

## “Life Lessons For Fathers, Sons”

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TARRYTOWN, NY — Nowhere among the four stated objectives of Allan Houston's "Father Knows Best" basketball retreat were the following: reducing homelessness, reducing drug use, promoting education, halting street violence. Ostensibly the retreat was only about fostering healthy father/son relationships through spirituality. But as the speakers nonchalantly dropped childhood stories of crime and degradation, as they cited one ominous statistic after another, a greater purpose revealed itself.

Recognition surfaced on some fathers' faces. They nodded. It wasn't long after the lines of communication opened that the fathers began to read between them.

Every 32 minutes in this country an African-American boy is shot dead, said the Rev. Jimmy Gallant. Every 45 minutes an African-American girl is raped.

What did those numbers have to do with being a good father? Maybe a whole lot.

The pieces will come together over the course of the three-day weekend event. Each day is split between workshops at the Westchester Marriott in Tarrytown and basketball clinics at the Brewster Sports Complex. Retired Knick Allan Houston attends most functions with his dad, former University of Tennessee coach Wade Houston, whose bond inspired Allan to create the annual retreat three years ago.

"As I started to go throughout the NBA and watch and talk to people, I realized that what I had was very unique," the two-time All-Star said.

"This is something we had to share because of what we had."

He doesn't pretend he can enlighten the world, or even the 100 or so participants. That's up to God, he said (Christianity is a central theme). It's all about giving people the tools to foster healthy families.

The Rev. A.R. Bernard stressed the importance of listening instead of just hearing.

"The whole point of the exercise was learning how to work together, how to cooperate, and how to communicate with each other," Amhir Campbell, 16, of Mount Vernon said.

Asked to speak about father-son dynamics, a celebrity panel offered a few vagaries before transitioning into a subject they were comfortable with: their own (largely fatherless) childhoods. Rock-A-Fella Records co-founder Briant Biggs started doing drugs in fourth grade. Christopher Martin, 'Play' of the rap duo Kid 'n Play, got kicked out of five high schools. Actor NaShawn Kearsse of "Desperate Housewives" sold crack and carried guns.

No one spelled out the connection. The hints just kept flowing, statistical as well as anecdotal.

Maybe the fact that 71 percent of high school dropouts, 75 percent of adolescents in chemical abuse centers, and 90 percent of runaways come from fatherless homes, maybe these are critical figures. Anomaly left the building a long time ago. The link between a dad's presence and a child's productivity is indisputable. Teaching fathers and sons to live together happily — all the three-day retreat set out to do — strikes at one of the root causes of violence and waste among young men.

"This kind of thing is invaluable," said Mount Vernon resident Sean Hammonds, here with 8-year-old son Trajan, "just recognizing that there are other fathers out there who are African-American trying to do the right thing, and it's not all about the imagery you see on TV where fathers fall short, African-American fathers are always absent or always doing the wrong thing."

Eugene Campbell is the director of a Boys & Girls Club in Harlem. Sometimes he spends so much time trying to save everyone else's kids that he neglects his own. Whether he and Amhir take anything away from this weekend or not, three days of bonding is all Allan and Wade Houston could have asked for them anyway.

"I'm trying to work with my son so that he won't be a statistic," Eugene said.