

STEVE'S STORY

My name is Steven. I am 33 years old and was born and raised in East L.A. I'm a second generation former gang member. I come from one of the oldest barrios in East L.A. In fact, I also come from one the largest families within the neighborhood. Both my parents are ex-gang members and most of my uncles are gang members. I got involved with the gang when I was about 11 years old. As a young boy growing up in the neighborhood and coming from one of the biggest families within the gang I grew up thinking that my role in life was to become a gang member just like the rest of my family.

So at the age of 11 years old I started off by hiding guns and hiding drugs for

the older homeboys. As time went on and I was starting to hang out with the older homeboys I noticed the way they looked up to the other homeboys who were really doing the gang-banging. To me these guys kinda became my role models through life. I also wanted to become a gang-banger. I wanted to be looked up to. I wanted to make my family and the older homeboys proud of me.

When I was 13 or 14 years old I remember asking a few of the older homeboys to teach me how to use a gun and of

course they told me they would. I remember they got me and a couple of other guys the same age as me and they took us up into the hills and they gave us each our own gun that we were able to keep. They taught us how to use these guns. I remember this old car that was parked up on the hill. We used to practice shooting at this car. And we used to get into other cars and drive by the car to learn how to shoot while in motion. This was a kind of varrio training that we

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went through. Once I became pretty familiar with my gun I started going out and doing drive-by shootings myself.

As time went on I got tired of just banging. I felt there was something missing but I didn't know what it was. So I started to get involved with drugs. I started dealing a little to make money but then I got kinda curious as to what drugs did to a person. So I started using drugs. I remember we started with heroin. I mean most kids start smoking weed and graduate into pills or whatever, but I just went straight into heroin. At that time I wasn't shooting it up into my arms with needles. I was snorting it. But then one of the older homeboys told me I was wasting it that way. I had to use a lot more of it to catch a buzz off it. So he showed me how to tie up my arm and how to poke my vein. Once I learned how to do that I was kinda gone. The heroin started to take over my life.



As time went on and I got strung out on heroin I stopped using my gun to gang-bang and started using it to make money for my drug habit. I got into robberies and robbing drug connections. I eventually ended up getting arrested for being under the influence of controlled substances. I remember the first time I was arrested I was given drug diversion. I went through these Narcotics Anonymous classes and other programs and I completed them but still it didn't keep me away from the heroin. I ended up going back on heroin and catching more cases. I ended up catching a couple of felonies which landed me in state prison.

After my first 16 months in state prison I kinda learned more about the life of crime. To me prison was kind of a college of crime. My release was like a graduation. From there, once I got out I felt I knew how to commit crimes even better. So I went back to a life of crime. And of

course I was wrong because I did end up right back in prison with more time.

After the first time I got arrested it seemed my life was on a merry-go-round

"I didn't want my kids growing up remembering me just as a jailbird or drug addict."

because I kept on going in and out, in and out of jail and prison. The shortest time I was out on the street was eight hours and I ended up right back in prison. The longest I was able to stay out legally on the streets was 55 days.

After the second time I went to prison my wife and I had just had a baby. The baby was three years old when I got out and it was the first time she had ever seen me. I felt bad due to the fact that I never got to know my kid and she was three. It kind of shook something in my mind and I started to think more about my kids. As time went on I got tired of doing time, got tired of wasting my life. I was noticing these old men walking in the yards. They were in their 50's and 60's. I didn't want to end up like that. I felt there was more to life than just wasting it in prison.

I made up my mind that I was going to make a change, not only for myself but for my kids as well. I didn't want my kids

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growing up remembering me just as a jailbird or drug addict. If the day would ever come where I were to pass away I wanted to go with my kids remembering me as a good person, someone who tried to do something for them.

After I paroled from state prison in 1989 I got involved with California Youth Authority working with some of these people in the department. They became my peers and my role models and they kinda helped me turn my life around. Whenever I did show that I was slipping back towards a life of crime these people worked real close with me and inspired me a lot to keep on going and keep on doing good.

Because of them as well as my kids I've been out for three years now. My life has turned around for the better and once in a while I run into a few of my old friends from the streets and they tell me they wish they could be in my shoes. Like I tell everyone, "You can do it." You just have to want it. As long as you want it it's going to happen.

Since I turned myself around it kinda created a chain reaction within my family. I had three sisters that were also into a life of crime, been through prison and other things and since I turned it around they kinda looked up to me and respected me for what I done. It helped them and now they turned themselves around and they're doing good. I feel good about that because I played a part in all this.

I'm happy with the job I'm doing now, trying to keep kids off drugs and out of gangs. I do this because I don't want that type of life for anyone. I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemy. I'm just thankful. I would not make any change in my life to go back to the life of crime. I mean I'm happy with the life I have now and I wouldn't change it for anything in this world.

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