

'Joke' turned sour for 2 pals in North Phila.

by Don Russell

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On a tiny, trash-strewn street in North Philadelphia, where graffiti and desperation cover buildings and souls, two young lives were blown apart Monday by a .32-caliber revolver.

One — Hector "Chino" Rodriguez, an 18-year-old high school dropout, the eldest of five children and the father of a 5-month-old child — was shot dead, police said.

The other — a 14-year-old friend identified by family as Gregory

Scott-Toney — surrendered to police yesterday with his lawyer Marc Neff. He was charged with murder and related offenses and is being held without bail, pending a preliminary hearing next Wednesday.

Police were uncertain what

sparked the killing, but the word on the street was that some light-hearted joking between the two friends had turned ugly.

Rodriguez's mother, Norma, said the two were hanging out in front of Gregory's house on Hutchinson Street near Somerset shortly before 4 p.m.

"Two pipers (crack addicts) come walking by and Chino says, 'There goes your uncles ...'

"Greg says, 'Don't play like that with my family, man.' He didn't like that kind of talk," she said.

Gregory's father, William Scott, said his son apparently came inside the house and grabbed the revolver that Scott kept hidden under his mattress.

"That's the best place to keep it," Scott said. "I got the gun about six, seven months ago for protection from the neighborhood."

Scott couldn't recall if the gun was loaded at the time, but he said his son probably knew where to find the bullets.

"I saw the two of them together 20 minutes earlier," Scott said. "They was laughing and talking. ... Next thing I know, I hear shots and see this kid lying in the

street. I recognized who it was and I said, 'God damn it! God damn it!'

"... One hour later, I heard it was my son who did it."

Norma Rodriguez said, "I was cooking in the kitchen when it happened. Cube steak and white rice. I heard some shots and I ran outside and around the corner, and my son was lying in the street. He didn't talk. He was breathing like this: *huh ... huh ... huh.*"

According to police, a relative drove Chino to nearby Episcopal Hospital, where he died at 4:01 p.m., about 10 minutes after the shooting. He suffered multiple wounds to the head and body, police said.

On West Auburn Street near 9th in this neighborhood called Fairhill, car windows were spray-painted white. "In Memory of Chino." A spray of palms marked the Rodriguez house, where Chino's grieving family had few answers.

"They were just busting on each other," said Chino's girlfriend, Maritza Carrasquiolo, a

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Norma Rodriguez

17-year-old 11th-grader at Edison High School and mother of their child, Melanie.

When Carrasquiolo first saw police cars in the neighborhood Monday afternoon, she feared Chino had been arrested. Family members said the boy had been named in bench warrants, stemming from a past drug-related incident in which he was arrested while holding a loaded gun.

"When I heard what really happened, I couldn't take it. How can

this be? He left me alone in the world with a baby," Carrasquiolo said, wiping tears from her eyes.

She said the two young lovers were never officially married. "We were just shackled up," she said. "But he was the sweetest guy and a good father."

Rodriguez's mother conceded her son "used to fight sometimes. He was real mean sometimes."

But she said her son "was a nice and good kid ... The other one [Gregory] was a good kid, too."

So how did a dumb argument end in another young homicide?

Scott — the father of the accused killer — said that when he saw his son yesterday at the surrendering. "He was crying and saying, 'I don't understand how it happened.'"

Nor could Carrasquiolo, crying on the front stoop of the Rodriguez home.

"We would always talk and Chino would say, 'Someday you'll graduate and buy me a car.' I never thought it would end this way." ■

Staff writers Joe O'Dowd and Frank Dougherty contributed to this report.



Rodriguez