

## Growing Up

The neighborhood I grew up in was a poverty-stricken, gang-influenced culture mixed with drug deals. My eyes saw a lot, and I started to think this activity was normal and cool. Over the years, my view changed dramatically.

I grew up in a government-assisted family, and the times were hard. My mother didn't graduate high school and job opportunities were limited. Minimum wage was what my mother worked for to support me and my brother.

My neighborhood was a bad one. Every night there were drive-by shootings, and often I could see drug deals going on. My mother kept us away from that stuff, but I was drawn by it early on. I hung around

the bad crowds in middle school and started smoking pot and drinking. I started to get in a lot of fights and joined the local gang. My mother was devastated and disappointed. I hurt her. Cops started bringing me home for curfew violations and fights.

Those times growing up taught me and made me into a man so fast. I was shot at the age of fifteen and still kept getting in trouble. When my grandma passed, I started to realize and appreciate life more. I stopped hanging with the bad crowd and spent more time with my family. I had my first son in December, and I am a happy father. No longer do I hang on the streets where many of my friends and family members were lost.

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