



# CHOICES

Essays from youth  
at the Northern Virginia Detention Center

September 2014

Submitted to WKCD's 2014 nonfiction writing contest, "Stirred But Not Shaken"

[www.whatkidscando.org](http://www.whatkidscando.org)

# ESSAYS

SENT TO VIRGINIA

MONEY

ALL ABOUT MY CRUSH

MY FOOTBALL LIFE

AN ADVENTURE

INSIDE THESE WALLS

LIVING A NIGHTMARE

CHOICES

FATHER

NOT WORTH IT

THINGS HAPPEN

MY PURPOSE

## Á

### SENT TO VIRGINIA

ON FRIDAY WHEN I GOT HOME FROM SCHOOL IT WAS A NORMAL DAY until my mom told me that the assistant principal, Mr. Vance, wanted to have a meeting with her at school. I was sure there was nothing so wrong for them to call her; I was thinking and thinking but I could not remember any bad thing I had done for Mr. Vance to be calling her.

When Monday came, I went to school calmly, but then in health class Mr. Vance came and called me. He told me to bring my stuff and when I got to his office, there was a police officer and he asked me “Do you have your phone?”

“No,” I said puzzled.

Then the cop said, “Let’s go, get you phone. Where is it?”

I said, “In my locker.”

Then we went there and when I opened my locker my phone was the only thing in there without a battery.

The cop asked, “Why did you take out the battery?”

I told him, “Because I don’t want it to ring.”

I did not know why he was asking so many questions about every thing. I was a little bit nervous at that time.

When we got back to the school office, the cop told me, “Have a seat” and I sat for a while, wondering what was going on. The principal was smiling at me so I thought it was nothing serious.

Then they called me to a small room with the principal and her assistant, my mom, a translator, the cop and two men looking at me really angrily.

I asked my mom, “Is it anything bad?”

She said, “No, but much more serious.” Then she asked me, “Why do you think you are here?”

“I don’t know mom,” I said. “What is it?”

Then one of the two men said, “We are from the FBI, so why do you think you are here?”

I said, “I don’t know“

Then the other one of them said, “Take a wild guess.”

At first I played stupid, hoping it was not anything serious, but then later I confessed, “I think I am here for supporting Al-Qaida.”

From there the two FBI agents started to ask a lot of questions. “Are you ready to detonate a bomb in your body?” they asked.

“Yes,” I admitted.

Then they also asked me, “Do you want to fight overseas?”

Again I replied, “Yes.”

After the whole conversation was done, one of the agents said threateningly, “We are going to keep seeing each other.”

I felt as if I was in a movie. Leaving school that day, all I could think was, “Do they think I am a threat?”

When I finally got home and my dad got home too, I hid in the bathroom while my mom finished explaining to my dad what had happened.

The next meeting with the FBI agents was at my house, and the ICE was with them. The agent asked me to stay outside while they talked to my parents. A little later, they called me and asked me the same detailed questions about what I believed and what I planned to do in the future.

At my last meeting with them, they asked me to stay outside again, but they did not call me back in but they just got out and I went in and my parents looked sad.

I asked them, “What happened?” and my dad said, “You and your mom have twenty-four hours to go back to our country,” but my parents did something that the FBI told us not to do: they called their friends asking for help and many started to search for lawyers. We did find a good one and we did not go to our country in twenty-four hours as the FBI said because it was World Cup and every one was going to Brazil.

So they were out of tickets and the FBI could not get them so they found another day for us to go. Exactly one day before we were scheduled to go back, we slept in our friends’ house afraid that the FBI would come after us early in the morning. So the next day my uncle called my mom saying that FBI went to one of our friend’s house and asked to revised it, so we knew that the FBI was after us, so we quickly got in the car and ran to the lawyer to go to Immigration. On the highway, though, my parents stopped the car and I knew it was a police car right behind us, and when I looked behind to see the car and quickly the siren started to blare and an FBI agent got out of the car with a weapon, pointing it at us.

She said, “Don’t move, put your hands in the air!” and the agent frisked and handcuffed us, but I was not even scared, though. They brought us to an FBI cell that was cold and uncomfortable. They gave us a lot of papers to sign, and they said we would be put

in a plane on the same day and be sent to Virginia. We were sent to Virginia where I am right now in the juvenile detention. But now I want to go back to my parents.

## Á MONEY

IF I WERE RICH, I WOULD DO SO MANY THINGS WITH MY MONEY. The first thing I would do with my money would be to buy my dad a house, my mom a house and both a new car. The reason for that is because my parents have always been there for me through the thick and thin. I don't know what I would have turned out to be if it weren't for my parents. I would buy them both a nice big house and a nice luxury car.

They have done so much for me so I would give back to them first. The next thing I would do with my money would be to buy myself a huge mansion. It would have a lot of rooms such as a game room, a relax room, an indoor pool, tons of bedrooms, and a huge basement so I could have many places to get lost in my house. The mansion would have to have a huge garage too because the next thing I would do with my money would be to buy a lot of cars. All the cars that I would buy would be really fast and really nice looking.

The cars I would buy would be really expensive because most of them would be foreign cars from different countries. Besides the house I would buy, that's what most of my money would go towards. Since I'd be rich, I would have to have an extremely sexy wife because everyone knows sexy women love a guy who has money. If I were rich, I would be super happy because I could buy so many things that I want that would make my life that much better. This may sound crazy but I would also buy a lot of dogs because I love dogs.

I would first buy a blue pit-bull because those are my favorite type of dogs. I would at least have five dogs if I were rich. The house that I would buy would have to have a huge pool also because I know my dogs would want to jump in and have a swim. The yard would have to be big, too, because who buys a huge house with a small yard? If I were rich it would feel like a dream because my family has a lot of money but were not rich. I would be the main provider for my family because if I were rich I wouldn't care about lending some money here and there to my mom, dad, or brother.

That's also another thing I would do with my money. I would make sure my brother has the best things on and driving the best because he's my best friend and truly the only person in the world that I can go to with any problem that I have. He's the one who has been in my shoes and suffered the things that I have when he was my age. If I were rich it would be a dream come true because to me, that would label me as being successful in the world.

## ALL ABOUT MY CRUSH

### Love

What keeps the PERSON YOU LOVE motivated; it shows how much you really care.

### True love

Really loving the person you want to be with forever.

### Everlasting relationships

Staying with the person that you love and married.

### Loyalty

Being faithful to the person you are with.

### Respect

Treating the person that you are married or dating with all the honesty and respect you have to give.

### Romantic moments

Sharing those sweet moments with the person you love. It can also be flirtatious.

### Caring

Caring about the person when something bad happens or you are upset

### Affection

When you show the person that you are with a lot of love.

ONE DAY WHEN I WENT TO MY NEW SCHOOL I SAW THIS GIRL AND HER NAME WAS ESCARLET. I really liked her, and so I found out more things about her and one of my friends that I knew since third grade said that I should ask her out because she is a nice and loyal girl. I waited for a week and that next week, on Tuesday, I asked her out. I was shy at first because I didn't know what she was going to say. To my surprise, she said, "Yes," and I was so relieved. After that we got some time to get to know each other better and I found out that we had so much in common. She said that I would probably be the perfect guy for her. I told her I knew I would, and after that I couldn't stop thinking about her; she was always on mind: in class, outside, and at home, and I kept thinking that this is the girl I want to be with forever.

A couple of months later she broke up with me because her ex came to Swanson and I was upset for a while. Two months later she got back together with me. I was so happy when she did because I thought she was never going to get back together with me and that's the main reason I was so upset because either I or the girl I date when one of us break up

with each other we never get back together, but I guess I got lucky. I kind of understand why she broke up with me because the boy she got back together with, she really cared about him and still had feelings for him. She found out that the boy she was dating in Swanson cheated on her. So she started thinking about why she broke up with me to get back together with a guy who broke her heart but she said she wasn't thinking at that time. She also said that she didn't know that he was going to break her heart again, but he did. Now I feel so relaxed that as long as she is with me, she won't worry about getting her heart broken because I am the type of boy who will never cheat on, hit, or lie to any girl I have a relationship with. Escarlet is the girl I want to be with forever. As far as I know, because I am sure that she might find somebody else, and I might find somebody else, but anyway this was the story all about my crush.

## MY FOOTBALL LIFE

FOOTBALL IS MY FAVORITE SPORT, AND I PLAY FOR MY HIGH SCHOOL. My favorite position and the position I play is quarterback. I first fell in love with the sport at age seven. Me, my brother, and a bunch of friends would hook up on the streets and run a pickup game. I got onto my first organized team when I was nine years old and I was just a mediocre player that didn't start.

Halfway through the season I worked myself up to the starting Quarterback spot. Once I played a couple of games my coaches really started looking at me and noticing my talent. My last season playing for my county, my coaches put in a word for me at a Washington-Lee High School, the school that I would be playing for the next year in the eighth grade. Once I started playing for the high school team the coaches liked me but didn't really work with me at quarterback, instead they had me starting at middle linebacker on defense. I turned out to actually be really good at it and I was a big factor for my team. We ended up our with a 6-2 record and were county champs beating both of our rivals, one for the first time in about 27 years.

My ninth grade year after actually transitioning into the high school my coaches realized my talent on offense at Quarterback. I tried out against three of my second year teammates and I earned the starting spot. My first scrimmage against Mclean High School, the beast was dl! My first for pass attempts I was four for four with four touchdown passes, I was hyped up. From there my team kept rolling up hill winning six straight games. Our first and only loss came against the Number One team in the state.

In this disappointing game I got sacked six times and got injured and put out of the game for a couple of plays. Their defense was so good I could hardly get a pass off. Despite my line not blocking well, I somehow still managed to throw two touchdown passes and zero interceptions. The final result to the game was a 41-20 loss. I didn't let that affect me though so I went hard the next game.

Coming off of the loss, our next game I threw 295 passing yards, five passing touchdowns, 62 rushing yards, 1 rushing touchdown, and ran punt back 91 yard for a touchdown against our rivals in the last game of the season. The best thing happened to me right after my phenomenal performance in the game. The next day the Varsity Football head coach at my high school congratulated me on the win. During that time he let me know that he would like me to start playing with the Varsity team in their first playoff game the next week. The following week I showed up at their practice strapped up and ready to go.

My first Varsity practices they had me running plays on the second team as backup quarterback, and on starting defense at free safety on third downs to key the opposing teams quarterback because of his speed. The coaches liked what I was doing at quarterback so they put in a reverse pass play for me while lined up as an outside receiver. We would use this play in the game if we ever lost the lead and needed a key play. In practice they also had me at punt return and said they would start me there in the game because I was quick and shifty, and also didn't drop a single punt in practices. After our last practice on Thursday night I was fit and ready to go for Friday Night.

Game day didn't really go as expected for me and eventually my whole team. My first punt return came on fourth down after the opposing team's first offense series. I went onto the field ready to go and get up couple yards and the next thing I know I muffed the punt! Thankfully though, I ended up recovering the ball and only losing a couple of yards. When I got to the sideline my teammates didn't give me any trouble about it they just told that it's alright and that I'll get the next one.

My team went into the locker room at the end of the first half excited and up 24-7 and on our way to our first playoff win in a long time. On the opposing team's first possession of the first half I got my chances on defense it was a little awkward when I started out because I wasn't used to playing the position but I got used to it real quick. I got two tackles the whole game and I also had a lot of trouble chasing around their very talented quarterback. Things starting going downhill real quick for my team as we were now facing a 31-24 end of third quarter score and we were losing. Now our coaches realized that we had a need for our trick play and quickly called it when we had the ball.

I got onto the field and lined up in my position ready to go. When the ball was hiked the quarterback handed the ball to our running back, which faked the run and tossed it back to me. As I was rolling to my right I saw our tight end crossing my face with about a 2 to 3 yard window between him and the safety. I let the ball go as perfect and as best as I could,



but instead of going after the ball our tight end kept running away from the ball and waiting for in to get to him. I couldn't believe my eyes when the safety jumped in front of it him and the first pass of my varsity career was intercepted.

When we got the ball back we were driving down the field about to score when our key receiver was hit late and got injured all though no flag was thrown. We just couldn't get back on track after that, we were now facing fourth down and we went for it and didn't get it. Our opponents got the ball back, ran out the clock and won the game in a disappointing loss. We blew a big first half lead, scoring only one touchdown in the second half losing the playoff game by seven points, 38-31 (L). There is definitely more to come but for now this is the end of my Football Life!

## AN ADVENTURE

ONCE I WAS WALKING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD AND WENT DOWN A STREET I REALLY WASN'T FAMILIAR WITH. I went down and continued and went on a path that led into the forests. I kept going and it was going downwards. I decided it would be better and more fun if I had a bike. So I went back up and found one lying around. I rode around my neighborhood and decided to go back into the forest.

The path was pretty steep and I started to pick up speed as I went down. Then after I was half way down and I hopped on the curb and I was so unlucky that my back wheel popped because I was going fast and I hit the curb too hard. I was forced to stop. I was mad because I was anxious and I really wanted to go down the hill because I wanted to know what was down there and where it would take me.

I walked all the way back up with the bike and got to the intersection. Then I heard yelling. I looked back and I saw this tall Indian kid sprinting down the street towards me. I got on the bike and pedaled hard in the opposite direction. Once I got to a different street I jumped off and I threw the bike behind me. I sprinted around my house and started to walk.

I was upset not because I was chased but because I really wanted to see what was down there. To my luck, while I was walking I came across a shed and I saw a back wheel poking out behind it. I quickly went in and saw that the only problem with it was that the front wheel was flat. I knew that there was a gas station that gave out free air down the street. I went and filled it up and on my way I caught a few stares and people told me I had a flat. I got there, fixed the tire and went full speed on the trail bike and went back up the hill. I went on the street that the trail was on and was pretty excited because I had finally gotten somewhere I had wanted to go for the past hour.

I was halfway down the hill when I saw the kid again. I was going pretty fast, and all he did was stare while he pushed his bike off to the side. As soon as he saw me, he yelled an obscenity and started after me but he gave up because of my speed. I was getting so close and finally I was in.

The path led downwards with many tall trees on each side. I kept going and I came across a small bridge. Since there had been heavy rains the previous days, the river was going over it and my bike was forced to go through a lot of water. The current was strong but I had pedaled enough and had a strong speed coming and just barely made it through. The water had gone up half of the tires and I got my shoes just a little wet. I was through, though!

I kept going and came across another trail. The afternoon went by with me following the same trail for over two hours and me sightseeing. The trail was the Washington and Old Dominion trail and I went all the way to route 66 and made my way to the outskirts of Arlington. I was debating on whether or not to go into Georgetown in DC, but it was getting dark and I knew my mom would be upset if I didn't come home soon. But I really did have a lot to tell her—about how much I had seen and how I almost made it into another city by myself. I was stoked, too, because I was thirteen and had explored and gone to a different city all by myself.

## INSIDE THESE WALLS

HAVE YOU EVER JUST FELT TRAPPED? I feel trapped at this very moment. Granted it's because of my own actions, I'll admit. I'm not proud of my actions but I must deal with the consequences.

At this current moment I'm in Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention center.

It all happened on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. I stole a lady's car. I was in Washington DC on New York Street. I was on my way home and I saw flashing lights. At that moment I was debating on or not I should stop. That's where I messed up at.

Then and there I decided to keep going. I went through the D street tunnel and I got onto 395. As I got onto 395, I got up to 70 miles an hour. A minute later I passed the pentagon and I looked in the rearview mirror. The police just kept coming, and when I looked down at the speedometer, it was just under a hundred. I started to slow down a little bit, the reason being I didn't want my mother to lose her child.

I got in the lane to get off on the king street exit and the car started to get out of control. The tires started to screech and I thought it was the end of my life. I hit a VDOT sign and the airbags came out. Then the car came to a stop. I got out and started to run up the exit. A police car was pulling up next to me as I jumped on the ground.

After the wreck I sat in the police car, thinking about how this whole situation could have been avoided. I sat at the Arlington courthouse for about six hours. My mom had work that night, so I told them not to call her until seven am. “Why would I want my mom to leave her job because of my mistakes?” is what I thought the whole time. And then I came to the Juvenile Detention Center.

I wasn’t scared, just nervous, being that I’m not from Virginia. It’s actually pretty easy. The worst part of being in here is the mental and emotional strain it puts on a person. For example, I get to see my mom once or twice a week .When I talk to her on the phone, it’s for five minutes. That’s the mental and emotional strain I don’t like.

I don’t tell my story to get pity. I’m telling it as a vent for myself. To be locked up is a terrible thing that I wish on no person. I respect the staff in here that is actually here to help troubled kids. The ones that don’t, I despise. Jail and juvenile detention are not a place for any human being. I feel bad for a person who comes here and gets institutionalized. All we are is a paycheck; some of the staff even tell us that. I realized this after it was too late. I hope this actually helps people realize certain things.

## LIVING A NIGHTMARE

THE STORY I’M ABOUT TO TELL YOU IS TRUE. It happened a year and four months ago. On October 3, 2012, my mother sent me to Honduras to live with my father. She sent me over there because she said my behavior was out of control, which I disagreed with. I had no choice but to leave America.

I traveled by myself and I was lost because I couldn’t find my next flight. So, I asked random people for directions, and found my flight. Once I arrived in Honduras, I met up with my father and my grandfather. As we left the airport, I was surprised to see a McDonald’s and a Pizza Hut restaurant because I did not know that those restaurants existed in Honduras. I thought to myself that being in a different country wasn’t going to be as bad as I thought it was.

As time went by, I started to get used to the food, weather, and I started meeting people from around the neighborhood. I didn’t want to go to school while I was staying over there because I thought I was going to forget my English, so my grandfather told me to

take care of his cows. When I first started working with the cows, I thought it was pretty easy, but then I realized that, as the weather was changing, it became more difficult. When the dry season came, the pond dried up and the cows couldn't drink.

On January 30, 2013, one of the cows had a baby, so my dad and I went to pick up the baby cow. My Grandma was happy to see the baby cow. She gave it milk and went to cook dinner. I passed out beer to my dad, his cousin, and my grandfather's worker. Then, a black car pulled up in front of our house and two men came in with guns and told everyone to get on the floor. We were being robbed! They searched us and my dad got hit with the gun in the back of his head. I got kicked in the face, and my grandfather got hit in the forehead. His face was bleeding and one of the men stayed with us to make sure no one moved. The other man got my grandmother. I heard her say, "No, son, don't do it." One of the men shot my grandmother four times and we all thought the gunshots were just to scare her. When they left the house, my dad went to his room to grab a gun, and I ran to see if my grandmother was OK. She was killed. It turns out her brothers and sisters paid to have her killed. I closed her eyelids, and cried.

The next day, my father and I went to go pick up the coffin for my grandmother and when we arrived at the house, a lot of people were in our house praying. I didn't know what was going on so I asked my father, "What's happening?" and he told me, "It's a tradition in our country, that when someone dies a lot of people come and pray for that person." He also told me that on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, on the 40<sup>th</sup> day, on the 6<sup>th</sup> month, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> year, of the person's death more people come to pray and on those days, people kill one of their cows or pigs so people could eat. Every year after that it's just a regular ceremony.

## CHOICES

MY NEED TO BE DIFFICULT STEMS FROM MANY YEARS OF DEFYING MY TEACHERS AND AUTHORITY FIGURES. For instance, I'm not trying to do this essay right now, but I've got a crazy teacher giving me a hard time, so I need to write it or I will go to my room. When I say my room you are probably thinking about a nice comfortable room with a soft bed, a TV, and Xbox, a nice temperature, and even a couple of soft pillows. However, that is far from the room that I will go to for forty-eight hours if I don't do this work. Where I will go is a small cell with a mattress as soft as a rock with three blankets and a steel toilet as cold as a blizzard that is connected to my steel sink.

I've been to this detention center six times and a total of fourteen months. I was barely thirteen the first time I came here, and now I will be fifteen in three days. I've been on

probation since I was twelve. For me, the system is a revolving door. I try to do well but I still always get in trouble. Trouble has always seemed to find me for as long as I can remember. I started stealing when I was three years old, started smoking when I was eleven, and started selling weed and robbing people at twelve.

I have to go to court in a few days, and I'm no stranger to the court system. I think the judge is going to let me out. However, I know that even if the judge releases me, he will do so expecting me to return because of my past history. But, I really am motivated to stay out of jail and prove the judge wrong. I have never felt much guilt about the crimes I've committed, but every time I come in here, it breaks my mom's heart, and I do love my mom. I am very motivated to stay out of trouble so I can make her happy and not depressed or stressed out.

When I'm out I plan on doing more productive things. First of all, my PO has services in place for me that will take away some of my free time. Also, I plan to play football when the season starts later this year. I am going to get a job too. I plan to make some new, positive friends and spend more time with my mom and sister. And I will be going to school **EVERY** day, do my work in school, and try my best. I realize that without an education I most likely will not get too far in life and have a lot of money. I also know that with a lot of free time on my hands I am more likely to get bored and fall back into my old behaviors.

If I could give some advice to the young readers of the world, I would say, "Think before you act. Respect authority but more importantly respect your parents and their rules. They understand your situation even if it doesn't seem like it. They were your age too once and made the same mistakes as you. I am writing this essay from a juvenile detention center and even though it's not the worst place in the world, it's not a fun place to be and I'm sure all of you readers would rather be at home than locked up. So make the right decisions because the choices you make now affect how your future will turn out."

## FATHER

WHEN I WAS FOUR YEARS OLD, MY MOTHER BECAME MY FATHER. At the time, it was something I failed to understand. From my perspective he was wrong—no one deserves to be fatherless.

He saved his life, avoiding about twenty years of parental pressure, but he lost twenty years of joy, love, and happiness. By saving his own life, he ruined the lives of five people—to be specific, my sisters' lives, my brother's life, and my life. Thanks to all her love and

support, my beloved mother raised us alone. I try to deny the fact that I miss him, but as I grow older, I only find myself thinking more and more about my father. Who's to blame? I don't know, but every day I find myself thinking about my father and the things he could have taught me. Things only a father can teach a son, like how to fix a car, how to play sports, how to be spontaneous, and how to receive the rough love that every son needs.

I've yet to see my father; it's been about fourteen years. I only hear about him. The fact that he has a new family is mind blowing because of the simple fact that he forgot about his real family and just started a new life. I've tried to think that if my father would come to me and ask me to forgive him, I would simply say "No," I would deny everything he would try to do to win me over—but deep down inside I'll truly know that I would try everything to hold back tears and hold back the hug I've wanted to give my father for so long and the anger, stress, sadness, and all the mixed emotions I've had about fatherly figures out there or all the males who have tried their best to help me in my life. I would like to say that I would—in the end—forgive him and would want him to stand by me for the rest of my life, but that is a distant dream.

From this situation I have learned and understood the effect that not having a father has on you. I know that when my time comes to be a father I'll always be there for my kids through the rough and the good, and to always persevere and keep my head up. So please, anybody with a similar situation, just keep your head up and know you're not alone. Thank you for reading my story.

## NOT WORTH IT

MY NAME IS IMAN. I'M SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD. I live in Alexandria, Virginia, and I am writing this from inside the Northern Virginia Juvenile Detention Center. My days are filled with school, sleep, and playing cards. I constantly have to walk with my hands behind my back, and I have been reduced from soothing thirty-minute bubble baths to quick and hectic five minute showers. The food ranges from disgusting to tolerable, and the only thing I have to drink is milk or water. I see my mom twice a week and we are surrounded by harsh, fluorescent lights, unsympathetic guards, and other weeping families. After these monitored, uncomfortable meetings, I am forced to take off all of my clothes, squat in front of a guard and cough, so they can make sure my mom didn't smuggle something to me. I often sit and ask myself, "How did I get here?" and "How can I make sure that I never get here again?"

It all started the summer of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. My best friend Lisa had started smoking weed and drinking when she met her new boyfriend Max. Even though she was my friend I was

never really interested in getting involved with that crowd. I saw Lisa when she was high and it seemed like the only thing it did was make her eyes red and make her laugh a lot, but something changed the day I went over to Lisa's house after getting into a big argument with my mom. I told Lisa all my problems and how I couldn't deal with my mom anymore. Lisa proceeded to pull out a joint. I immediately stopped talking and stared at her in disbelief. "What are you doing?" I asked.

"Listen," Lisa said. "I know you're all against drugs and s\*\*\* but you're stressing really hard. I've been where you are and nothing can calm you down right now like this, and you need to live a little and stop being such a goody two shoes."

I didn't know what to say, I mean I was stressing, but I knew that I should say no and turn it down. At that moment my mom called me and I pressed the reject button as soon as I saw it was her.

"Fine, light it up I guess, but don't think this is a regular thing for me now." Lisa just smiled at me and said sure I know girl and got out her bright red BIC lighter and lit the long skinny joint. I watched as the paper went up in a small flame and then quickly simmer out, Lisa demonstrated how to hold it and how to suck it in and hold for a few seconds before blowing it out. I tried to do what she demonstrated, but somehow I was doing it wrong, because I wasn't feeling anything or coughing like she warned me I would be, but on my third try I finally got it right. I immediately started coughing and dry heaving. Lisa started laughing and patting me on the back, making sly comments about how I was worse than she was when she first started. I passed it back to her and watched in amazement as she inhaled and didn't even cough a little bit. After taking a couple of puffs she passed it back to me, and I was determined this time to control my coughs. The second time around I was much better and got three puffs in before my coughing fit began, that's when I started feeling it slowly. My perspective of everything changed and all the thoughts I had had about my mom were suddenly gone and instead were replaced with how funny everything seemed to be. For about three hours me and my friend just sat in her room and laughed at nothing and everything. It was, at the time, the most fun I had just sitting in a room and that was the beginning of my intense downfall.

By the time 12<sup>th</sup> grade came I was heavily into the "drug scene," almost all of my friends smoked and drank on a regular basis and I was regularly skipping school so that I could go smoke with them.

After that first time I smoked I realized that it could take my mind off of all my problems, and it made me feel like I belonged to a real group of friends, but it lasted for such a short time that a couple hours later everything came rushing back to me. Instead of trying to fix my problems and talk to someone about them I was unsuccessfully trying to bury it and all it really did was make me sad and go searching for more drugs. Eventually it all caught up to me. I was caught in school with a small bag of marijuana on me and the next

thing I knew I was standing in front of a judge hearing how I wasn't living up to my potential, and that the only way for me to see the error of my ways was a short stint in Juvenile. Now after being here for almost a month I see how idiotic my decision to rely on drugs was all it did was make me a whole lot poorer, and get me in a place that I don't belong. It saddens me that I'm in here but I also know that this experience will forever change me; nothing is worth giving up your freedom or having to go through the ordeal of being in this facility, and I realize now that the drugs were just a misguided way for me to try to gain approval from my friends and make myself happier. And in the end it did the exact opposite. Trust me, that one joint isn't worth it.

## THINGS HAPPEN

I WON'T REVEAL EXACTLY WHO I AM, BUT I'M SIXTEEN YEARS OLD, I'M A FEMALE AND I'M CURRENTLY IN A SIX-MONTH PROGRAM IN A JUVENILE DETENTION FACILITY. It all started when I was eight years old. I was only eight when I saw my first drive-by. I was so scared. I remember getting so mad because it seemed like a good day could go bad in a heartbeat. I hid behind a shack until the shooting stopped. I walked out, went up to the dead guy, and realized that he was a homie. There was so much blood, his eyes rolled back in his head, and then my homie was gone. I felt so shocked. I remember my cheeks were so red, they felt like I was being touched by a steaming hot pan.

Why did he die? Why now? What did he do? I never could answer those questions. I just remember a hole in his chest. I didn't get it. I started to run home, tears streaming from my eyes. Once I got home, my whole family seemed oblivious to what just happened. All I could do was go to my room and cry about it. That moment was very traumatic. I still replay what I remember in my head.

Today, now that everything is clear, I take a couple of guesses about why my homie died. Back then, the gangs were out of control. It was MS13 versus every other gang that came into their "territory." You had to be very careful about what colors you wore. I wasn't old enough to join or understand gangs, but I was very smart about the tension they caused in my surroundings. I was a bit confused about why there was so much violence. I just told myself I never wanted anything to do with the police. But I was a bit too ahead of myself.

During the year of 2007, a lot of things happened. Things I wish I didn't have to deal with. I take my life experience as a learning lesson. (Especially the things that happened with my brother.) My brother and I have a close relationship. We are so close today because we both somewhat gone through the same things. He was on probation, I'm on probation,



there are many things that have hurt us a lot we can talk about and understand each other. I'm going to share one story that no one knows about. Something that just makes my stomach clench.

I hated her, but my brother was in love with this girl, and they had a baby together. Now, I had a nephew because of their affair. Great, an aunt at the age of nine. I wouldn't have said my brother and his wife were in love though. I can remember clearly what happened. I was taking care of my nephew. The "woman" was mad. I can't remember why. But I was hanging out in the living room, when I saw her go into the bathroom, even though my brother was taking a shower. I KNEW something was about to happen. The evidence was written all over the week that had just gone by. All of a sudden, I heard the curtain fall, glasses break, and then some screaming. I assume that my brother and his girlfriend were having a fight. My nephew began to cry and all I could do was get up and rock him. Can you believe that? A nine-year-old taking care of a baby. I was still a baby myself.

ZOOM! I saw a quick flash of my brother and his girlfriend go into the room and close the door. From there, all I heard was a lot of screaming and glass breaking. I heard the woman call my name but I was too pissed and scared to go into the room. After about five minutes, my brother came out and called the police (which was a STUPID idea) and told them what happened. In just three minutes the cops came. I was still holding my nephew. I got up and opened the door. They came in and separated my brother and the women into two rooms. They cops told me to go with the woman in the room, and so I did.

The woman was sobbing and taking big breaths of air like she was about to die. GOSH. WHY WHY WHY WHY WHY?!?! I was beyond mad. I felt so weak and so pissed at the same time. The room in which they fought was completely destroyed. What was just neat about twenty minutes ago was gone. Perfumes were broken, the iron was cracked, and I mean everything was just gone. I finally gave the woman her child back and got up to see what was going on. I looked at my brother's legs and they were scratched so badly they looked like actual worms. Like when you scratch yourself there's usually a line that comes with it, but this line was so dark and real.

Finally the questioning was over and everyone went to the living room. My brother was read his rights and handcuffed. I felt rage after this happened. What? HE DIDN'T DO A DAMN THING. If anything, he was defending himself, but of course it's against the law to hit anyone (especially a female) NO MATTER WHAT. I turned to the woman and stared at her. I went to her room grabbed her stuff and threw it out the door. Shoot. Are you really living in MY mother's house and having my brother get arrested? AGAIN? Oh no. The woman really had things twisted.

My mom was called, and she picked me and my nephew up, and took us to her hotel that she owns. About eight hours later my brother was out. I looked at him and hugged him. I told him that I hated the women and he looked at me and said "Me too."

## MY PURPOSE

WHEN I WAS YOUNGER, MAYBE ABOUT EIGHT OR NINE, I WAS ALWAYS INQUISITIVE ABOUT WHAT MY PURPOSE WAS HERE ON EARTH. Everyone else had a reason to live: to be president, to win the super bowl, or even to be a dumpster man. There was always a job and someone was always doing it, except for me. I was just a little kid who wanted to do big things.

My dream was to be in the NFL as a free safety, number twenty one, in honor of my longtime favorite football player, Sean Taylor, who had died in 2007. But as time went on I realized that there are people out in the world who were bigger, faster, and stronger. I wasn't the only one chasing an NFL dream. But I knew I had to achieve it and I was determined to do so.

Getting older, I had stopped thinking about it and doing other things like getting in trouble. I was fighting, messing with drugs, and getting suspended from school a lot. I had lost the determination and focus on my dream and I was just being dumb. And again I was trying to figure out my purpose on earth.

When I was in the seventh grade I was always playing football with all my friends and some other kids. But after the games I would always hear that I'm too small, too slow, or just no good. I would always talk about how I wanted to be in the NFL, and everyone always told me I didn't have it takes to do that. After a while I gave up on my dream and thought I wouldn't be able to make it. Out of millions who grind every day to be the next big superstar, what made me special? I threw in the towel and gave it all up.

During my seventh, eighth, and ninth grade years a lot of things went down in my life. I had a physical altercation with my father that rewound our relationship and following that I was placed on probation and house arrest, sent to juvenile detention three times, and sent to a program called north springs. All that took up nine months of my life, from June 2012 to February 2013.

On February fourth I was sent to a boys' group home and I stayed for 13 months before getting kicked out. During that time I played football for my high school, Washington-Lee high school for the freshman squad. At that time in my life I had thought back to my dreams I had and my purpose on this earth. I wanted to start over and continue to chase this dream, thinking I could play football in high school, get a scholarship to college, and then get drafted to the NFL.

It would all go perfectly, so I thought. But at 5'6, 122 pounds, and a 40 yard dash time of 4.34 things were very hard. I was a second string in everything. At wide receiver, free safety, outside linebacker, even for special teams I was just a backup. I wasn't even able to

keep my grades up to play and for that, after a month of playing football it all came to an end.

Time went by and I had been in a position where I just did not care about anything anymore and I was doing things to get myself into deeper trouble every day. On March 21, 2014 I was arrested at school, but I won't share the reason why. I had come to detention and a week later my judge ordered me to a six-month program called New Beginnings.

Sitting in the back of the police car on my way back to detention I was thinking of something a friend told me when he saw me struggling. What he told me was that I'm lost and I really need to do a lot of soul searching and as the day went on I thought about it more and more and figured that my friend was right. I had given up on everything and I didn't care where my life was heading.

Fast forward to today when I have 119 days to go in the program and I have changed a lot. I finally got tired of hearing the things I couldn't do and decided things have to change. Today, I currently weigh 138 pounds and I am 5'7 1/2". Every day I push more and more to get stronger and faster by working out consistently and pushing myself to go beyond my limits. My whole demeanor on things has changed.

When I leave the program in September I plan to join the JV squad for the same team and continue to grind and push forward towards my dreams of playing in the NFL. I don't expect anything to be handed to me. I guess the moral of this story is to tell you readers that if you have a dream, don't let anything especially people get in your way of it. I've had my ups and I've had plenty of downs but I'm still chasing that spot in the NFL. All this time I've been looking for the reason of me being here on earth and now I know that I was sent.