

KING: For families affected by police brutality, their loss lasts much longer than a trending topic

 www.nydailynews.com/news/national/king-police-brutality-lasts-lifetime-victims-families-article-1.2815734



At the end of the event held by The Amadou Diallo Foundation, Amadou's mother, Kadiatou (c.), handed out 41 candles to signify how old her son would be and had them lit.

(Gregg Vigliotti)

"This is worse than a nightmare. Nightmares end. This pain never ends. I live with this every single day," said Gwen Carr, mother of Eric Garner, nearly 27 months after her son was choked to death by NYPD Officer Daniel Pantaleo.

On this past Friday evening, with my young son in tow, we made the trek from Brooklyn to The Riverside Church in upper Manhattan for what was to be the 41st birthday celebration for Amadou Diallo. Of course, Amadou would not be there. Seventeen years ago, possessing nothing more than a wallet, and committing no crime whatsoever, the NYPD fired 41 shots at him on the doorstep of his home in the Bronx — claiming that he kind of resembled a suspect for a crime committed a full year before the shooting.

We were all there, Gwen Carr, former Mayor David Dinkins, Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr., Rev. Al Sharpton, and so many others, because one powerful woman invited us — Amadou's mother, Kadiatou Diallo. Painfully, the number 41 has become synonymous with her son. For the past 17 years, she has held events on Feb. 4, the day he was gunned down, but this year, she wanted, needed even, for this to be different, so she invited an intimate group of friends together to try, somehow, to look forward.



Amadou Diallo.

(AP)

The entire evening was a combination of sweet and bitter. It was sweet because Kadiatou Diallo told us beautiful stories of her baby boy that I had never heard before — about his love of reading, his brilliant ability to speak five languages fluently, their world travels together before Amadou ventured off to the United States for school, and so much more. See,

she knew him for over 8,000 days before he became a headline. She changed his diapers, fed him, groomed him, dressed him, nurtured and encouraged him. Just a young teenage girl herself when she was married and gave birth to Amadou in 1975, she told us that she and Amadou grew up together. From Guinea in West Africa, their family traveled the globe and lived in Togo, Bangkok and Singapore. They were close.

[Out of grief comes grace](#)

We came to know Amadou not because of those 41 shots, but because she had lived and loved him for a lifetime. It has taken her the bulk of these past 17 years to achieve some semblance of peace. In some ways this gathering seemed designed to help us catch up with her.



Daily News Columnist Shaun King spoke during the event, which was held on what would have been Amadou's 41st birthday.

(Gregg Vigliotti/For New York Daily News)

Hawa Bah is not quite there yet. Her wonderful son Mohamed was shot and killed by the NYPD in his Harlem home. Her story is woefully familiar. She called 911 for medical help as Mohamed struggled through depression and seemed unlike himself. Within moments after police arrived they shot and killed him — falsely claiming that he had stabbed an officer. It turned out to be one NYPD officer being tasered by another. This was in September of 2012, but on Friday night, as Hawa Bah wept on the stage next to us, it was clear that the pain was not in the past, but was very present.

Indeed, how does this nation expect Kadiatou Diallo, Hawa Bah or Gwen Carr to rest when they have no justice? Not a single officer has been held responsible for the heinous deaths of their sons. On any given day, they are liable to bump into the men who killed them here on the streets of New York.



Gwen Carr, the mother of Eric Garner, spoke during the event.

(Gregg Vigliotti/For New York Daily News)

Hashtags with names like #PhilandoCastile and #AltonSterling and #TerenceCrutcher normally last for 24 hours at the most, but for their families, those men aren't trending topics, they are sons, brothers, and fathers. Those families, in an instant, are left to scramble with something far more gruesome than a tweet or a video.

[KING: Here is how we will boycott injustice and police brutality](#)

Mohamed Bah was shot in the head at close range. What that looks like doesn't make the news, but it sits with a mother for a lifetime. The horror is unthinkable.



Mohamed Bah was fatally shot by police after wielding a knife in the vicinity of 113 Morningside Ave. in Manahattan.

How is it cleaned up? How do you spend another night there? Where do they take the body? What happens with all of his possessions? Who has money for a casket at a funeral in a city where it's already hard just to get by? What about the mail that arrives with his name on it? What about online accounts since he didn't leave any passwords?

Amadou Diallo was hit with 19 of those 41 shots fired by the NYPD — rendering his young body almost unrecognizable. That's what bullets do. With her son dead, Kadiatou never got a chance to properly tell him goodbye. After flying in to the

United States to retrieve her son, she returned his body to be buried in their homeland, but Kadiatou decided that the United States must now be her home so that she could continue to fight for justice and also support so many others affected by police brutality.



Eric Garner was choked to death by NYPD.

(acquired by: TOMAS E. GASTON)

Gwen Carr, also fighting back the tears, told us that she vividly remembered her final conversation with her son, Eric, as they prepared to attend a summer cookout together. They divvied out who would bring drinks and desserts, and, as always, told each other "I love you."

[Cop who killed Diallo named 'Sergeant of the Year'](#)

"I'm so glad that we were that type of family that always said it," Carr remembered fondly. "Eric and I always told each other I love you."

This country, day in and day out, continues to create new families like these. It's too much. While you may be tired of protests or hashtags, a new family today will experience for the first time what these mothers have been battling through

for years. For them, the painful journey on how to put the broken pieces of their lives back together again is just beginning.

As we closed the gathering out, we held up 41 candles for Amadou — not for the 41 bullets that were fired at him, but for the 41 years he should've lived on this earth. While I am glad that future families who will no doubt lose their loved ones to police brutality will have Kadiatou to lean on, I am appalled at just how large the network of grieving families has become.

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