

## Jean-Albert “Johnny” Pun – What makes a hero?

Christine Barnden – October 2005

**This is the story of Officer Pun, a genuine hero and role model whose story should be told to children both in Haiti and in the diaspora.**

What is a hero?

Some would say that you have to do something dramatic to be a hero; like saving someone’s life or fighting in a war.

But could a hero simply be someone who gives you what you need, even when it’s NOT what you want? Like making you do push-ups when you’re late for school and slacking off with your homework. That’s what Johnny made Luigi Cusati do. Luigi wasn’t going to put up with that kind of treatment so he gave up on school. But Johnny didn’t give up on Luigi. Johnny called him up and encouraged him to come back to school. What did Luigi think of Johnny? He thought Johnny was being really tough on him, but deep down he knew why. Johnny was trying to help him to make something of his life. To get him off the streets and out of trouble.



It seems that was what Johnny’s life was all about. Reaching out to young Haitian people, touching their lives and making a difference for their future.

But Johnny died last week. At the age of 37, he was killed in a tragic accident when his motorcycle was hit by a pickup truck. Hundreds of people have already signed an online Legacy guest book<sup>1</sup> devoted to the remembrance of Johnny. They have shared amazing stories of how Johnny has made a difference in the lives of young people in Delray Beach and how much he will be missed, by his family and everyone who knew him. Some of these people had never even met Johnny and yet they’d heard about his impact on the community.

Was Johnny a hero? Perhaps we should ask the people of Delray Beach.

He has this addictive sense of compassion. Always in Johnny's presence, I felt special. I will never forget you Johnny for you are the example of a truly wonderful man. You are my HERO. You had a heart of an angel on earth, but now you are in heaven where you belong. **Sherley Cesar (Miami, FL)**

I was not fortunate enough to know him but I have heard nothing but great things about this man who was so sadly taken. He was a real HERO. **Dominique Mondesir (Delray Beach, FL)**

What did he do that made people see him as a hero?

Officer Pun paved a bright future for many of our youths in the area. He has given a lot of our city youths a second chance, he has given them their wings. He was the bridge to our Haitian community. **Dominique Mondesir (Delray Beach, FL)**

He was a big brother to me, and always stopped whatever he was doing whenever he saw me to ask how my son and I were doing.... and simply how life was going for me. **Karen Davis (Delray Beach, FL )**

Johnny, I will always remember you as a great friend. You always treat everyone with respect and dignity; it's always fun to be around you. Your legacy will live

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<sup>1</sup> All comments from Delray Beach community, friends and family of Johnny Pun are excerpts from the Legacy Guest Book.

on. **Nixon Joseph (Coconut Creek, FL)**

Johnny, You were the best big cousin that I could ever ask for. You were always encouraging, uplifting, inspiring and truthful. You would always tell me the things I needed to hear, rather than the things that I wanted to hear. One of my favorite sayings is "I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day". I must truly say that you personified this saying to the utmost. You did not talk the talk, you walked the walk. Everyone could see that your words and actions guided your heart to uplift humanity. I am proud of all that you did and I will greatly miss you. Love from your cousins, **Eddy Moise Jr (Marietta, GA)**

Johnny was a Haitian police officer who spent many hours with the youth of Delray Beach. Instead of cracking down on them, when they got caught up in drugs and gangs, he listened to them. He wanted them to believe in themselves, that they could really make it in life. Johnny's dream was for young people to have a brighter future.

This is what some of those kids had to say about Johnny:

You helped me when no one else would. Just like you helped so many other kids like me, and for that I truly thank you and always will remember you. **Chandler Garr (Wellington, FL )**

When we all heard the news we did not want to believe it; He was such a great inspiration in all of our lives. He made sure we stayed out of trouble and focused on our future. We give our deepest sympathy to his loved ones. He will be truly missed but never forgotten. Pun will always be in our hearts and prayers. R.I.P. **Maxu, Willzor, Josier, Frandy, Dyana, Ranger, Lynda, Kerline, Ebony, Gulanda, Yves (Delray Beach, FL )**

Johnny dreamed of these Haitian kids growing up to be tomorrow's community leaders. And that's what he was devoting his life to. He even co-founded a school with some of his police colleagues: the Delray Beach Youth Vocational Charter School. Johnny spent most of his working hours here, helping kids with all sorts of things: finding apartments for students who had nowhere to live; speaking at court, in their defense; even getting a local plastic surgeon to remove a student's tattoo.

We at the Omega Joshua Generation Counseling Service, Inc. would like to send our deepest sympathies to Johnny's family. We met Johnny about two years ago at Delray Youth Vocational Charter School. We worked in conjunction with him and his students enforcing their self importance. **Sheila Francis, Brenda Gardner, Janie Johnson, Jael Brown, Kathy Butler of The Omega Joshua Generation Counseling Service, Inc. (Delray Beach, FL)**

Johnny's legacy of community service as a fine police officer, as role model for our youth, as co-founder of The Delray Youth Vocational Charter School. The many lives he touched and influenced will render lasting testimony of this. Johnny was a good man. **Rabbi Suzanne Carter (Delray Beach, FL)**

I met Mr. Pun when his school first opened. He wanted to give my son a safe place to go. Soon after starting my son was not able to finish due to other issues. But Officer Pun, even after finding out my son couldn't complete the school, still offered his heart full force. This great man will be missed. **Shawn G (Boynton Beach, FL)**

Do you know how you can make a difference in other peoples' lives?

**And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years.**

Abraham Lincoln.

Here is an encouragement from **Rose Louissaint (Lake Worth)** to all of us, to make the most of our lives:

Fè tout sa ou kapab  
pandan ke ou kapab  
pou tout moun ou kapab  
jouk tan ou pa kapab

Do all that you can  
while you can  
for everyone that you can  
until the time comes when you can't.

And a poem from **Dominique Mondesir (Delray Beach, FL)**, showing the deep impact Johnny has made on so many lives:

**At the rising of the sun and at its going down,  
We remember him.**

**At the blowing of the wind and in the chill of Winter,  
We remember him.**

**At the opening of buds and in the rebirth of Spring,  
We remember him.**

**At the blueness of the skies and in the warmth of Summer,  
We remember him.**

**At the rustling of leaves and the beauty of Autumn,  
We remember him.**

**At the beginning of the year and when it ends,  
We remember him.**

**As long as we live, he too will live;  
for he is a part of us, as we remember him.**

**When we are weary and in need of strength,  
We remember him.**

**When we are lost and sick at heart,  
We remember him.**

**When we have joys we yearn to share,  
We remember him.**

**When we have decisions that are difficult to make,  
We remember him.**

**When we have achievements that are based on theirs,  
We remember him.**

**As long as we live, he too shall live,  
for he is a part of us, as we remember him.**

What could you do in your life to be like Johnny?