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Why Can’t Everybody Fear Me Like That?

Saint

I Just Call Them Cousins

All right, my name is Saint. I was born in Brooklyn, Crown Heights. Grew up with my mother and my father my brother my grandfather. All of us lived in the same house for years. I had a pretty good childhood. No problems no stress, basically got everything I want.

I lived in Crown Heights until I was like maybe four or five years old. I can’t remember that much because I was young. I used to enjoy it over there because even until now in the same building where we was at, probably still got like eight cousins over there. I’ve got a lot of family in that same building, in like three different apartments. Ours was like the fourth. It was fun because there’s not too many places where you could be five years old and be able to run through a whole building without your parents chasing you ‘cause they know there’s nothing but your whole family in the building.

I don’t remember everyone’s names, but there were six or seven cousins around my age or a little bit older, mostly females. Me my brother and about three other cousins where the only boys in the building. Everybody else was females. Then I had my three uncles and five or more aunts, then my mother’s cousins. I don’t know what they are to me—I just call them cousins or aunties. It was like at least 20 of us in the building within three apartments because back then we were kind of poor so, there’d be like eight people in each apartment.

I might eat in my own apartment, but everybody cook their own thing in each apartment, so I might eat some food in my apartment, run around for a while, go eat at my auntie’s apartment. Then my next cousin on the third floor might call me and say, “Come over, we about to eat.” Everybody cooked but we could eat wherever we wanted to. I’m from a Haitian descent so we eat Caribbean food like corn meal, fried chicken and rice. We would also eat rice with beans and bean sauce. And sometimes fried pork, I used to eat it back then but I don’t eat it no more—fried pork. Salads, a lot of fried plantains, potatoes, steak. Stuff like that. On a regular Sunday maybe some fish.

Heat

One time there was no heat in the building; everyone was complaining. It was snowing outside and the landlord came and removed the thermostat from inside the building and put it on the outside. So that no matter what, the heat just kept going because the thermostat is always going to read cold. So it was probably below zero outside and like 120 degrees in the building. Everybody, I’m talking about everybody, people’s mothers, sister and aunt is in they bras and panties and we all in the hallways—people calling the landlord, they calling the police, and we’re just running around. It was like me and like six of my little cousins because everybody else’s mother was like, “Nah,

take cold showers and lay down.” We’re just running around the building in our underwear, sweating like pigs and we did that for the whole night.

I ain’t see him do it, but I seen the thermostat on the outside of the building and I heard my parents and everybody else’s parents complaining about it. Like, “Oh, he did that because we was complaining about not enough heat, now he gave us too much,” but I know when the heat hit, that’s when everybody started coming out of their apartments, we can’t deal with this, especially with the cooking.

Y’all Too Young

When we moved from there we ended up on Martense on East Flatbush with another set of family, with my mother’s uncles and aunts. And it was like the whole building was family because my uncle owned the building. That was my first real house, in Flatbush. It was a nice two-family house with a basement. Me and my brother and my mother and my grandfather had rooms on the top floor. And downstairs was the kitchen the living room, basement. We rented the basement out to some close friends of the family.

My mother and my father used to work for years until recently. My father used to work night shifts and my mother used to work morning shifts. So, one of them was always home because both of them had to work. It was a nice house in a pretty good neighborhood. We had to move out of there because of certain things that I did and police kept coming back and forth to the house and that embarrassed my parents.

So every single person who lives in that building is related to us, even until right now. But it was kind of crazy because it wasn’t no people really our age. I had my older cousin but he never used to mess with us because he was like, “Y’all too young right now.” So I ain’t like it over there too much because it was boring. He had his friends on the block that was older. So at the time he was probably like fourteen and we was probably like around six, seven. So he’s like, “y’all too young for me to be chilling with y’all running around playing on the block, y’all just play with each other and I’m gonna go play with my friends,” because we in totally different age brackets. I play with my brother.

Our block was known for shootouts and a lot of gang activity and stuff like that. So my mother ain’t want us outside, so we just had to stay in the house; that’s why she moved. She would tell us, “All right, well y’all can’t go outside.” And as kids, you know we’ll always be like, “Aw, we want to go outside.” I was about seven, my brother was like nine. We was old enough to realize that yeah, everyday when we sit in our apartment there’s always gunshots. Shots probably came through our window before. So we would be mad, but she would never give us a reason like, “Well, people getting shot outside.” But we basically knew, we look at it and be like, “All right, we know what time it is.”

Yeah, I remember one time, I was younger than seven at the time, I think it was like ’89 when we was living over there, in ‘89 or ‘90. And we was all in the house, we was watching *Leroy The Last Dragon*. It was about a black guy who was a Kung Fu artist and he was actually in his neighborhood practicing Kung Fu. And then there was a bad guy who used to beat people up and do stuff like that, rob the stores, and he did Kung Fu too. And at the end they had to fight each other and everybody thought he was gonna

beat up Leroy, and Leroy ended up beating him up. Crazy movie, but now it's kind of corny when I look at it, but back then it was a good movie. Everybody was hyped, *Leroy the Last Dragon*.

It was me, my brother, my mother and my aunt. We was all watching *Leroy The Last Dragon* and we just heard mad gun shots, the gunshots sounded like they were coming from real close. So my mother just told everybody automatically, "Just get on the floor," because we were already used to it. So everybody just got on the floor, we stayed there, and it was like, we're so used to it that I was still watching the movie. I'm on the floor laying down with my head down and all that, and I'm just watching the movie. The gunshots went on for about five or ten minutes. It just kept going and going.

So after a while the movie is done, so I get up and I go and look out the window and I see mad police. So when we go downstairs, there was this drug dealer guy that used to live in the basement right next door to our building. And he was a cool guy because back then, a dollar used to be a lot of money. He used to give kids on the block twenties, like, "Go buy ice cream and keep the change, bring me back a dollar water or something and keep the change for y'all." So all the kids on the block used to love him. A fat Puerto Rican guy named Joe. So we came outside, police just told us that they found him in the basement dead with a lot of drugs on the table. He was down there by himself and people came to rob him. He killed like two of them, but it was like five people and some of them killed him and they said it was a trail of blood leading out. So he must've shot like three or four of them, but he killed two of them down there in the basement and he got killed. And I ain't never forget that because he used to give us money and all that. He was a pretty cool guy; he used to look out for all the young kids on the block. Take us whenever we ran out of money to the arcade. He always used to pass through, look for anybody from the block, and say, "Y'all good? Aight, here, five dollars, go ahead spend it all on video games." So I always remember him even until now.

Once you hear gunshots, and you're in your house, always get on the floor because you don't want a bullet to come through your window and hit you. It happens like that all the time in the hood. So you just start to learn wherever you at, you hear bullets, duck. At least if you in the streets duck. In your house, get on the floor. You can't run because if you run, you might run into a bullet or get hit in your back. That's why it's always good to just get low because it might not be for you.

On My Block

I was going to P.S. 181 Elementary School in Brooklyn. From the house on Martense it was like, six blocks, walking distance. And then when we moved into our own house; it was right across the street. That wasn't my favorite school but it was one of my favorite schools because P.S. 181 is on New York Avenue, so it was fun because I lived right across the street from the school. I didn't have to come directly home after school. Back then we always used to have fights and stuff like that and I always used to feel comfortable because we'd get into fights on our own block, so nothing could ever happen to us. So no matter what happened, no matter how much time, people would come with mad people, I'd always have more friends there to fight for me because this

was my hood, on my block. So I was comfortable going to that school, I got suspended a lot, but I was comfortable.

Once I had got into an argument with this girl. And her brother came back to the school. Her brother was the same age as my brother. Both of them went to the same school, but he ain't know that that was my brother. So he comes up to the school and he's like, "Anybody said something to my sister Stephanie?" I was like, "Yeah, I said something to her." He said, "I just came here to let you know I'm not having it no more, so anyhow I hear you say something like that about my sister again I'm gonna punch you in your mouth." I was like, "Yeah, whatever, you just talking." He was like, "Yeah you a punk n____," whatever, whatever. While he was walking away, back then the thing to say was "ya mama." So I was like, "Ya mama." So he turns around, come back to punch me in the face. So I started fighting him, but he was bigger than me, so of course I lost.

I ain't know he lived two blocks away though. He ain't know that I lived right across the street. Basically, by the time I ran in my house and got a bat, my next-door neighbor was just coming out their house too. So they were like, "Yo what's going on?" I'm like, "Yo this big n____ just came and beat me up on the block." "Word?" So all of us ran, caught him on his porch, beat him down. He ran in his house, we threw a garbage can through the window. I thought that was that. I came back, I told my brother how he look and all that. I told my brother the girl name and the last name and my brother was like, "Yo that kid go to my school? He's my age." And I'm like, "Yeah I think he do." Whatever, the next day I thought it was gonna be more beef but the kid's parents came back with police to the school and I got suspended. I was probably like ten or eleven. That was like third or fourth grade I think.

We War With Each Other and We War With Anyone Else

Then I went to Walt Whitman Junior High School in Brooklyn; that's in Flatbush too. And that's when everything basically started going downhill. That's when I started smoking weed. I always noticed girls in school, but that's when I really started, because everybody in high school and junior high had a girlfriend. I started cutting school to go by my girlfriend's house and chill. We had hooky parties and stuff like that. That was like '97, '98.

Around them times that's when the gang thing was going on real hard. I kind of stayed away from it a little bit even though we had like our own little crew from our neighborhood that we all stuck up for each other. But we still was getting pressure from other gangs. But we wasn't having it because it was known in the neighborhood, our gang, our hood and the other hood from the other side be the two hoods that we would war. So it don't matter, we war with each other and we war with anyone else. So it was like that for a while. Then I started getting into more fights, because after being around so much of the older people in my neighborhood, it was like a lot of times you see people doing violent things. You like, "Oh that's real violent, but I won't do it." After seeing the same thing everyday, you see a kid get stabbed everyday, see a kid get shot everyday, it's just another part of life. It's nothing for me to do it, so I started getting more violent. I started stabbing people, fighting people for no reason, jumping people.

Then I got arrested, that was the first time. Me and a kid got into an argument after school, his big brother came up to me. His big brother was in the same school too.

So he came up to me like, “Yo, you know Paul is my brother.”—and his first name was Gary—“I’m his big brother Gary and I ain’t gonna have nobody talking to my little brother like that.” And I thought I was a little rough neck, so I was like, “What? You could do whatever you want to do.” So he said, “Take it around the corner and we could fight.” He was bigger than me, but I’m like, girls is over there and I got other cats from my hood, so I can’t look like no punk, so I’m like, “All right, let’s take it around the corner.” We took it around the corner; I took off my jacket. Me and him started fighting and I started to lose because he was towering over me. So next thing I know I just seen somebody else punch him. So I looked up and seen one guy from my block. So we just kept wearing him out, and somebody took his Jansport book bag. That’s when Jansports used to be the thing, so he had an \$80 Jansport. I think they took his Jordans too and he ended up running off home. So when I looked at them they were like, “Yeah, we know your older brother and we been seeing you doing your thing, you’re a little gangsta n_____. So any problems you got we gonna handle that for you. Just let us know.” I’m like, “Oh, *aight*, that’s what’s up.”

Next day I came to school, seen mad police but I ain’t think it was for me. So I went to classes, everything was going all right. When I got to lunch police walked up to me like, “Your name Saint?” And I’m like, “Nah.” So there was an exit right there at the lunchroom. So I’m walking toward the exit, but I ain’t tell my girl because she would’ve been beefing, “I told you stop fighting; you’re gonna get in trouble.” So I told her, “Yo, listen, you want anything? I’m about to go to the lunch line and get something.” She’s like, “Nah, I’m good.” So I walked toward it and I’m about to jump out the door. Right when I get close to the door, she shouts, “Oh yeah, Saint, get me a milk.” So the police officers looked like, “Oh I thought you said you weren’t Saint?” So I tried to run out the door but then they grabbed me and I got arrested for assault and robbery. I basically beat the case, but that was the first time I got arrested. And since then it kept going on and on.

The guys that stood up for me were the rough guys from the hood. We looked up to them. “Yeah when I grow up, I want to be like him.” Because in the hood it’s all about a fear and a respect thing, because once you fear somebody, like really and truly, you respect them. You might fear them, but when I see you fear them, I’ll respect them like, “*Damn why can’t everybody fear me like that?*” You could see somebody just walk up to a group of kids about to go in the corner store and just take everybody money. Like damn, I’m walking around with two dollars. This kid came out his crib with nothing, left his house with nothing. And he got fifteen, twenty dollars on him right now. They had all the girls. You know, of course, the girls wanna be with the thugs. So they had all the girls. The rest of the kids—even the thug kids from our hood hung out with the thug kids from them other hoods because like they say, birds of a feather flock together. So they got the perfect crew. Ain’t nobody stepping to they crew ‘cause everybody in that crew is gangsta. All of us little homies were like, damn, we wanna be like them. They got money and fresh sneakers all the time.

So that’s when I started chilling with them. And when I started chilling with them that’s when I started getting into a lot more trouble because I started seeing things they did. “Aww, man, why am I sitting here with two dollars in my pocket when I could be robbing n_____, getting 20, 30 dollars a day easily.” Even though that’s little money now, back then that was a lot of money.

So I started doing the same thing they was doing. In the morning times when I used to see them hop on they bikes, they be like, “Yo, we gonna ride out to the next school, get some money and come back.” They come back with 100 dollars. I’m like, “100 dollars? You rich! You never gotta work no more.” That’s how I looked at it. So then when I had my little crew, we was younger, but I was like, “You know what? Let’s make *money*.” So I went through my hood, found all the young guys who wasn’t scared to put it in. Like, “Yeah we stab anybody. We don’t care.” And every morning we started doing the same thing, we going out! We ride to the other schools, our school, everything. We gonna let these fools know that we ain’t playing no more. Started riding to schools putting it in, doing the same thing the older guys were doing, just at a younger age.

Historical Landmark

My high school was rated like one of the worst high schools in Brooklyn because of stabbing, shootings outside, everything. The Erasmus High School. My older brother never even went to Erasmus. He was like, “Yo, they put it in over there?” So when I got to high school it was like damn, my first day there, thinking about Freshmen Friday. Freshmen every Friday getting beat up. And I wasn’t stressing it because a lot of kids from my neighborhood was there, that was older than me. But then I’m like, “Yo, you know what? I’ve gotta start putting this in for myself right now.” So once I got in there, I was on some, “Yo, I’m doing this straight gangsta, I’m gonna stop playing.” Around that time I was like fifteen going on sixteen. So then I started staying—that’s when I started not going home like that. Staying out in the streets more often, my moms complaining but I ain’t care. I started smoking weed hard, every day, now I was on some every day smoking weed two or three times a day, when it used to be maybe two times a week. Messing with girls hard, probably a month straight not even going to school, then going to school just to bulls__.

Smoking weed is all right, but selling weed is even better. So then I started going back to school because I was like, “Yo, school is a money spot.” Everybody in school smokes weed so I used to go to school with weed everyday. There used to be kids in our school with guns and all that because the back of it is on the main strip Flatbush Avenue and we had big gates, like cell bars. So you could call one of your peoples and tell them to give you your weapon. We had a campus, our school actually had a campus, it’s a historical landmark.

So we used to tell people to pass on Flatbush. They used to pass down Flatbush Ave. We used to be right there at the gate and they pass you a gun or a knife and you have that in school all day. So after that, when I seen that started going down, I was like, “Aww, man, this school is real gangsta.” I started liking it even more, like, “Word, we turned it up in this school.” Making money out, selling my weed, all the girls was loving me because, “Yo, this cat, this the weed man right here.” I never used to stay past lunch because at lunchtime everyday I would always have all my weed sold out, maybe have like two more bags left. Then I’ll be like, “Aight, that’s for me to smoke when I hit the block.” Go to the block, buy something to drink, smoke, wake up the next day it’s the same thing. Buy some more weed, go back to school, next day it’s the same thing.

Family, Basically

A lot of people from my crew that I was with from junior high school started getting arrested and going up, to Spofford and up north. So I was by myself. Then I bumped into some Crips; they were older than me. I was like 16, they was like 21. He came to me in the neighborhood and he was like, "I heard about you in the neighborhood. A lot of people out here talking about you. They telling me that you put it in, you one of the gangsta kids in this block, you run this whole block right here." And I'm like, "Yeah, this is my block." So he's like, "Yeah, I want you to start chilling with me because the fools you hanging with is punks man. They ain't gonna put it in for you, and I know you got drama." So I started chilling with him and one day I got into some problems and he came out and he handled it with me. I respected that so I started chilling with him harder. Next thing you know I ended up moving up out my house, living with them.

So after a while, you know, we always used to just chill and smoke weed and all that, then I was like, "Yo you know what? We with each other everyday. Any problems you got I handle it. Any problems I got you handle it, so I might as well become Crip with you." So after that I joined Crip. Then after that it became even more problems because a lot of the kids in the neighborhood was Blood. Our Crip set had like the least amount of people. Everybody else's set probably had like 60 people, 100 people. We was rolling around with eight people in our set. So just for our name to be known out there, everything that everybody else was doing we had to do it ten times harder. So if you would just go to a block and fight, we had to go to that block and stab everybody up and so on. That's how it went. It kept going farther and farther until, basically I ended up where I am at now because of what I did then.

The older guy who initiated me, who put me in the Crip, he had respect. He knew me in the neighborhood. Even though I had respect on my block and I had it smashed on my block, throughout the neighborhood, next I had to gain respect in the projects. When you go through the projects, they used to be like, "Locc? Yeah, that n_____s a killer! They scared of him!" So when I used to walk with him and I used to be doing my little bad boy walk, and he used to walk right next to me doing his bad boy walk, smoking our cigarettes or smoking our weed walking down the block, I used to see certain fools just look at him and start to run or just act like, "Yo, we don't want no problems!" And that's the fools who I used to look at like, "Damn!" They used to go around and beat up everybody else, but now that Locc's on the block, you talking about you don't want no problems.

So I wanted to be just like that. Like when I was younger—the same way when I used to look at the older guys and be like, "Word, I'm gonna grow up and be just like them." Even though you're older, a lot of people think you don't wanna be like nobody. But, really and truly, when you look deep down inside, you're like, "Yeah, I *do* want to be like him. I want to have the same type of respect he had." So I joined the Crips, thinking that I'm gonna get the same type of respect he had. But I ain't know the type of work that he had to put in to get that respect. I ain't really know what he did to get that respect. I just thought maybe he fought, bust his gun once or twice. Then, when I start hearing stories about what he been through, how he put it down in the hood, then I'm like, "Oh he went through a lot to get the respect that you get." So that's when I'm like, "You know what? I'm gonna go through a lot to get this respect too, because I wanna be

just like him.” You can’t be rolling with a gangsta all day and you a punk. Then they gonna look at you like you a funny-ass n____. How you rolling with this G’ed up n____ and he’s a punk ass n____? That’s when n____s goin’ go up to the G like, “Stop rolling with him, he’s soft.” So basically, you gotta pull your own weight too, even though you’re in a gang and ya’ll fight for each other, you got to pull your own weight. So I joined Crip after that. Got jumped in. After that you gotta go get high and y’all family, basically.

I got my status up. Like your status is like from soldier to young gangsta to O.G. is like when you’re at the top. That’s what the guy who put me in was. Then I got to like second head, I basically run the set ‘cause he the O.G. and he don’t gotta do nothing. He can just sit back, I run the set, I collect the money, bring all that to him. But when I got jumped in, it wasn’t that bad because the O.G. love me: I was like his little brother. So even when they was fighting with me, before it even happened I ain’t know at the time but he later told me he said, “to take it easy on him ‘cause I don’t want him to get it that bad.” So, I got it on, probably got a couple punches to the face or whatever and that was about it. Probably went for like six minutes because we Crips we go by minutes. My set went by two minutes ‘cause everything we do by the two or by six minutes, because all Crips go by six and Bloods go by five. So I did it for two minutes. I seen a lot of people who came in after me who really got it, down to the females. Who really really got it, because after I got in, I was already like a little role model in my neighborhood because of what I went through from school to school putting it in. So a lot of my kids in my neighborhood were like, “We like the way ya’ll not even deep like that. It’s like eight of ya’ll and ya’ll got half of these other Crip n____s and these Blood n____s out here scared. We want to be down with ya’ll.” So then I went to talk to my O.G. like, “Yo, there’s a couple young n____s, you know what I’m saying, some Y.G.s and we could probably turn them in.” And my O.G. was like, “Yo, listen, anybody you want to recruit, recruit them.” So that’s what I started doing, recruiting.

Next thing I know we like 20, 30, started getting deeper and deeper. We had girls, males. Then I had, I had like, my little Locc. Somebody I had under my wing, my little homie. I lost him in the struggle, he ended up here, in Rikers, in like 2001 for shooting his step-pops in the head. So he got a body under that ‘cause he seen the way we was doing it so he was like, “I ain’t goin’ let nobody play me for a punk.” Shot his step-pops in the head. That actually brought a tear to my eye ‘cause a lot of people came up to me after that like, “Yo, you made him like that. If he had never met you he would’ve never been on it like that.” So that kind of hurt me.

Then we had another guy, cool guy named Young Locc; he was about 16 years old and he was Crip with us and he got found on the roof with a bullet to the head. That hurt me even more. The police came and rushed my house thinking I had something to do with it. I had to take a lie-detector test to prove myself and all that. That was the first time I took a lie detector test in my life, to prove I was innocent, that I didn’t kill my own friend, a kid who I used to chill with everyday. So.

Respect

The older people we call “O.G.s,” like the “old gangsters.” But there’s not like a lot of them; all my role models were bad. Like this guy in the neighborhood until right

now they call Debo. Older guy, going up north on a body. I used to look at him like, "Yeah, I respect him." Because of the same thing, people fear him in the neighborhood. Walking around he had three or four cars, Lexus', Denali trucks, everything and you look like him like, "Damn, how he doing it like that?" And it came to the point where he actually put me under the wing because he like, "I see you running this block, this used to be my block before I went up north, now I see you doing your thing." But, that was like one of the older guys that I respected.

Besides that, it was my father and my grandfather. But I respect them because they my family and I loved them. And I see that no matter what was going on in the neighborhood, my father never let none of that get to him. He stayed with his legal job and took care of his family. That's why I respected him. But what when it comes down to like respecting people on some gangsta s____, I had all the bad role models, people who been locked up, people who got shot, people who shot people, that's who I respect.

Flags

I got into some problems with some Crip kids. When they came looking for me they ain't know it was me. So when they came to my school and they seen me, they was like, "Oh, it's you? Nah we don't want no problems." I felt violated because I'm like, "Yo, y'all done came looking for me and everything and then when ya'll see it's me ya'll talking about ya'll don't want no problems." So I'm like, "Nah, yo, we got problems." So at the same time, all of them started leaving, so you know I had my cell phone in school and I called up homies and I'm like, "Some fools just came up here and they looked like they was going to flip me, but they ain't know who I was, but I still feel violated. There's girls in here, my n_____ in here. N_____s just came in here, know what I'm saying, like they was gangsta." So my man was like, "So what you want to do?" I'm like, "Yo son, I want to do whatever." So he said, "You know what? I'm coming up there right now," because he started coming up. So we walking down the block—I'm walking behind them but they still got like a block on me and I'm like, "Damn, my homies was supposed to be up here and they ain't even come."

So I'm on my way walking to my house now and I see a car coming down the block doing like 80. I look on the back I see the gray flag swinging on the antenna. So I flag them down, then they pull up like, "Where they at? Where they at?" I said, "Yo, they're right over there." So we jumped in the car, we circled the block; finally we found them. I jumped out the car first—they ain't realize I was in the car. So I'm walking up to them like, "Yo, so what's up— what it is?" So automatically when the guy seen me I start chasing them. So he turns around and let off three shots. I didn't know he had a gun, I ain't have no gun on me. So now I duck down, the car pulls up with my homies and they automatically start shooting. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom. And they was busting, so when I seen that I was like, "Oh that's gangsta." I liked that, I was like, "Oh that's real."

So after that they drove to the house. They ain't even wait for me; after they finished shooting they just pulled off. So my friend who was originally in the drama with me was riding my bike. So he came through, told me to jump on the pegs and we rode out. When I got to the crib, I'm like, "You know what? There's a lot of people I messed with for years in this hood. You know fought with and all that and they probably

wouldn't even do what ya'll just did for me. Ya'll just put your life on the line." Because while we was riding to go find these guys, detectives pulled right up on us and was looking at us. We got flags all over us and I think they got a call saying there was a shooting someplace else so they just pulled off. So right there if they had stopped us they would've found like three guns in the car. So I'm like, "Ya'll put your lives on the line for me." So right then and there and I'm like yo, that's when I really realized I want to be Crip because if this is how ya'll treat somebody who was not even Crip and ya'll just liked and want to be Crip, basically, how would ya'll treat me if I *was* Crip? So I looked like, it is a pretty tight-knit family. So from then, I just joined, even though we went through problems.

A Grown-Ass Man

We had a house, we had a basement right up the block from the same kid that we shot at. We had a basement that was like my best living-by-myself experience without my parents. I was waking up like 3:30, 4 o' clock in the morning and walking into the O.G. room and be there smoking mad weed, smoking and rolling up some more weed. I be like, damn, my man heavy, always drinking liquor. After like our first month being in there we all had girls that left they houses and came down there. We had some runaway girls, everything, girls that just stayed in there 24/7. So we had girls that were living in there with us. I'm like damn, I feel like I'm a grown-ass man. I go outside make my little money, slinging my little stuff. Come back home, I could drink, smoke. I got a girl waiting for me every night. We switching girls, sharing girls 'cause they say, "We just love ya'll, we don't care which one of ya'll we got." So I used to have fun. I used to go home sometimes when I get food from my mom, call my moms and say, "Mom, I'm hungry." She'd say, "I'm gonna cook up some rice for ya'll." I'd say, "Yeah, just cook up some butter rice, go to the Chinese food store, buy some fried chicken and I'll be good." She'll cook up a big pot of rice and she know I was living with other people. Bring the whole pot home, split it up. We used to eat good; it was all of us. Sometimes I'd be hungry and Big Homie'll buy the food. Sometimes he'd be hungry, I'll buy all the food, you know. Like that, we lived like we was family. Them two—like me I ain't want my mother coming down there because all the weed smoke, plus we had guns in the house.

So that was my favorite place I could say I ever lived. Really and truly. Could've did anything I wanted to, walk around the house butt-naked, walk into they rooms, oh, they messing with they girls, like, "What up? I can't get none?" Like that's what it is. That was one of the funniest years of my life, basically. I had the most girls ever, I won't lie, even though I used to get girls on my own. When it was all three of us together getting girls, it was no stopping. 'Cause we used to share, unless you know everybody got they one little wifey, like, "Yeah, this is mines." But everything else we sharing, really sharing, so we used to have fun. Basically, there used to be times when I used to bag girls in the street, and they would straight up come and tell me, "I wanna have sex with you, man." So it was fun, that was my favorite house. I'll never forget that. Never forget it.

Who My Family Is

My brother, that's always my family. I only got one brother, I almost lost him to the struggle in the streets already, so he in my heart. I got my homie in the hood—that's my heart. Debo—the older guy—he's my family too. They take care of me, know what I'm sayin? My homeboy Yellow take care of me, and then I have other people, to tell you the truth, that I *swore* was my family, until I get locked up, 'cause when you get locked up that's when you see how real it is. People that you used to give money to in times of need forget you. We used to smoke hundreds of dollars worth of weed with them—when they didn't even have money in the morning to buy their own kids something to eat, and I used to be like, "You hungry? I'm gonna go buy food for everybody." Spent fifty dollars one time for everybody, and I've been in here and they can't even send me twenty dollars worth of commissary. I don't want much, I know that you ain't even have money to get your kids something to eat, so I'm not gonna tell you like I tell other people, like, "Yo, send me a hundred." Throw me twenty dollars. Matter of fact, you ain't got the money to send me, don't send me nothing, come see me on a visit, show me that at least you thinking about me, know what I'm saying. *They couldn't even do that.* So that's when I started realizing you have these people out here, they just fake, they use you 'cause they know you making money or whatever, and that's it.

So that's when I started realizing who my family is really—people who been telling me, "Oh, son, listen I can't come see you, 'cause you know how it is in the hood already, but listen, I'm sending you money." And I call them the next week like, "Yo, you got that?" "Yeah, I got that." These people I remember—that's people when I go the street I'm gonna still be messin' with them. A lot of people when I get to the street, they can't ask me for shit, and a lot of people when I do get home, I'm straight whippin' they asses 'cause of experiences I've been through while I'm in here, so it's kind of crazy.

My mother and my father wanna come visit me, but I refuse, straight up, because, I can't—I don't want my mother coming through that whole Rikers process—bad enough that I'm locked up. I know I'm gonna get out of here soon, my time is getting real short, I got two months left, but I'm not depressed about it, 'cause I done been through a lot of s___ already. I'm not depressed right now, I'm actually happy 'cause my brother told me the way people been dropping in my neighborhood left and right, I could have been one of them dead bodies out there. So I'm happy I'm here, alive right now, and going home in two months, still alive.

If I see my mother come in here, I be depressed. 'Cause I know first thing my mother gonna do is start cryin', I know my mother. Sometimes when I'm on the phone—like when I got into a fight here and got a ticket—I call home and my mother found out that I might be going to the bing and lose some good days, first thing, she started crying. I'm like, "Mommy, I love you." She like, "I love you too, but you don't even understand, you in jail and you still getting into trouble, you never learn." My mother, that's one thing.

I dealt with my girl comin' in here cryin', I dealt with that for the first month. Excuse me, I don't need to see nobody else coming in here cryin'. So most of the time I like my brother comin' in, 'cause my brother basically knows since we were younger I was always tougher than him. That's why even when I joined Crip, and my brother wanted to join Crip, I told my brother, "No, I don't want you being Crip." My brother got a daughter. Stay here and live for your daughter. If I gotta die, I'm gonna die. If I gotta

die for you and you daughter, I'll do that, but you gotta be here for your daughter. I don't got nothing to live for. So my brother when he come in here, he already know how I'm livin', so he don't cry, he stress it like, "Yo, I miss you, son. Things ain't the same in the hood without you. I know you making your little moves in here." He understand that. So I'm good with my brother and maybe a couple of my homies come to see me, and that's it.

My brother got shot like towards—towards Brownsville, like by Saratoga Avenue by some guys we had problems with over there. It wasn't really nothing that serious, but it got that serious after he and my brother was talking and—I guess my brother told him something that he didn't like 'cause that's how me and my brother got to be bold. My brother went over there, out of our hood, so that was the first mistake, 'cause he was out of our neighborhood, and he ain't had no gun on him. So him and the kid started getting into an argument, the kid walked away, the kid came back with a shotgun. My brother said, "Oh, s____, you got that shotgun, you better use it." The other dude was like, "All right." Pumped it and shot my brother in the d_____.

Well, that night my brother got rushed to the hospital. A whole—fifty-thousand dollars worth of surgery later—he had his daughter. That's why I say I almost lost my brother to this struggle over here. So after that it made me love my brother. 'Cause that's when I started realizing, "Man, I only got one brother," and I almost lost him to the streets just like that—he coulda went. He was this close to dying. So—

It was crazy. That almost brought a tear to my eye, to see my own brother shot in the penis with a big bandage over him, nails—his nails was full of blood. I'm lookin' at my brother—this is my older brother—and he's sitting there, he got the tube down his throat, seeing dried tears on his eyes, I'm like, "Damn, that's crazy." Even when he came home, he was going through pain for, like, months. Getting shot in the penis, you know, but he went through it—had his kid after that and he works at some plumbing stuff. He's a DJ with the recording and all that and he got his security license, so he bounce from job to job, though, he don't really hold a job for too long. But I guess right now he's trying to work hard, because he's like, "Yo, when you was in the streets you always take care of me. Now that you in here, I gotta make sure I take care of you. When you want something, I gotta make sure I'm able to give it to you," so he tries to keep working right now, just for the fact that I'm in jail.

I've been through facilities after facilities—know what I'm saying, that's why I tell my brother, I don't want you in a gang, 'cause I don't want you to join up with a gang, really start messing up, so I don't want you to start coming through facilities after facilities after you join a gang, facility here, facility there. No. My mother went through enough, my brother's daughter is going through enough without having her uncle—'cause his daughter love me, that's all she knows, "Uncle, Uncle, Uncle." So right now that I'm locked up, she going through hell, I know that, so—bad enough she already don't have uncle, so I don't want her to be like, "Oh, so I don't have uncle and daddy." Bad enough, and if I die behind this gang thing, it's the life I chose. I don't want to sit up one day and know that I'm getting duct-taped—kidnapped or something like that—and they're about to kill me and I look right next to me and my brother is there, like, "Both of you Crip n_____s about to die right here." No—I rather go by myself, at least my brother will be able to carry on the name.

My mother, she don't know too much about the gang thing, but she know I'm affiliated. She said that I've been lying to her, 'cause if I tell her, "Yeah, well Mom, I'm Crip," that's gonna stress her out too much. But she already know, basically she's not a stupid woman, she know that I'm gang related. So, it hurts her, she cries, she's like, "You always in and out of jail, you my youngest son, you my baby boy. When you ain't had the GED—you got kicked out of school, you still getting locked up, you went and left the house already, I don't know how you getting money, you twenty years old, you went from a Honda, now you driving a Lexus." My mother's like, "I know you doing something in the streets that's not good." So that hurts her. My mother's a God-fearing woman, go to church every week and all that, so every time I speak to her she like, "You know I pray for you every night." I tell her, "Same thing Ma, you know I pray for you too every night, and I'm good in here, Mom, you ain't gotta worry about nothing." But you know it hurts her a lot, I ain't gonna lie. That's the—the main thing about this, this bid right here that hurts me, is knowing that I hurt my mother so much. I could do this time, it's nothing for me, I've been through this, but just to think about what my mother go through, that hurts me. Sometimes that makes me want to cry, but—you do the crime you gotta do the time, so I never cry, I sit here and do what I gotta do, you feel me? I know—I know it's not easy for my mother. As hard as it is for me, it's probably thirty times harder for my mother, to tell you the truth. Nobody gonna be feeling as much as my mother, as much as my family. But I know my mother feels it the most.

My father, he's a man, so I tell my father, I call my father, "Yo, Pops, I just have to wear this thing out to be in jail, you hear me pops?" I don't have to talk to my father like how most people talk to their pops, I could curse with my pops. Don't get it twisted though, I can't curse *at* him, he slap the spit out of my mouth with the quickness. I could tell my pops, like I'm in the street, "Yo, Pops, after paying this stupid ass n____ off—I f____ this n____ up," or whatever, my pop's laughing. My pops—I remember the times when these fools come to my house, trying to jump me like thirty deep, and my pops was cleaning his car and pulled out the Club, like, "Yo, one of you touch my son, I swear to God I'm sending everybody to the hospital." And I come out the house, like, "Yo, ya fools don't know what it is, one of y'all fools touching my pops, forget goin' to the hospital, you're dead!" And they walk off the block, "We catch you later." See them later, they fall back. That's how my family is, we stick together no matter what—me and my brother could be fighting, and somebody else jump in. Both of us stop and wear his ass out. That's how my family is, so I know that my family can take it, my pops can take it. He understands that I'm in, he comes and puts money in my books every week or every other week.

My mother—I tell her to stay away from this altogether, 'cause her just thinking about me being in here is enough. I been thinking sometimes like when I'm in here, my mother and my grandmother, I'd be praying to God like, "Please don't let them die stressing out over me," and s____ like that, or, "Please don't let them die when I'm in here, period." But I know my mother and the way she's thinking about me—she love my brother but she worry about me, 'cause I'm the youngest one and I'm wild, since I've been young. She always worries about me, always. I know this kills her right now, but like I told her when I come home I gotta make it up to her, you know what I'm saying. I can't really do nothing, but I'll try my best.

Go to the Hood

First thing I'm gonna do when I get out, no lie is— My people should be waiting for me with mad weed, mad liquor, so I'm gonna get my mind right. Then I'm probably gonna chill with a girl for a little while. I'm gonna go home and see my moms straight up. After I spend an hour or two with my moms, I'll probably relax, you know what I'm saying, take a nice cold shower, watch TV for a little while, don't make her think I'm just coming home and running right out. Then I'm gonna jump in my car, I'm gonna go to the hood, basically. After that it's a lot of—like I said problems I gotta handle, stuff that happened while I was in here. But that's not too serious. I'll handle that real quick, that should be done the first week I get home, then after that I'm chillin—trying to see if I could change certain things around. I don't want to go back to selling drugs, 'cause I don't want to get locked up. With this President we got now, Bush, I definitely don't want to be coming back in here with a drug charge, so I'm gonna try to see if I could get legal, basically. That's what I'm gonna do, try to see if I could get legal. That's it, I've been through it enough already, I don't need to be serving twenty-five to life for me to learn maybe it's time to change. Right now I thank God for the time, 'cause I could be doing way more. There's things that I did that ain't come up yet, that I could be doing way more time over, so I appreciate that I got this time, 'cause it opened my eyes. So—like I said, I'm gonna try to change when I get home, but easier said than done, I tell you. You hear that a lot from me, easier said than done, so—I don't even know.

There's a couple of people in here that kept it real, and never moved behind my back this whole time while I was locked up. When I go home, I'll come up and visit you. I'll come up and put money in your books, it's nothing—that's the type of n_____ I am. But other people, you better hope you never see me in the street, and that's it. Certain people is real, but I didn't come to jail to make friends, but you do, so—at least if I see that we could be in a situation like this, where the odds is all against us, and you still with me, then I know when we in the streets and we got more of the odds, we got more of the numbers, that mean you'll really come through. I already got my close-knit family and other than them I don't want no more family. I got associates, that's it. I don't need no more people that I could look at and be like, “They're family,” 'cause guess what? A lot of people are fake out there. I don't need no more new friends, none of that—that's about it, basically.

Before I got here, I end up getting hit, I end up getting shot—a forty-five slug in the leg. So now I'm sitting up at the hospital, shot and locked up. I went through court cases and I got out. There were a bunch of parties around that time and I seen my own friend get shot right in the eye, while we partying. So just to show you, this gang life is not what it is, just to show you if you ain't in a gang, don't join one, and if you're in, and you think of what I've been through so far, this is what you got looking ahead. This is what you got coming to you, and you just might not be as lucky as me to be the one that gets shot in the leg, to be the one that gets shot in the—to see your friend get shot in the eye. You just might be the one who gets shot in the eye.

A Seed

But my time getting shorter now anyway, so I don't like too many visits, 'cause that's gonna make me think about the outside even more. I might get one visit this month, one visit in January just so my homies can bring my go-home package, my clothes and all that. After that I'm good. I'll be home February 7th.

Now that I got my GED it'll be easier for me to get a legal job too. I'm not used to working legal, I'm used to fast money, but I'm getting older right now and this hustling thing was really getting boring, so it's like I try to cut back on it as much as I can. If I gotta get legal jobs to stay free longer, that's what I'll do.

To stay out of jail there's certain moves that I wanna make, that I feel I should make. I wish I could go back and take—take back the time when I joined Crip. Can't do that though, I'm already Crip, and once you Crip you Crip for life, no matter what, so—I'm Crip for life, that's one thing. That might bring me back in here, or that might end my life.

I know I do a lot of bad so I try to do a lot of good to balance it out. So I'd try to stop selling drugs—maybe stop with the violence, stop moving around with guns. I already got three gun charges under my belt. You know stop—stop all the violence. Maybe I could stay in the streets longer, but it's easier said than done. I could sit here and tell you, "When I go home, I'm changing my life," but I ain't changing my life.

Violence is a part of it. That's how I grew up, with a lot of violence, all day I be seeing people get shot and held up—I done got shot—playin the game. I guess I leave it in God's hand. I don't even know what I could do to make it better. I got opinions of what I could do, but they're just opinions. I might not even follow them when I get back into the streets. It's easy to say what I'm gonna do right now while I'm in jail, but it's harder to do it when you're in the streets, real hard, and then you got a reputation to uphold. When I get home, that's still my block. Feel me? Nobody gonna stop and say, "Damn, son, he come home from jail this time and he turned straight soft!"

You ain't never safe in the streets. No matter what, I knew people who were coming out of church and caught a bullet in the head. So when it's your time to go it's your time to go. I never got caught for slinging but never say never. This might have been my wake-up call. You never know, that's why I said I don't want to be too late. I don't wanna be like one of the guys in here, like, "Damn! this is my fourth crack charge and now I gotta go up north and give them seventeen." Let me know before I even get served, throw me? That's how I look at it. I don't want to wait till I get served and then be like, "Damned." Now, it's a wrap.

Sometimes I think about it, it'll be good for me to have a seed— I like, I love kids—I love kids—but—the life I live is like I don't want to be walking down the block with my kid one day and somebody shoot me and hit my kid in the head, or a bullet coming through me and hitting my kid, or I die and leave my kid, so I have to think about it. It's crazy, I want a kid, but, because of the life I live I can't. Maybe if I could change my life, it might happen, you never know. I want a kid, tell you the truth, but it's all serious, I think it's not meant for me to have a kid, especially not right now.

If I get through this, I have stories to tell my kids—I have stories to tell my aunt—I've been in jail enough times that nobody in my family ain't got to go to jail no more—what y'all want to know about jail, I could tell you about it. I wish I ain't going through it, but I did, and like I said what don't kill you make you stronger, so I guess I'm a pretty strong man right now—at twenty—I'll be all right though.

