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A FATHER'S ANGUISH, A NEIGHBORHOOD'S FEAR

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By Marguerite Del Giudice Inquirer Staff Writer-Somebody or something had struck fear into the heart of the West Philadelphia man who worked in the neighborhood of 60th Street and Lansdowne Avenue, but he didn't want to go into it. He was a praying man more than a fighting man, inclined to mind his own business and tend to his own soul. The law of the streets is this, he says: No matter what comes down, "you don't tell nobody nothing." When someone gets killed - as happened to 17-year-old Chester Laws Jr. on May 16 - the streets start to snap, crackle and pop with talk. But it is cheap and unrelenting talk, intended to confound an outsider trying to make sense of the goings-on of the streets. The dead boy's father, Chester Laws Sr., will tell you how the streets fell silent after his son was shot in the forehead near his own front door, on North Felton Street, early that Sunday morning. It seemed that no one had seen or heard a thing. But two days later, he said, "everybody started shootin'." The Tuesday after Chester Jr. was shot to death, a 29-year-old eyewitness to the crime, Homer Lane, was shot at as he drove past some young men gathered at Lansdowne Avenue and Edgewood Street. The bullets did not hit him, but they dented his 1982 Chevrolet Citation and blew out a front tire. Two days later, Chester Sr., 53, a tavern owner, took a slug himself. "In the back," he spat out in disgust. On a sunny morning, on a busy street, right after he had ordered beer from his supplier. "Do you know what's out there?" he said. "Can you imagine the nerve of a punk coming up in broad daylight, shooting me in the back on a main thoroughfare? I worked hard all my life for what I've got. There wasn't nothing given to me. And then some scum punk comes up and does this." The punks, he said, seem to be taking over the neighborhood. That view is not rare in this neighborhood, which is home to hoodlums as well as proud homeowners, to neat rowhouses with flowers out front as well as empty buildings with plywood windows - located a couple of miles away from the grand mansions and finely trimmed lawns of Philadelphia's Main Line. The latest round of mayhem came as no surprise in the neighborhood, because it was not the first, or second, or nth time that someone there had been shot and killed, or shot and hurt, or shot at. In a five-block-by-seven-block