



68 BLOCKS: LIFE, DEATH, HOPE DAY 3 OF 5



YOUNG S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Tony Van Der Meer lives along Hendry Street, which has regressed after a few years of seemingly better days.

TIME TO CELEBRATE AND TO WORRY

On Hendry Street, a new sense of stability is unraveling. On Norton, a gang target plans a peace festival, which police fear will only draw trouble. Nothing is easy in Bowdoin-Geneva, but no one is giving in.

IN HIS NEW house on Hendry Street, Tony Van Der Meer sits at his desk, his reading glasses on, staring at the screen of his laptop and lazily hunting the Internet for images of African culture. It's his hobby and profession. A muggy June breeze wafts through an open window into his third-floor bedroom.

The freshly painted walls are bare; he moved in months before. But as summer starts, his shelves are already crammed with books and papers. He's an African studies professor. Certain things he can do without, but

On his computer, he finds a YouTube video of a Nigerian wedding and calls out, “Come look at this.”

His brother and roommate is in the next room, getting dressed after a shower, and comes to stand in the doorway.

he needs his books.

The street he lives on used to echo with more shots each summer than most in Boston. But an expensive and concerted rehab effort led by the city lured families and people who wanted to put down roots, prompting the mayor to declare a new era on the block. It was a kind of dream for Van Der Meer, a black man with tufts of gray in his beard who wanted to leave the South End to live among people who shared the heritage and struggle of the African Diaspora.

What came next remains for him as vivid as a waking dream.

Suddenly: noise and confusion, a sharp explosion of noise, followed by another and another.

There is a beat while Van Der Meer's brain struggles to process the sounds.

Gunfire. He drops to the floor. So does his brother, diving like a base runner toward the bag. They count at least eight loud, well-articulated shots. Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam! Bam!

The shots are so close they sound



Residents celebrate the reclamation of a Dorchester street

► **HENDRY**
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taining 41 units, in the area. Police shut down two drug dens and said they have arrested 27 alleged drug dealers. Home values have increased.

"Day by day, we keep fighting to make it strong and peaceful," said Agnaldo Monteiro, the new owner of the yellow house. "We changed this street. Now we live in peace."

Mayor Martin J. Walsh gave a short speech, calling the transformation "remarkable."

"This is huge. This street, many years ago, was a tough street that residents rallied around, and really turned the street around," Walsh, who grew up nearby, said in an interview. "If you have residents like this in every neighborhood that has problems, you will see a transformation in Boston."

Again and again, residents spoke of how far the neighborhood has come. It's quiet now, they said, and neighbors wave to each other as they walk past. The days of intimidation, of gang members occupying their porches, of having to keep their mouths shut and their heads

down, are gone.

"It was awful. I didn't feel safe to come outside," said Manly Correia, 19, who spent his younger teen years in the neighborhood. "A cop used to be here 24/7. One by one, they all left. Now, things are pretty quiet."

The Rev. Richard "Doc" Conway of St. Peter Parish said the street was once "the worst street in the city of Boston."

"It's all changed," he said. "It's a symbol in this neighborhood, that if this street can change, we can change any neighborhood, really."

Seeing so many children playing in the streets, zipping around on scooters and shrieking as they splashed in the dunk tank, brought Boston Police Deputy Superintendent Joseph Harris back to his Dorchester-Roxbury childhood.

"This is how people get to know each other," he said. "Four or five years ago, this place was pretty much deserted . . . So the transformation over the last few years has been great."

In 2011, the Globe published its "68 Blocks" series, chronicling the joys and sor-



PHOTOS BY MATTHEW J. LEE/GLOBE STAFF

Residents played soccer with 37 Hendry as a backdrop. The renovated three-decker, once the bane of the neighborhood, was the centerpiece of the block party. Mayor Martin J. Walsh (below and top left) attended the event.

rows of Boston's Bowdoin-Geneva neighborhood. People called the yellow three-decker the cancer house. Its owner had fled to Rwanda, behind more than \$150,000 in mortgage payments. Some building tenants' records included selling crack on Hendry, carjacking, and possession of a sawed-off shotgun.

Tony Van Der Meer, a Clarkson Street resident who helped organize the block party, lauded homeowners who remained in the neighborhood through those tumultuous years.

"We're talking about folks who took fear and turned it into courage and helped transform this neighborhood," he shouted into the microphone.

Walsh's presence was a good sign, said a 55-year-old resident of Clarkson Street who declined to be named.

"I kind of like what he said, but he could be a little more hands-on, a little more uplifting for folks in these neighborhoods," he said. "But I'm glad he came out."

There is more to be done, such as boosting education and employment, he said. But for now, in the exquisite summer afternoon, music thumping from the speakers, it was enough to reflect on what good has already been done.

"It was a different world," he said, remembering the sound of gunshots that used to punctuate the summer nights. "Now, the kids running around in the morning? It's like birds chirping."

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