

BEHIND THESE WALLS

By Ian Harewood

Free will is all about choices. In prison you have no free will. Every day, you have to do what someone tells you. You can't wake up in the middle of the night and go for something as simple as ice-cream or a snack. I remember when I had free will growing up. I wish that my choices had been different.

As a kid, I was always trying to fit in. But back in those days, the dark-skinned guys were the butt of jokes in school, the ones who weren't popular. My mother worked hard to make sure we had a roof over our heads and food on the table, but she had no enthusiasm for fashion. She didn't see the need to spend a hundred and fifty dollars for a pair of sneakers that she said "only cost five dollars to make in China". Although we were poor, I didn't understand her thinking. All of the other kids where we lived came to school with the latest style. But my mother would buy our family cheap clothes, so I got alot of grief from the other kids at school. According to them, we were dirt poor. But my mother didn't buy into the Ghetto Culture which claimed fashion was more important than getting an education.

I dreaded the beginning of every school year. It was a fashion show: Eight Ball jackets and Jordans. I wanted all of the different styles of Jordans that came out. I wanted more than my mother could give me. The Ghetto Culture was calling me and I felt that I needed to be part of it. Little did I know, that decision would predetermine my fate.

A year later, as I stood on the street corner, the daily traffic of fiends permeated my mind. Like a cattle herder, I rounded the customers up while stuffing wads of money into my pockets. And as I bent down to secure my stash of little baggies filled with crack cocaine, I scraped the side of my Jordans--damn! In my young mind, that was almost a tragedy.

The reality was, I was living in a roach infested project, rocking Jordans, thinking that they're some kind of status symbol.

Railing against everything that my mother said, I bought into something that was in no way worth the price. No one was there to tell me that the kid from down the block, the big-time hustler whom I used to look up to, thinking that he had it made, would be dead a couple of years later. Or that his son would end up just like him. They both died from .45-caliber slugs. Rap songs never broach this topic. The part of the game that they talk about is one-sided, all bling and no real. What about the mothers who have lost their sons? What about the players that have been taken out of the game? They became just another number on someone's chart, proving the impact of drug violence on the inner city. But who was there to tell me that most drug dealers don't make it?; They end up either dead, or in jail. I should've chosen another occupation, like my big brother who wanted to be a doctor. Or like my best friend who wanted to be a businessman. Both of them realized their dreams. Yet, here I am just like that kid from down the block.