Nowhere near a happy New Year, and definitely not the kind Nathan Brown was expecting when armed robbers came through the door in an attempt to get anything of value in Brown’s home... including his life.

**Family, friends, dignitaries speak out on death of Nathan F. Brown**

**By FELICIA C. HANEY**

Staff Reporter

Ten, 9, 8… As most of us are gathering our glasses in anticipation of the clock to strike midnight… 7, 6, 5… Onlookers are gathering together, waiting on their opportunity to strike… 4, 3, 2…BOOM! In one second, the ball has been dropped by you, just for minding your own business, in your own house, sitting on the sofa playing Internet games on your laptop. After midnight, shots ring out, but not the celebratory kind. These shots are courtesy of young, neighborhood thugs who’ve just kicked your door in, in an attempt to rob you.

Nowhere near a happy New Year, and definitely not the kind Nathan Brown was expecting when he decided to spend his at home – a house on Hilgard Ave. in Cleveland that he’d only been living in for roughly a month. Police believe the 42-year-old single father of one was sitting at home alone on his sofa using his laptop when the sound of forced entry startled him. Coming through the door were armed robbers in an attempt to get anything of value in Brown’s home. They ended up leaving with nothing material at all, but did accomplish their goal of retrieving the most valuable thing – which turned out to be Brown’s life.

Two of the suspects have been apprehended – a 17-year-old male and 18-year-old Montell Smith. Smith is in custody on a $1 million dollar bond for aggravated murder. Smith’s brother, 22-year-old Marcellus Smith, is still at large and is also wanted for aggravated murder. He is believed to be armed and very dangerous according to The Northern Ohio Violent Fugitive Task Force. Marcellus is a Black male who stands 6 feet, 1 inch tall with black hair and brown eyes. He weighs 175 pounds and is suspected of hiding out in Cleveland.

“By hook or crook they want to come in and take it,” said Warrensville Heights Mayor Brad Sellers of the incident. Mayor Sellers happens to be a friend of the family and had this to say after attending Brown’s funeral, “they are a very close knit family; and he was an inspiring man to his family. I’m sad he had to be the first victim of 2013 to a senseless act of violence, and it didn’t have to be. It seems that the more and more we pick up the newspaper, we see these things. I believe in the second amendment and people have the right to bare arms... [But there are] institutions of authority in this country who are afraid to take a stand.”

Brown was not one of those scaredy cats. In fact, he headed his own intruders off, meeting them with resistance. According to Brown's family, there were definite signs of struggle at the

crime scene. But, Brown's natural reaction to defend his home was grounds for the unsuspecting thugs to shoot. Brown was hit in the leg. The bullet pierced a major artery, causing him to bleed out. He expired on the front porch of his home under the care of a nearby neighbor who had come to his aid following the commotion (this information is per Brown’s family who said the police statement of him being shot in the torso is incorrect. Fourth District Police Department had no updated information when they were reached by phone and had not returned our call as of press time). But, none of this happened before Brown had a chance to demonstrate his heroism by confiscating the weapon from one of the perpetrators, letting off some shots of his own and striking one of them before their exit. The blood trail is what led police to one of the perpetrators’ homes.

By daylight the following morning, Brown’s family was still mentally clueless to the tragedy that had happened hours earlier; though they felt in their spirit that his non-responsiveness meant something wasn’t quite right. His sisters, Stacey Brown and Stephanie Brown Caldwell explained how they received news of their brother’s death from the News.

“Let me tell you how close my brother, sister and I are… Extremely. I mean, to the point where when I did not receive a return text from him at midnight saying “happy New Year,” I knew that was odd,” said Stacey. But, I figured, maybe he was just sleeping. I knew he wasn’t going out ‘cause I had just been over there a few hours before I went out. Stephanie then called me in the morning and said that she was supposed to take him to work and he didn’t answer…” Baby sister Stephanie cuts in to say “He did not respond to the text message of ‘do you need a ride?’ I assumed that his phone was dead.”

The thought never crossed Brown’s sisters’ minds that it was not the phone that lay lifeless, but something far more priceless that could never be replaced.

The two, along with Stephanie's children, took the trip to Brown's home where they were met by police and news cameras. Stacey first approached the scene in an attempt to figure out what was happening. A Channel 19 reporter informed her that they were there investigating the murder of Nathan Brown.

From the car, Stephanie saw her big sister hit the ground following a loud outcry. At that moment, Stephanie hustled to see for herself what happened when the reporter asked if they knew Brown. They informed him that Brown was in fact their brother and this was the first they had heard of his death.

Arriving in the knick of time, Brown's sisters were able to head off police who were just headed to their parents' home with the tragic news. Stacey and Stephanie interceded to be the ones who would break news to their parents that their only son was Cleveland's first homicide victim of 2013.

What has angered the his family the most is that Brown had a 17-year-old son of his own - around the same age as Brown's attackers - and they swear that Brown would have looked at these boys like his own son's friends and would've been willing to help them.

Laughs surfaced in the midst of tears when Brown's huge family sat around his parents' dining room table and reminisced on how full of life he was and imitated what he may have said had he lived to tell this story himself. In a way, they believe Brown did leave the clues to tell his own story, which leads baby sister Stephanie to believe "my brother died a hero."

If ever given the opportunity to address those who murdered Brown, his family wants them to know that an integral part of them is missing and they took a loving son/brother/father/cousin/uncle/nephew/grandson away from their family and the community.

Family friend and congresswoman, Marcia Fudge, also made an appearance at the funeral and offered these words, “I have known Mr. Brown’s family for years and I wanted to offer comfort and support to them as they cope with their tragic loss.”

Anyone with more information concerning this case or the whereabouts of Marcellus Smith should call 1-866-WANTED. Anonymous tips, reward money available.