwhile Sheila was holding his head in her hands. "What's your name? How old are you?" He was fifteen. His name was Juvenis (not his real name).

I got his mother on the line. I tried to explain as calmly as possible that there was an emergency and that her son was hurt and that she needed to come right away. Juvenis said, "Let me talk to her." I put the phone up to his ear.

"Mom, I've been shot." I heard her scream. I took the phone back.

"Stay on the phone with me. Don't hang up. Stay on the phone. I am going to guide you here." Someone else got on the phone. She told me this was a landline and to call back another number. Somehow I remembered it. As I gave them street by street instructions to my house, a police car drove into my driveway. I yelled at him, "Get the hell out my driveway. We are waiting for an ambulance. Get out of the way."

"I am the police," he said. "Then do your job, get an ambulance here, and get that car out of my driveway," I said. "You're in the way."

I continued talking to Juvenis's mother's friend. "Keep going straight. The next light is Wealthy." Sheila knelt by the young man's side and wiped the blood from his eyes. She kept telling him he was going to be all right and to stay awake. "Stay with me, stay with me. Your mom is coming. The ambulance is coming. Stay with me, Juvenis."

The cop asked me who I was talking to. I said I had his mother on the phone. "Let me talk to her."

"Do your job and get an ambulance."

I ran down the street to the intersection. By now three more cop cars were blocking the street. There were two fire engines on the main street but still no ambulance. "Turn left at the next street," I said into the phone. They turned and I heard screams coming through the phone as they saw all the flashing lights from the fire engines. "Keep coming, keep coming. Can you see me in the street waving to you?"

They parked the car and ran up the street but the cops wouldn't let his mother near him. I was yelling at the cops to let her go. There were lots of cops now and a fireman was doing some first aid. The cops told Sheila to go back in the house. I am sure if we were black they would have cuffed us both.

Sheila ran back into the house and came out the side door on a deck over looking Juvenis still lying in his blood in the driveway. She yelled down to him. "Your mom is here. Stay with us, Juvenis. Don't close your eyes. Your mom is here. Stay with us. You're going to be all right." The cops tried to shut her up because they were trying to interrogate him. They may as well have blown a whistle at a tornado. Sheila stayed with him.

I got his mother a chair and a glass of water. Finally, an ambulance arrived and his mother rode to the hospital with him.

Later I asked a detective what took the ambulance so long to get here. He explained that an ambulance wouldn't approach a scene of violence until the police cleared it, that is, told them it was safe. All our neighbors were in the street and the yard but the police wouldn't give the ambulance an all clear until they were done interrogating the victim.

Why did Sheila and I and my neighbors act so differently than the folks in Twin Lakes, Florida where Trayvon Martin was murdered? Maybe because we don't live in a gated community. I know this. If I ever have another emergency, I won't call the cops or an ambulance. I will take the victim to the hospital myself.

After the scene cleared the policeman whom I told to get out of my driveway told Sheila that I wasn't very cooperative. "Really?" she said. "You don't think he's cooperative?" Ha! Maybe he should talk to my old supervisors at GM-Delphi. Or the UAW for that matter. You can't trust authorities.

Juvenis survived. He had two bullets in his head. A 9 mm and a .22. He was also shot in the thigh and he had a severe laceration on his arm from scaling fences in his effort to escape his attackers. Most of the yards in our neighborhood are patios, small and fenced. My backyard is an anomaly. It's a double lot in an L-shape with tall old pines and shrubs. If Juvenis had run back there and collapsed, we may never have found him until it is was too late.

911 was busy when I called because so many neighbors were also dialing 911.

In Grand Rapids, where I live, there is a law against "hindering and opposing." I have no doubt that if Sheila and I were black we would have been arrested. That's how it works.

This event actually occurred in August 2011.

When there's blood and violence in movies, I close my eyes. I can't bear the sight of blood or injury. I was scared as hell. I refrained from writing the sort of shop talk that I actually used when I was yelling, "Why don't I hear sirens! Where are the sirens!" Or when I was yelling at the police. But you know what I said. Yeah, you know what I'm talking about: soldiers of solidarity.

sos, shotwell