

Gilson Brown Elementary students honor fallen classmate in balloon release

by Brittany Kohler, Content Manager
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ALTON - Young **Romell Jones**, at only age 11, was a victim of a tragic drive-by shooting in the Alton Acres Housing Complex on Monday, Jan. 11.

Romell, along with several other kids, were hanging out in front of the Recreation Center of the complex waiting for a ride to basketball practice when a red vehicle drove past and shot several rounds.

Romell later died in the hospital from a gunshot wound to the chest.

(To clear up the confusion regarding the spelling of his name, sources confirm that he was indeed named Romell by his mother when he was born, but the hospital did not annotate it correctly on the birth certificate. So, the family calls him Romell, but his name is spelled Ronnell on legal documents.)

"We have been experiencing a very sad week," said Gilson Brown Principal JoAnne Curvey. "Not only did we lose a student at Gilson Brown, we also lost a friend, a family member, a brother, a cousin, a best friend."

Today, Romell's classmates held a balloon release ceremony in his honor. Romell was a fifth-grade student at Gilson Brown Elementary. The student body, faculty and staff, along with Romell's family, all gathered in the basketball court behind the school.

"We all have a favorite story about Ronnell, something that we hold in our hearts that makes us smile during this sad time," said Curvey. "I would like you to think of that happy thought, maybe it was the way he used to make you laugh. Maybe it was his way of shooting a basketball. Perhaps it was how he made you feel better when you were angry or sad. It might simply be the way he smiled just when you needed it most. Those are the thoughts Ronnell would want us to have right now."

The fifth graders each held a single blue balloon to release into the sky in remembrance of Romell, blue was his favorite color.

"Fifth graders, I would like you to think of one happy thought you would like you keep in your mind about Ronnell," said Curvey. "After you decide on your favorite happy thought or story, you may say it to your neighbor or just in your head. After you say it, I would like you to then release your balloon while the rest of us watch those happy thoughts float up to Ronnell. I know Ronnell will hear your words and smile back down on you today as you remember him."

As the balloons were floating higher and higher into the January sky, a handful of Romell's friends presented a basketball to the family. The basketball was passed around the school earlier that morning and signed by Romell's classmates. A group of girls also presented the family with a big blue poster decorated with kind words and messages to Romell and his family.

[SEE Balloon release in honor of Romell Jones PHOTO GALLERY BELOW:](#)

[See "Gilson Brown Elementary Holds Memorial for Romell Jones" VIDEO BELOW:](#)

