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WHO WERE YOU THEN AND WHO ARE YOU NOW ?

MY LIFE CRIME DIDN'T BEGIN ON THE DAY I COMMITTED A HORRIBLE CRIME AGAINST KENNETH COLLIER. THERE ARE SEVERAL FACTORS THAT COME INTO MY POOR DECISION MAKING SKILLS.

FROM BIRTH I HAVE FELT SELF CONCIOWS ABOUT MY EXISTANCE BECAUSE I AM THE RESULT OF MY MOTHER HAVING A AFFAIR WITH A MARRIED MAN. I WOULD HEAR MY AUNTS / UNCLER, COUSINS AND EVEN SIBLINGS WHISPERING ABOUT ME AND HOW I WASN'T "REALLY" PART OF THEIR FAMILY. THIS CAUSED SERIOUS EMOTIONAL AND SELF ESTEEM ISSUES BECAUSE AS A CHILD I DIDN'T FEEL WANTED OR EVEN ACCEPTED BY MY FAMILY.

BECAUSE OF MY MOTHER'S CHOICES SHE WAS A SINGLE PARENT TO 6 CHILDREN AND WASN'T ABLE TO PROPERLY PROVIDE FOR US. MY MOTHER HAD A LOW INCOME JOB AND WE LIVED WHERE

SHE COULD AFFORD. WHICH WAS IN EAST REDWOOD CITY IN A AREA FULL OF GANGS, DRUGS AND CRIME. THIS ENVIRONMENT IS WHERE MY SENSE OF REALITY, DECISIONS AND THOUGHT PROCESS HAS ITS FOUNDATION.

WITH NEGLECT AT HOME AND NO REAL GUIDANCE FROM MY MOTHER AND A NON EXISTENT FATHER I BEGAN TO SPEND MOST OF MY CHILD HOOD OUT ON THE STREETS. WHERE I FOUND "ACCEPTANCE" FROM GANG MEMBERS. WHO WOULD ENCOURAGE ME TO STEAL FROM STORES, HOUSES OR CARS. THEY WOULD EVENTUALLY GIVE ME THE NAME "BANDIT" BECAUSE AS A 9 YEAR OLD I HAD BECOME A EXPERT THIEF.

AROUND THAT TIME GANG MEMBERS SAW ME AS A ASSET. WHILE RIDING MY BIKE I WOULD CARRY THEIR DRUGS AND GUNS IN MY BACK PACK BECAUSE THE POLICE "WOULD NOT SUSPECT A CHILD".

BY THE TIME I TURNED 12 IT WAS A CRITICAL TIME IN MY LIFE. I BEGAN TO DRINK ALCOHOL AND SMOKE MARIJUANA REGULARLY. I BEGAN TO

MISS CLASSES BECAUSE I WOULD RATHER DRINK/GET HIGH WITH MY FRIENDS. THIS LED TO BEING JUMPED INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD. I NOW HAD "HOMEBOYS" WHO ACCEPTED ME WITHOUT QUESTION.

THIS NEW FOUND ACCEPTANCE IS NOT FREE. I WOULD HAVE TO PROVE MYSELF ALL OVER AGAIN. THIS TIME INSTEAD OF STEALING IT WAS THROUGH VIOLENT ACTS. WHICH BY THEN I SAW AS A WAY TO ACHIEVE OUR GOALS.

THE GANG LIFESTYLE BY THEN HAD BEGUN TO MOLD MY THOUGHT PROCESS AND DECISIONS. IT WAS A BIG FACTOR ON THE ACTIONS THAT I TOOK.

THE OLDER I GOT MY VIOLENT ACTS PROGRESSED. THE MORE VIOLENT ACTS I COMMITTED/WITNESSED THE MORE I ABUSED ALCOHOL/DRUGS. WHICH BY THEN HAD BECOME A COPING MECHANISM TO NUMB MY EMOTIONAL PAIN. WHEN I WAS HIGH/DRUNK I WAS RECKLESS AND IMPULSIVE BECAUSE I WASN'T THINKING WITH A "NORMAL" MIND.

I WOULD SUPPRESS MY EMOTIONS

BUT SOMETIMES THE ANGER/RAGE INSIDE OF ME WOULD EXPLODE FROM TIME TO TIME. SOMETIMES I WOULD SNAP WHICH IS WHAT HAPPEND ALL THOSE YEARS AGO WHEN I KILLED KENNETH COLLIER, WHICH IS THE CRIME THAT BROUGHT ME TO PRISON.

WHEN I ARRIVED TO PRISON I WAS AGAIN "EMBRACED" BY MY FELLOW GANGMEMBERS. BUT GANG POLITICS ON THE STREET ARE DIFFERENT THEN IN PRISON. YET I ENGULFED MYSELF INTO PRISON POLITICS. WHERE I HAD TO PARTICIPATE IN THINGS THAT I DIDN'T AGREE WITH.

LIKE THE GANG LIFESTYLE BEFORE - HAND THE STRESS OF PRISON POLITICS BEGAN TO WEIGH HEAVILY ON MY SHOULDERS. IT'S AT THIS TIME THAT I BEGAN TO SEE THE NEGATIVE TURN MY LIFE HAD TAKEN. I WANTED TO BETTER MYSELF WHICH LED TO MY DECISION TO RELINQUISH MY GANG TIES.

WHEN I RELINQUISHED MY GANG TIES MY PHYSICAL SAFETY WAS IN DANGER. MY PREVIOUS "HOMEBOYS" NOW SAW

ME AS A DEGENERATE AND TURNED THEIR BACK TO ME. SO I WENT THROUGH THE DEBRIEFING PROCESS SO I COULD BETTER MY ENVIRONMENT.

ONCE I ARRIVED ON THE SNY I BEGAN TO ATTEND SELF HELP GROUPS, COLLEGE COURSES AND GOT A JOB. THROUGH SELF HELP GROUPS I BEGAN TO SEE THE PAIN AND HURT I CAUSED OTHERS. I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND EMPATHY AND INSIGHT. I NOW HAD A CONSCIENCE.

IN THE BEGINNING OF THIS WAS THE QUESTION "WHO WERE YOU THEN AND WHO ARE YOU NOW"? THE ANSWER IS SIMPLE.

I WAS A DEGENERATE WHO WAS SELFISH AND ONLY CARED ABOUT MYSELF. AT ONE TIME I WAS A RECKLESS AND DANGEROUS INDIVIDUAL WHO SAW VIOLENCE AS A WAY TO GET WHAT I WANTED. I HAD NO FEAR, GUILT OR REMORSE FOR MY ACTIONS. THAT COMBINED WITH MY GANG ACTIVITY IS WHO I WAS. I WAS A DRUG ADDICT TOO.

WHO AM I NOW? I AM NO LONGER THAT DANGEROUS AND VIOLENT GANG MEM-

BER. I AM NO LONGER A DANGER TO SOCIETY. I NO LONGER THINK LIKE A GANG MEMBER. I AM NOW A VEHICLE FOR POSITIVE CHANGE.

THAT IS WHO I AM TODAY. NO LONGER THAT DRUG ADDICT / ALCOHOLIC WHO HURT INNOCENT PEOPLE. I NOW HAVE EMPATHY AND FULLY UNDERSTAND THE HARM I CAUSED. I AM NOW A CHANGED MAN.

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