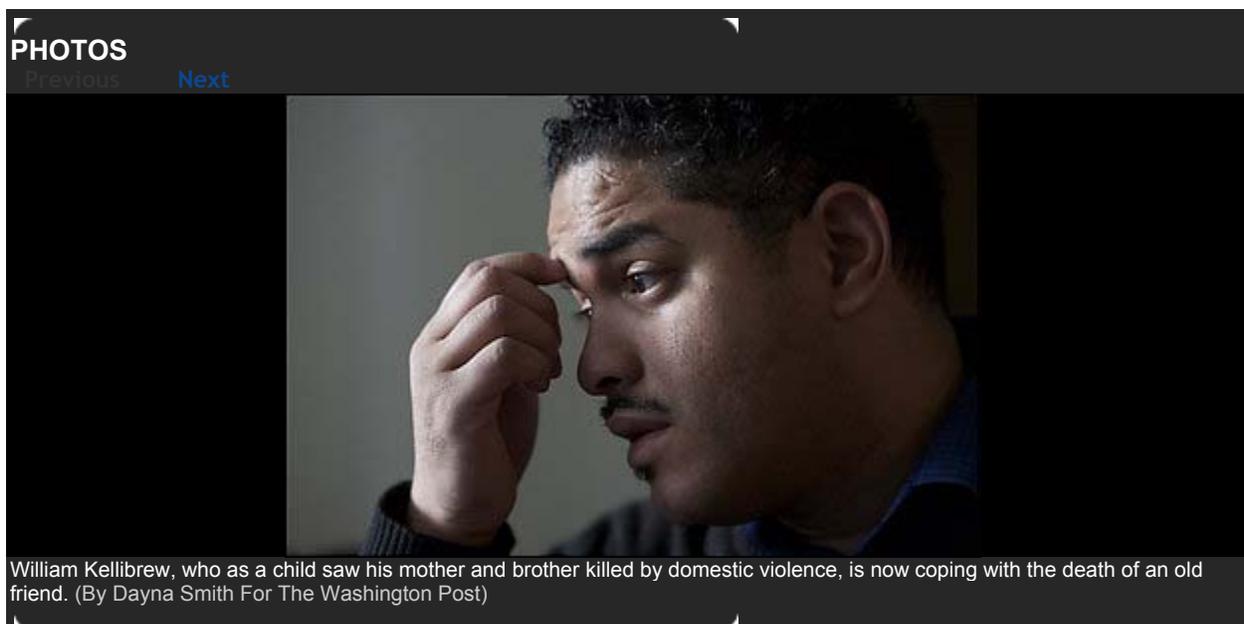


Seeking Solution to Violence

Man Hopes to Create a Registry of Domestic Abusers



By [Robert E. Pierre](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, November 29, 2008; Page B01

William Kellibrew's memory is seared with the carnage of domestic abuse: bullets being loaded into a handgun, piercing screams, four point-blank blasts at his mother and older brother, his own voice pleading not to be killed.

Kellibrew was 10 at the time, and for years family members did not want to discuss the 1984 killings by his mother's former boyfriend. He had to deal with it on his own.

His memories flooded back last week when Tiffany Gates was stabbed to death and a former boyfriend, covered in blood, was arrested at the scene in Southeast Washington and charged with murder. Kellibrew and Gates, 33, had known each other since elementary school and were so close that they considered themselves brother and sister.

Before Gates died, she dialed feverishly for help, reaching friends, the 911 communications center and a U.S. marshal who was nearby when she said, "He is here and kicking my door in."

Friends will gather to bury Gates today. And Kellibrew plans to turn his tears and anger into action. He has organized conference calls with family members and contacted anti-violence

groups proposing an abuse registry similar to those for sex offenders. Feedback so far has been positive, he said.

"It's a community tragedy," said Kellibrew, 34, a student at the University of the District of Columbia. "I'm past grieving or mourning. When my mother died when I was 10, I remember being helpless. I did not have the strength to talk. I could not speak. I said after this, 'We've got to do something different.' "

An average of three women are killed each day in the United States by a husband or boyfriend, and estimates of physical abuse run as high as 3 million cases each year.

Locally, the numbers are staggering. According to the latest report of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 12,800 cases of domestic violence were reported to D.C. police in the first six months of 2007. In Maryland, almost 22,000 cases were reported in 2006. In Virginia, 51,600 people contacted domestic violence programs that year.

The cases stem from stormy relationships, with breakups and reconciliation attempts that frustrate families, prosecutors and police officers who are called in to mediate.

In the past year, women in the region have been set afire by former boyfriends, and their children have been killed by ex-husbands. A week ago, a St. Mary County's man was arrested after he allegedly broke in to his ex-girlfriend's house and killed her new boyfriend with a shovel. The three children she had with the suspect were in the house, and the woman had notified authorities of her fear that he would kill her.

"This is a public health crisis," said Kiersten Stewart, director of public policy at the Family Violence Prevention Fund. "There are going to be more Tiffanys if we don't take this as the public health crisis it is. We need to focus on preventing these situations."

Her organization was among those that advocated for the federal Violence Against Women Act. The law, initially passed in 1994, increased pretrial detentions for the accused, imposed restitution on those convicted and banned gun purchases for those with protective orders or domestic violence convictions.

Despite progress, domestic abuse is often shrugged off as a family problem. Police officers complain about repeated calls to the same locations. Relatives tire of imploring loved ones to leave abusive relationships. Manipulation and fear drive the abused back to the arms, and control, of the abuser.

Experts say combating the violence requires extensive outreach in schools -- among boys, in particular -- to drive home the point that it is unacceptable.

More typically, the focus is on punishment, not deterrence. On its Web site, the Family Violence Prevention Fund says the Violence Against Women Act "included mainly a continuation of already existing programs with few improvements, additions and funding increases."

Stewart said law enforcement should always respond vigorously to red flags, particularly when murder and suicide are threatened. Just as important, she said, is funding for therapy for youths such as Kellibrew who have witnessed domestic abuse. Preventive programs to reduce the stigma attached to domestic violence victims and to educate boys and men have received little federal funding.

Manyka Gaither, Kellibrew's sister, said she and Gates had been friends since they were 8 years old. The two women lived together for years, and they shared each other's triumphs and failures. Gates befriended the entire family.

Gates began dating Roderick A. Ridley in summer 2007, records show. They shared the apartment in the 3900 block of D Street SE, where Gates was killed.

The relationship deteriorated, and she turned to police and the courts for help after a series of incidents. She obtained a temporary protection order after Ridley allegedly threatened her life, the records show. Gates accused Ridley of kicking and punching her and striking her head with a knife in a dispute at the apartment Aug. 12. He also tried to burn her apartment, records show, and was awaiting trial on that charge.

Court records show that Ridley has a 13-year history of battery and false-imprisonment charges involving various women in the District and Maryland.

"The judicial system should not have let this man out," said Sheila Gates, Tiffany's aunt, a former D.C. police officer. "They should have seen his history of violence. She had too much life in her to be taken this way."

On the night she died, Tiffany Gates was on the phone with a U.S. marshal as Gates burst in. Although the marshal and another member of a fugitive task force searching for Ridley were near her apartment, they called for backup and waited for D.C. police to arrive before entering the building. By the time they reached her, she lay on the floor dying.

A year ago, Kellibrew told his survivor's story on "The Oprah Winfrey Show," sitting next to comedian Bill Cosby. He recounted abuse that he and his siblings witnessed and the killings before his eyes.

The killer spared Kellibrew's life but took his own that day.

Gates's death -- eerily similar to his mother's -- brought childhood horrors rushing back. Domestic violence deserves more attention, he thought.

He pulled together a conference call with friends and relatives two days after the killing to develop a plan of action. He reached out to the National Center for Victims of Crimes. At his urging, his employer, the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation, is considering ways to add domestic violence to its national agenda. Kellibrew is feeling his way, trying to draw attention to the issue, even among those who are not directly affected.

"Instead of just going to the service and grieving or mourning, we have to take a proactive approach in rebuilding our lives," Kellibrew said. "We have to use our resources to manage our grief. We want to capture that energy and use it for something positive."

Staff researcher Meg Smith contributed to this report.