

# Brown family promotes peaceful solutions

Siblings Bobby and RaiChel Brown saw big possibilities as they entered BSM in 1997 as a sophomore and junior, respectively. Bobby intended to play football for the Red Knights and leave his mark on BSM. RaiChel had plans too. She wanted to get involved in student government and cheerleading. Both Bobby and RaiChel had college dreams. And their mom, Ava, wanted to be the sideline cheerleading mom. She was proud of her kids and so very supportive.

But a tragic drive-by shooting just weeks before the beginning of the school year left Bobby a paraplegic

and in a wheelchair. A sister, LaVonne had also been hit by stray bullets to her legs. Suddenly, the Brown family had much to deal with.

Bobby couldn't play football, but the family never gave up on their dreams. They decided to turn their pain into powerful actions, one of which is to establish the Brown Family Award for students involved in BSM diversity efforts. "We just want to give back to the school," Ava commented when she recently called the school to discuss their efforts. "Benilde-St. Margaret's was a bridge over our troubled waters. The Christian values so often spoken

about were truly evident at BSM in deed and in heart. We truly felt blessed to be part of the community." RaiChel added, "When Bobby and I started school we were welcomed with open arms by both the students and the staff. We felt good about coming to BSM."

Bobby just graduated from Augsburg this past spring with a degree in business administration. He served as the president of the student body at Augsburg his senior year. While in high school and shortly after the shooting, he and his family formed an organization, Beyond the Court, a youth basketball camp, where Bobby

could also share his theme of non-violence. The family has continued their efforts in spreading the message of non-violence. Both Bobby and Ava were featured speakers at the Million Moms March in Washington, D.C., in May 2000, and Bobby was named a Dr. Martin Luther King Local Legend at ceremonies here in Minneapolis this past March. Most recently, Bobby and Ava were invited by the US Attorney's office to be keynote speakers at a prayer breakfast for victims' rights in Birmingham, Alabama. The highlight of the trip was to present the concept of their basketball clinic to students at Kirby Middle School. Although Bobby was unable to attend due to finals, Ava spoke to students about the choices they have and the power one person has to make a difference.

RaiChel graduated from the University of St. Thomas (UST) and has plans to attend law school. She currently works in the law office of Blackwell and Igbanugo located in Edina. She was appointed to the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Crime Victims Reparations Board as the first African American woman and the youngest member ever appointed to the board. While at BSM, RaiChel was very involved in P.R.I.D.E. (Peers Respecting Inclusive Diverse Education). Under her direction as student president, many new programs were put in place. She carried her tenacity as well as her leadership and organizational skills to UST where she became involved in student government and was a leader in the university's diversity efforts. "I appreciated the quality of education at Benilde-St. Margaret's. I felt so prepared for college and felt BSM was instrumental in my acceptance to UST," commented RaiChel.

One word that perhaps best describes the Browns is "peacemakers." The family has been faced with so many obstacles, but they have turned them into such powerful gifts to the benefit of others. They certainly taught us much at Benilde-St. Margaret's, and the Brown Family Award will continue their legacy.

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

**Brown Family: back row (left to right) Ava, RaiChel, and LaVonne; front row (left to right) Bobby and Samayah.**

