

Marquis

Let Me Tell You

I'm twenty-eight years old, born February 10, 1977, in San Diego, California. I live in northeast Tucson. I'm tall— six-one—slim, brown skinned, and weigh one hundred seventy-eight pounds. I keep a certain dress code: tee shirts, Dickies, and Chuck Taylor shoes. My hair is braided with a design. I wear it a couple of different ways and change it once a month. My little cousin or my girl braids it for me.

Seems like I got a million and one tattoos. The reality about my tattoos: I should never have got none of them. They are all gang related, so I regret getting them. One I got on my stomach that refers to my neighborhood. It says, "Sugar Hill Loccsta." It's a gang thing that means, "What's up?"

Family Portrait

I never knew my father. My mom is real cool. She grew up between Long Beach and San Diego. From what I understand, my dad was from St. Louis. I got two brothers. One is twenty-four, and one is eleven. I guess my mother wanted to get away from California, and she moved out here. I know my mother's mother. She's staying in Tucson right now. My mother has five sisters and three brothers. They're here, except for two who are back in California. My mother got her GED, and she was going to Pima, the manager of a fast-food chicken restaurant. My mother is my heart. She's a special

woman, and I love her so much. We get along real good. She's always been there for me. In my family, I have one cousin, Philip, who attended college and played football in Kansas City.

School Days

I went to Jefferson Park Elementary School in Tucson. I remember my favorite teacher, Mr. Thompson. He basically wanted to teach us right from wrong. He was a good teacher, an older guy who helped me a lot. He was patient and had a sense of humor. Math was my favorite subject.

I was real close with my friends. I played Pop Warner football and basketball. I played soccer and Little League baseball. My mother got me signed up, got me the physical and all that.

I went to Doolen Middle School. It was a change from elementary school. I did some of the same things, played Pop Warner football, played basketball, and baseball. In the sixth grade, they took us to Sea World. In middle school I started getting into trouble. The first time was for stealing. I stole a piece of candy from a store, then it was bikes. I was being dumb, I guess. I was hanging with the wrong crowd. I kept the things I stole. At the time, I thought it was cool to steal a bike, until my bike got stolen. I was doing alright in school, getting B's and C's. I can't recall ever getting D's. Math was still my favorite subject.

Marijuana at Age Eleven

Basically, I used just marijuana and started when I was eleven. I got my first joint from my cousin, who is a month older than me. My whole family was smoking marijuana, but not my mother. I think she tried it one time, and she didn't like it. She didn't find out I was smoking until I was in high school. There was nothing she could say because I was damn near grown.

A lot of my family members used to sell marijuana. Me and my cousin would steal it from them. We'd go through about a whole ounce a day. I would smoke on the way to school. Believe it or not, I don't think it affected my school work. It used to keep me focused.

Gangs

I was eleven when I first started in a gang. I was in elementary school. My whole family was into gangs—my cousins, my uncles, my aunties—even my mom used to gangbang. I was gangbanging in Tucson. When I went to California, I was gangbanging out there, too. I was representing my same neighborhood from here. I used to bang Crips. If someone from outside the neighborhood wanted to come in, they got to get jumped in. Three or four people from the neighborhood put hands on him, mopped him up, and beat him up. It didn't matter if he cried; he could still get in the gang.

When I went to Phoenix, I was still representing my Sugar Hill neighborhood from Tucson. If I switched gangs that would be flipping flavors, and I never did that. A couple of guys tried to get me to flip, but it's not good to do. You could get killed flipping flavors. They could either respect it or leave me alone, because I'd never switch—never. If someone hits me up with their neighborhood, they want to start trouble. I

never bow down, and if they can't handle a beating, they'd take it to a whole 'nother level. They could try to kill me. If I go into the wrong neighborhood, those gang members would jump me.

The Crips' color is blue. I used to wear blue Chuck's with blue laces, black pants with a black sweater and a blue jersey over the sweater, and a blue rag in my left pocket. There was no benefit at all to being in a gang.

I got my first gun when I was thirteen and carried it around all the time. I took it to school with me and everything. It was a forty-five. I got that gun fully loaded from my uncle. I don't think he knew that I took it to school. I never showed it to the kids, but I was going to do whatever I had to do with it. I never intimidated anybody with the gun.

High School to Prison

From my freshman year through my sophomore year, I went to high school in Phoenix, and it was just fun. I played football. For my junior year I moved back to California and went to high school in San Diego. I started to get in trouble, and my auntie sent me back to Tucson. I loved every minute of high school.

In my free time, all I wanted to do was hang on the street or in the park with my home boys. I didn't have a job. We would hang out and do things together. I don't remember ever taking a vacation with my family. I just hung out.

Joe was my physical education teacher, and he was real cool. Basically, he was the kind of teacher who would just sit down and talk to us about staying out of trouble, about heading in the right direction. My friends wanted to be tough guys, so Joe's words didn't reach them. They were a whole bunch of gangbangers. My friend Keith was a serious gangbanger, and there wasn't

anything he wouldn't do. He died at eighteen.

I was seventeen when they charged me with two counts of armed robbery, aggravated assault, and attempted murder. I was in high school in Phoenix, and I was supposed to graduate the next year. It happened just that quick. My uncle, who was twenty-three, my cousin, and me was coming from playing basketball in a park. I had a gun in my back pocket.

On the night that changed my life forever, the three of us were on our way home at ten o'clock. We smoked weed that whole day. My cousin also had a gun. We went to a Circle K, and I think the clerk knew what time it was when he seen the gun. I asked, "Can I get a pack of Newports?" He turned around to get the cigarettes, and when he turned around again, he had a gun in his face. There was the three of us and two guns. When he seen the guns, he opened the cash register, and we got a little bit of nothing. We probably got \$260, \$270, and we left. It was a spur-of-the-moment thing to do. In reality, we didn't need the money.

We went to a friend's house to hang out after the robbery. When we came out of the house to walk home, the police had the whole area blocked off. At the time of the robbery, we wasn't thinking about video cameras in the store. We knew the police would be around because the Circle K got robbed. The police seen us, and I guess we fit the description. I still had the gun in my pocket.

I thought they would question me and let me go. I didn't try to run or fight them. I said, "You got the wrong person." I was young and dumb. The police cuffed me and my uncle and took us to the station for questioning. They told us what we were charged with and sent us to the county jail.

We were indicted on the case, and I sat in the county jail for thirteen months. I had a

public defender, and he wasn't any good. They all work for the prosecutor, and work in the same office. Basically, before we even caught that case, it was decided what was going to happen. They make deals like that.

I got six and a half years in Wilmot Prison. My mother was hurt; she was hurt way more than I was. You know, when you're young you think you're tough. She asked me what the hell I was thinking? Every Sunday she came to visit me.

Wilmot Prison

The cell had two bunks, a bottom bunk and a top bunk, and I had a cellie. We each had a desk, and we both had a drawer and some shelves. In the beginning, I was locked down twenty-three hours and fifteen minutes a day. I got out for forty-five minutes, going to breakfast for fifteen minutes, going to lunch for fifteen minutes, and going to dinner for fifteen minutes. We had exercise every other day, and a shower every day.

They let us go to school if we needed it. There's a certain test, and if you pass the test, then you don't need to go to school right then. They took me out of class and put me on the waiting list. They let the people go to school that didn't pass the test. I worked in the kitchen from five in the morning until eleven-thirty, with two days off. I was paid thirty-five cents an hour, which is twenty-eight dollars every two weeks. During my whole time at Wilmot, I only went to school for about eighteen months.

There were a whole bunch of gang members in the prison, Crips and Bloods mostly. Sometimes we'd trip [fight] each other. If a person hit me up, I'd hit him back. If a person don't hit me up, then I wouldn't trip with him. I was the type of person who wouldn't trip until someone tripped with me.

Life on the Outside

It seems like I've been arrested a hundred and one times since I've been out of prison. I got out November 29, 2001. It was, like, backwards. As a kid, I never got arrested until I caught that case and went to prison. Ever since I've been out of prison, I've been in and out of the county jail like a juvenile. I've been falsely accused by the police department and charged with things I didn't commit. The case would always end up being dismissed or dropped because I actually didn't do the crime.

The police had a personal thing with me because I was never scared of them. I never ran from them. They tried to accuse me of a carjacking. I had to go to court, and the jury knew the case was bull, and it was dismissed. They accused me of selling drugs, but they ain't never seen me selling no drugs. They would try to put it on me anyway, I guess, because they are the police department. Basically, they just wanted me off the street and did everything they could to put me away. I ain't mad at them for doing their jobs, but if you're going to do your job, do it right.

I wouldn't say it's a race thing. There are a lot of cool cops out there. A cool cop is one who is there to actually do his job, not one who comes to mess with you because you dress a certain way or you got on a certain color. There were cops in the neighborhood that I was cool with. They wouldn't come over to mess with us; they'd come over to talk to us.

I was shot at point-blank range in January 2002, forty-two days after I got out. I was standing outside a Mexican restaurant with some guys, and some dude from the other side, I guess a rival gang member, shot me. I took off running. About four or five shots were fired. I tried to hop over a gate, and I couldn't do it. My home boys took me to the

hospital. The bullet was close to my heart, so the doctor left it there. Now it is closer to my lungs.

Jobs

I have had three jobs. One was at a car-detailing place. I was twenty-eight when I got that job. I learned how to buff and wax cars. I already knew how to vacuum a car. I would shampoo the carpets, spray the engine. I didn't get paid by the hour. I got paid by the cars I did. In a week I would make about eighty dollars. I had to be there from nine o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. If no cars came through, I'd have nothing to do, so I wouldn't get paid. I got paid by the car. The price was \$8.75 for half a detail. I'd have to do the car all myself to get the whole \$8.75. It was \$10 for a full detail. If two people were doing the car, we'd split the price. I left the job because I violated my intensive probation. They locked me up for two months.

My second job was at Popeye's Chicken. I cooked and did the dishes. I made \$5.75 an hour and got paid every two weeks. I didn't like getting burned by the grease, so I found a job as a framer for manufactured homes. I make \$7.50 an hour and get paid every week. Eventually I'll get medical benefits.

All I think about is completing this intensive probation without catching any more cases and not going back to jail. I think a high school diploma would have helped me find a good job. When I look for a job and say I have a felony, they don't call me back.

Religion

Since I made a change, religion is in my life. I'm a believer because the Lord above gave me so many chances. This time around, I

know it's my last chance. I know how messed up I've been. This time I won't let Him down. Sometimes I go to a Christian church.

I've met a couple of ministers who've been through the same thing way before I've been through it. We talk, and Johnny talks on the level that I can understand. My minister has been in jail, and he's been to prison. He sold drugs, he did drugs. He did these things way before my time, so he understands how I feel. He made a whole one-eighty change for the better.

Johnny does services at the county jail, and that's where I met him. His church is filled up; he's a good preacher. No one in my family goes to church, but my girl, Shannae, has gone with me a couple of times. For some reason, when you make a change in your life, you feel peaceful. You don't worry about somebody trying to kill you. You don't have to watch your back.

A Girlfriend

I met Shannea walking down the street in my neighborhood. She was with her sister and a friend. I was kind of shy, and first we walked past each other. I kept walking and she kept walking. Then I turned around and said, "Hey you, come here." One of them asked, "Which one?" I said, "You, the one in the middle, let me talk to you real quick." I asked for her phone number and she gave it to me. We've been together for two years.

She was just so beautiful. I picked her out right away. She's twenty-six, about five-five and weighs about one-sixty. She graduated from high school and goes to Pima College. Being with her, she keeps me away from my so-called home boys because when I get with them, I get in trouble. Basically, she keeps me off the street. It seems like the female always knows. She'll tell you to stay at home, and you decide to leave anyway.

You end up getting locked up, and something bad always happens. If she tells you to stay at home, stay at home!

Shit, every time I got locked up, Shannae was there the whole way, every court date. She came to visit me at the jail. Everything she could do when I was locked up, she did. I guess Shannae loves me because I was one of those dudes who treated her with respect. I never cheated on her. I loved being around her twenty-four seven. I love her the same way she loves me.

Probation

I'm on probation until 2008 for another charge—prohibited possession. There was a gun found in a car I was driving. The gang unit from the neighborhood knew me. They stopped me, broke into the glove compartment, and found the gun. They said it was mine. It wasn't my gun. It wasn't even my car that I was driving. This time I got indicted on the case, and I don't see how I got an indictment. I didn't know that gun was in the car. My fingerprints weren't on that gun, and the gun was legit. It was registered to somebody.

I thought they was going to send me back to prison. I signed a plea bargain, and the only reason I did that was because I got tired of sitting in the county jail. I was, like, if I'm going to be locked up, I'd rather go back to prison. The county jail was stressful. The sentence was probation available in that plea bargain, or I could get from one year to 3.75 years. The judge ended up giving me intensive probation. If I violate any of my probation, they'll send me back to prison.

The worst part of being on intensive probation is doing community service. We got to be at the place from five forty-five in the morning until two o'clock in the afternoon. If I'm five minutes late, they've locked the door. They take us to the

wastewater plant, the veteran's hospital. I do forty hours a month, three hundred and sixty hours altogether. But as far as having job, going to school, and community service, I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. They are helping us, and my officer is okay.

Right now I'm going to school at the probation department, and I can get my GED. I attend every Tuesday and Thursday from nine-thirty to eleven-thirty. Going to class is bringing back a lot of education I forgot about. Slowly but surely it's coming back. My math is alright, but I know I could do better, way better.

I've got a job, and I'm not hanging out on the street. I'm always at home. I can't do nothing but go to work, go to school, go to community service, and go home. I can't even go to the movies with my girlfriend. I have to earn that privilege. I'm, like, locked-up on the street. I can't have no visitors until I come off intensive probation or unless my officer says that it's okay.

The Light Comes On

The last time when I got locked up, I was already starting to do good. I got caught up on a fluke, just driving the wrong person's car. I thought I was going to prison, and I prayed. It's kind of crazy, but I said to the Lord, if you give me IPS [intensive probation service] I'll pass it, and I'll never get in trouble again. It says in the Bible, like, if you want something, pray for it and you'll get it. I prayed for probation, and I actually got it. I'm not going to let Him down this time. It's not that hard.

I've learned that crime is not the lifestyle to go. If a kid is smart, he will stay in school and get his education. I wish I could do my childhood all over again. I wouldn't have no record or nothing. I'd probably be an NFL player somewhere.