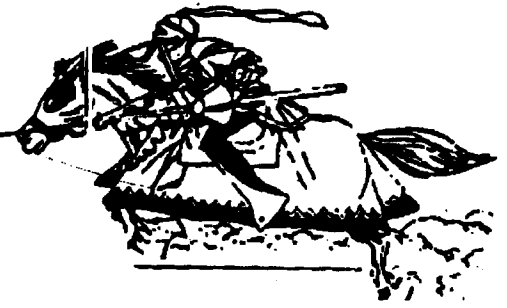


YOUTH NEWS



c/o **Future Leaders Network**
Box 170610
Brooklyn, NY 11217
(718) 643-9603, (215) 472-4024

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 2 ■ SUMMER 1994

WHO WE ARE

This issue of Youth News is made up of articles written by the young people of the Future Leaders Network. The Future Leaders Network holds an annual Summer Retreat (Aug. 12-21 this year), a Mini-Camp, a Reunion, and other meetings during the course of the year. We plan to put out other issues of Youth News in the coming months. If you would like to write an article for our next issue, get information on the Summer Retreat, get more copies of this issue, or future issues, or find out more about the FLN, contact us at: FLN, P.O. Box 170610, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11217, 718-643-9603 or 215-472-4024.



This is it. This is the last issue of Youth News before the retreat in August. Like in our previous issues, we have some great articles from some of our members, and others from people who read the newsletter. We even have articles reprinted from other newsletters. Also in this issue, you'll find a letter from a group that wrote to us from Africa!

It's always a pleasure to write articles and share my feelings and thoughts with all of you; that's why I'm including this paragraph which deals with our theme for this Summer Retreat in August: "Youth working together to build more humane relationships."

We as today's youth should become more articulate. We should make our parents, teachers, mentors listen to us. Because we all know that people change and so do thinking and ideologies. Our parents wouldn't really understand what we say or where we're coming from although they were young too. We have to take a stand and our time to explain things and especially not walk away from our problems. We will build a more humane society only by communicating, listening to others and respecting the differences that exist around us.

Everybody knows how powerful we, the youth are. Anywhere and everywhere something starts in the world, the young people are there (China, Haiti, France etc.) So let's not let our pride or stubbornness ruin our only time in life where we're really FREE. Free of bills, children, old age and all the other grown up "things" that come with age.

Again, if you want to come to the retreat, it's not too late. Contact us right away. And remember, we are tomorrow's leaders let's act like it...

Jo Ann Benoit, Brooklyn, NY

THE TASK FOR FUTURE LEADERS IS THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOOD HUMAN RELATIONS

"All too often, on the long road up, young leaders become servants of what is rather than shapers of what might be." This quote by John Gardner, an educator and major contributor to the student development movement, presents a task to all future leaders. This task is to prepare oneself to accept some measure of responsibility for society's shared concerns.

A major concern is the improvement of our human relations climate through the development of young leaders who can combat the destructiveness of sexism, racism, and other types of prejudice. Preparing a future cadre of leaders who are ethically and socially responsive to addressing the local and global needs of our communities, I believe, is essential to the future of human relations.

To the retreaters of this year I challenge you to explore several tasks:

- 1) enhance the understanding of and appreciation for cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender-oriented differences;
- 2) participate in inter-group and cross-cultural experiences;
- 3) understand the critical role of personal involvement, social responsibility and leadership within your community;
- 4) share experiences and exchange ideas on local and global issues that you are concerned with; and,
- 5) last but not least, develop skills or learn information that could make you an effective participant in your community.

Abdullah Payton, Jersey City, N.J.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

A woman with soul piercing
eyes and caramel skin
Asks a question that made
me shudder again, "What are you
looking for?"
Staring, with thoughts unpure
I gave her my best answer
Because I wasn't sure
I could answer that question
But I don't know where to begin
But for starters how about we just
Be friends
She asked the same question
What are you looking for
Once more I was not sure
I went into deep thought
actually deep stare
Looking at her long, flowing black hair
I tried to answer that question
once again
When I did she saw through
my answer as though they were
paper thin
Then I said again let's just
be friends
She gave me her card and said call
me some time
As I was leaving her beauty behind
My mind began to clear
Once again that question appeared
What are you looking for
On the bus ride home I struggle
with the question some more
I asked myself what the
hell am I looking for
I am looking for someone or someplace
where I don't have to be so
defensive or ready to argue
where people are not homeless or
searching for food. I'm looking
for a place where guns and drugs
are not a way of life.
Then the bus came to my stop
And so does my thought
Now when I sleep at night
asking this question, "What are you
looking for."

Leaving someone else to struggle
with the question some more.

Sevin Melton, Philadelphia, Pa.

WAR AGAINST THE IMMIGRANTS

People have come from all corners of the earth to find salvation in the U.S. in order to have a chance for a religious life. This country was built by immigrants as a matter of fact. This country was built by people who sought freedom from religious oppression, censorship, etc. For this country is a settler state.

I wish to address a problem related to this topic, for personal and of course progressive reasons. It pertains to the I.N.S. or Immigration Naturalization Service detention centers, which have committed cruel acts of inhumane treatment toward the detainees who mostly come from the South or third world countries. As a matter of fact, more than 1/3 of the detainees are of Asian, African, Arab and Latino descent.

I wish to use my father as a model of one who is being oppressed at one of these detention centers. My father Faruck Mahmoud Abdel Muhti was detained in an INS detention center at 201 Varick St. in Manhattan, NYC. From the outside it looks like a regular office building. But it is actually a concentration camp where my father and many others suffered all types of abuses from guards. My father said that he was detained in a small room with two other detainees who were psychotic. There were six light bulbs without something to shield them, lights which were at least 150 watts each. The light was shining intensely. The reflection would bounce off the bright yellow cell walls 23 hours a day. Whenever it was too hot they would intentionally cut off the air conditioner, and they would do vice versa when it was cold. My father said that the food there was horrible. As a matter of fact many times litter was found in the food. What made things worse is that my father and many other detainees were Muslim and could not eat hardly anything because pork products were mainly used for the food.

Besides the food, the infirmary was also horrible. My father suffered from asthma and had bad eyesight. The doctors were so incompetent that when my father went to get his eyes checked, they told him it wasn't very serious despite his bad eyesight. My father didn't get a pair of glasses until 7 months later when he was released. And to top it off, during the time he was detained, he protested against these inhumane acts. He ended up in max just for protesting. He was in max with an Ethiopian Jew named Tulsaged Ghine who was detained for four years without trial. He does not want to go back to Ethiopia or to Israel because there is racism. He was recently transferred to Arizona.

If my father's story does not convince you, the human rights report done by the ACLU should. As a matter of fact there was an article written by the New York Times pertaining to the

report done by the ACLU. It states that detainees are only supposed to be detained for six weeks at the most. The report also stated that many rules and regulations of the INS are unconstitutional. The report also states many of the conditions I just described.

I feel that more action needs to be taken against the INS. I feel that the INS has become an extended arm of ethnicism, racism, and ignorance. This is because the INS has become an instrument in blaming the country's socioeconomic problems on the immigrants, who in fact benefit the country. We as a nation must remember that our fathers, grandfathers and great, great grandfathers were the ones who built this nation. For they were once immigrants. If we wage war on them we wage war on ourselves.

Tarasik Abdel Muhti, New York City, N.Y.

DEAR UNCLE SAM,

No, you don't know me. I'm nobody to you. I live directly across the street from your big "White House". My bedroom is the sidewalk facing your front doors. I have no place to go because of your system.

You send off millions of dollars to foreign countries for war and aid relief. But what about my war, the war that's going on inside my mind, my heart and my soul? Can you stop it? No, I don't think so. My mental war causes me to be what you call a "menace" in society.

How could you put me in prison for merely trying to survive? Here, where I live, I see a need for relief. My people are dying and killing themselves over gold chains and sneakers. This is because of the competitive society you have created for me to live in. I have to scramble, steal and cheat just to get a candy bar, but yet you pay M.C. Hammer millions of dollars to dance for America and you pay Barkley to run up and down the basketball court. In your society you don't let an African man get but so far and then you cut him down to remind him of his place.

Violence, sex and crime are things you operate on. You violently rape my mind and my ears with a subliminal message, that I'm bad and that I'm an outcast because of the life I have to live. You sexually abuse, harass, and put down my mothers and sisters by telling them that they are nothing more than sexual instruments and that they hold no real status in society. You criminalize my fathers and brothers by labeling them as being criminals by your own standards.

Even though I have no home or formal education, I'm not sleeping on your game plan. I once ruled a great civilization



thousands of years ago. Again I will rule and right the ills of your society. With the help of some positive people, I will not become a statistic. I will rise out of your miserable society.

Through the eyes of Nobody, Mecca Williams, Petersburg, VA

A LETTER FROM KENYA

Dear Sir/Miss,

First are greetings from the youth here, hoping that all is in shape with your FLN group. We too are fine and working towards our goal.

Thanks for your letter and the pamphlets. The information and materials about your retreat and the feelings of some of the participants were very encouraging, inspiring and of great value to our group. We felt challenged and motivated into doing more.

Please send us more information about your group because the guys want to know more. They would also like to be corresponding with some of your members. They have also asked me to request the FLN if it could organize for an exchange program. Others are also asking if they could get scholarships for the Summer Retreat that will take place in August of this year. They are really damn crazy about it.

Bye for now and looking forward for a positive response.

Yours,

Barrack Otyenoh, P.R.O., Makadara Y. Centre, Kenya

FEAR

Fear is described as "the emotion or condition of being afraid" and referred to as a "concern" by the World Book dictionary. One of my most pervasive fears is of violence. Ever since I've been catching public transportation to school in the fifth grade, violence has been the number one thing on my mind as I leave the house. Worrying about protecting myself all of the time has the potential to make me a reserved and hostile person, but I understand the need for communication in resolving this problem and my fear of it. I have been a victim of this violent society, but predominant in my mind is the time that my life was threatened.

In the tenth grade, a few of my friends and I sat on the steps outside of the school building during our lunch period. Two young males who did not attend my school approached and said profane things to us and proceeded to say that they would rob and kill all of us. Since there were also girls outside, the boys were probably trying to show off. My friend went on to call their bluff and they got into a war of words. The whole incident got blown out of proportion. The next week, the two returned with a couple of carloads full of their friends. My friends and I told the cops that these boys had returned, but the cops said that they could not do anything to the boys until the boys did something to us.

Well they did. One of the boys started to hit my friend and everybody jumped in and engaged in a fist on fist battle until one of the boys who did not attend my school pulled out a gun. Everything that happened after that is a blur in my memory, but thankfully nobody got shot.

These types of occurrences make me wonder what causes people to be violent. The boys that I had a fallout with probably thought that they were displaying macho behavior for the young women who were around, but I believe that violence as a whole has deeper roots. Many young people live in oppressive environments which create feelings of anger and powerlessness. The hostility usually comes out against their own peers and people who are closest to them. Many boys play with toy guns from the time they are toddlers. Shooting is seen as fun and exciting. Guns and violence are glamorized by movies and television and portrayed as being arousing and as a means toward obtaining power. On a subconscious level, producers play certain music behind violent scenes to make them more racy and entertaining. In order to curb the flow of violence, these issues have to be dealt with.

In the situation I was involved with, I tried to escape the whole thing by transferring schools and basically hiding from the boys whom the incident had happened with. I realized, though, that escaping reality does not deny its existence and that violence needs to be dealt with on a larger scale.

More teenage girls need to discourage males from violent behavior and make it clear that it is not macho. Teenage boys need more men to explain to them that responsibility comes with being a good man. Youth need to be shown that the actions they take against each other are not hurting, but actually helping, the people who are causing them to be oppressed. For example, a white supremacist gun dealer was quoted in the Philadelphia Inquirer as saying that he hopes some of the guns he sells find their way to the ghetto so that "niggers" can kill each other. Toy guns need to be taken off the market and violence in movies purely for entertainment needs to be banned. Instead, it should be shown for the travesty it is with ideas on how to stop it. Myself and anybody else who thinks of violence on a regular basis have to take immediate precautions such as learning to avoid provocative situations and conflict resolution techniques.

As long as one does not become paralyzed by the fear of violence, it is a reasonable fear to have in the society we live in. It can not be immediately overcome, but I plan to get involved in a youth action taskforce that will help me to mobilize the solutions to violence that I have mentioned. This will help to make a better society which will, in turn, help me to overcome my fear.

Tahir Wyatt, Philadelphia, PA

"AS A PEOPLE"

In order to build a more humane society we must first start with ourselves and our homes. We must accept love, and respect ourselves for who we are. Our homes should represent us as being open and humble. After that process we can learn to live with different people in harmony.

We must seek knowledge and learn about our fellow man and woman. How can I not like a person when I know nothing about him? Not liking a person because of what you see comes from stereotypes. We must analyze people who come with these stereotypes and dispel the concepts.

We must get involved in our communities. The whole world is one big community. If we can teach and reach out to one person that person can reach out to the next. It will be just like an assembly line, people working together collectively to build a more humane society. I believe if you believe that we can make this world a better place for our people.

Mecca Williams, Petersburg, VA



MULTICULTURAL DIFFUSION

The reason I chose this topic was because that's why I feel my (our) society needs especially in our schools. I don't know if it's the same with everybody else but my school is starving for racial harmony. That is why some friends and I got together and started the Multi-Cultural Diffusion club (MCD) which involves and includes all different ethnic backgrounds.

This club educates people about how to live and deal with people who are not necessarily from the same background. Half of the reasons we have so many fights and arguments is because of ignorance. Ignorance is truly bondage. Right now I'm working on getting more knowledge put out through the school, not just once a year on cultural day or once a month. We need assemblies, programs all year 'round.

I know I can't change the world but this is a start. A few is better than none. What people have to understand is that we all want to be or are trying to get to the top, but we can't do that by fighting and killing one another. "United we stand, divided we fall".

Danielle P. Avent, Williamstown, NJ

THE DIAMOND INSIDE THE COAL

There are a lot of people who know me, but how many of them truly know me. Sure they know of all the bad things, all the pitfalls I've fallen into along the way. They know of the system that beat me, the society put together to help me fail. They know of the peers that want to see me make a fool of myself, fight and be an object of entertainment, like a soap opera.

They don't know of the kid who had a misguided past as well as present. Do they know about the things I overcame as a child? Do they know that even though the pitfalls were deep and numerous that I came out with a smile and my head still high? Do they know of the times I've stumbled and caught myself before I could hit rock bottom?

There are the few who stared in awe for they can't believe the intelligence of such a young person, one who still lives in an environment of destruction. They say things like he's so articulate because they don't want to believe that someone like me could think on such a level of maturity and experience probably greater than many of them. There is no way that someone of my background could quote passages from Shakespeare.

Again they fail to realize that under all the layers of toughness is a soft and knowledgeable being. In the midst of the violence around me I have always sought to decrease the violence in my immediate area. Something helped me see that my immediate area was not good enough. I had to learn more skills to better myself and those around me. I attended a college orientation workshop at VMI that began to change dramatically my train of thoughts on many subjects. The manipulative skills that I've learned can be used on those I influence, those who chose not to be influenced and those who watch and manipulate the environment around us. The way to befriend and get the respect of a larger group of people is to learn things about them that they have trouble expressing, or don't want anyone to know about.

A teacher and I came close to each other when she discovered that we shared a common interest in philosophy. She instilled in me many beneficial tools and straightened some of the bent ways I still held on to. I discovered a new medium of social acceptance where I could display my knowledge and thoughts and people could really benefit from my words, words that I now transcribe on a page for self and to help someone else understand something I didn't know but now do. I've found a group of peers who had great pleasure in helping me obtain the goals that I set for myself.

They also gave me new insight and enlightened me on subjects that are taboo in this society.

Without a foreshadowing of all my characters how can you begin to lay judgement or praise on me? The surface of

many fine gems is rough and deceiving but with the proper care and cut of a skilled workman the essence of the gem begins to reveal itself. I'm like many things you can't obtain the information held within, until you open or penetrate the ignorance of your own mind to see past the outside of the information cover.

Charles Wilson, Jr., Richmond, VA.

AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

There are many issues that concern me, but the one that concern me the most is that of our African-American brothers killing each other. I like to call them an endangered species.

This issue is important to me because I don't like to see people killing each other especially my people. It is also important to me because my six year old brother is already an endangered species. My older brother is seventeen years old and statistics say that most African-American males won't even live to see their eighteenth birthday. I don't like the feeling of knowing that they may never reach eighteen years of age.

In order to improve this situation, I think that we as a people need to stop fighting each other and feeling powerless against this epidemic. Somehow we need to get our people to realize that they don't have to be an endangered species. We also need to help them realize that we shouldn't be fighting against each other. Of course this will not take care of the problem completely but it's a step forward and a definite start.

Tamaini L. Wilson, Richmond, VA

SEE YOU IN AUGUST

As I sit at my desk in Durham, NC, my eyes wonder around my room. Aimlessly searching for a topic for a Youth News article, I look at the pictures cluttering my desk, windowsill and walls. There are old camp pictures, family photos, a picture from prom, and silly pictures of my best friends that I've taken over the years.

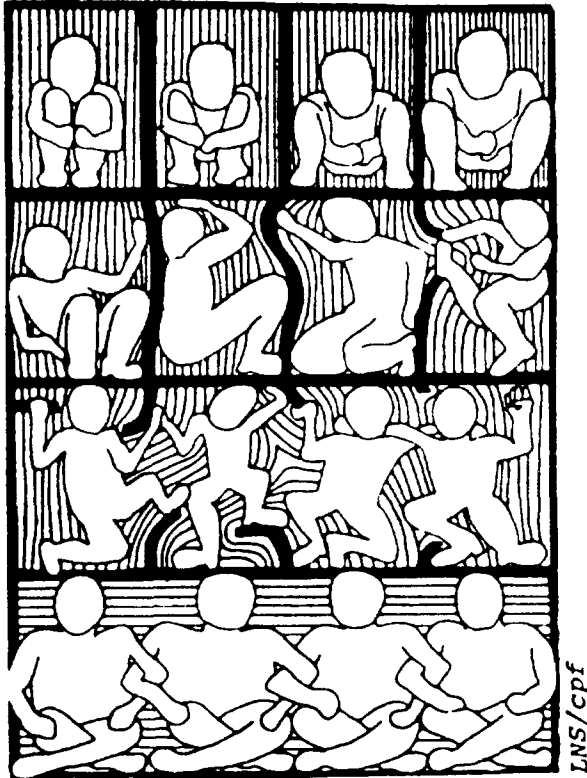
In between, there are my FLN pictures; a group of us sitting in front of the girls' dorm in Doylestown, Jason and Elliot underneath a tree, Lai Har and I in our dorm room.

Every time someone comes into my room who does not know about our retreat last summer I tell them "this is my family from FLN. We got to know each other for ten days last summer and we talked about so much that in that short time I got to know them really well. It's awesome, I'm going again this summer". I say something like that then smile. The other person smiles too but doesn't understand.

FLN is nothing you can describe with pictures or words. It's learning, in the best kind of way from people you never knew, about things you all care about but see from different angles. See everyone there in August.

Carson Harkrader, Durham, NC.

WHEN IS THE MADNESS GOING TO STOP?



A few weeks ago, my grandfather was mugged in his own apartment building. Things like this really upset me. Not only because he's almost sixty years old or that he's my family, but because this tells me that he's not even safe in his own home.

At one time there were certain places you wouldn't go in order to be safe. Now you can't even go home and feel safe. What is going on? Are we so afraid of what might happen if we unite that we hurt each other in order to stay oppressed? This is exactly what it seems like to me. If we keep going like this, the world will come to an end soon.

This world is getting scarier. I had fun as a child. That seemed to have ended a long time ago. I wonder if the children of today are having any fun.

I just have one question. When is the madness going to stop? If you can answer this or give some suggestions, I would appreciate it very much. (A letter would be appreciated in the next newsletter).

George O. Davis
Brooklyn, NY

BITTER CONFUSION

"Every major horror in history was committed in the name of an altruistic motive." — Ayn Rand



UNCLE SAM TALKS TOUGH WITH TODAY'S TEENS.

Sometimes I wonder how many people know what's really going on. It seems that everything happens because of other things that happened so long ago.

The predicament we find ourselves in every day is the doing of somebody whose most likely dead. The prejudices which are huge, consuming and alive, were created by somebody whose dead.

There's a bright attractive hollow light of prejudices and half thoughts. An example of half thoughts: I was listening to a radio talk show, they had two black men, one white man and a white woman. The black men were arguing that a lot of great inventions came from their ethnicity and the white man and woman were arguing the opposite (half thought). Both ethnicities had created great inventions (complete thought). It's like building a house with only half of the foundation. Half of the building is going to be unstable.

Nothing is stable anymore. In the long-run, when the chips are down, we seem to rely on our primal instinct: self-preservation. The flag they taught us to hail in school turned out to have yellow decadent stripes and stars rather than white, thriving, immaculate ones.

Everything is double standard. We go to school and learn our A's and B's under a dictatorship and communist system: principal, vice principal, and teacher. I remember all the time in class the teacher would say (in defense of her ruling) "This is not a democracy..." we just live in one. So after big guys get out of big schools with big futures, they go from operating under a dictatorship to running a democracy. I can see the chaos and the confusion. Most politicians act like dictators doing what they want to protect their future in office and to get all the money they can (cultivated chaos and confusion).

So what's the answer? Should we turn schools (somehow) into democratic institutions? Should the U.S. of A. go dictatorship (if it hasn't already)?

DON'T ASK ME, I'M CONFUSED.

Nick Pome, Newark, NJ

PAX CHRISTI, U.S.A.

The media tells us that violence is on the rise. Politicians scramble for votes by creating, supporting and implementing "tough-on-crime" measures that are nothing more than flash-in-the-pan solutions to a larger problem that extends 500 years and more into our past. Youth and young people are challenged daily to maintain a sense of hope for the future. This sometimes seems impossible, especially when we realize that our society stresses individualism and competition, not community and cooperation.

As a Youth Coordinator for Pax Christi USA I travel around the country inviting young people to counter the violence in our presence (personally, locally, nationally, globally) by building community. The task is difficult and challenging for many because we have lost our sense of community (forgetting, even, that communion, communication, etc. are all based in community.) We build communities based on the Gospel of non-violence, believing that only nonviolence, compassion and love can eradicate the structures of violence that taint our world.

From the youth voices in Pax Christi has risen the Pax Christi USA Youth Forum, a collection of young people age 18-30 from around the nation, struggling to counter the violence in our world through spiritual, prayerful, communal, and political means.

The Youth Forum voiced its concerns at a recent meeting.

Homelessness is on the rise. Gang violence on the streets is escalating. The military is infiltrating our schools. Consumerism is the new religion for US youth. The environment is being manipulated and destroyed at an alarming rate. A spirit of immorality, individualism and hopelessness seems to have pervaded the air we breathe. When Daniel Berrigan was asked how he remained hopeful when all appear hopeless, he responded: "By doing hopeful things." The Youth Forum is a hopeful endeavor in the face of hopelessness.

Although domestic issues are a top priority on the agenda of the Youth Forum, it is a call to conversion that is the core and spirit of the Youth Forum vision. Stephen Augustine, a member of the Youth Forum and on the national staff of Pax Christi USA, says, "The role of the Youth Forum is to offer hope and direction to young people adrift in society without a sense of place, values, or morals." He adds, "Although young people find it essential to address systemic injustices, it is much more important to convert oneself."

Conversion is the key. The Youth Forum was established on a basis of community. This is an important distinction because a community implies living, sharing, learning, growing, working together, not just meeting once in a while. The Youth Forum calls its youthful members together to community, to live and breathe the Gospel, to conversion. Conversion in one's heart leads to world conversion.

The Youth Forum stresses the importance of lifestyle choices as a directive for personal conversion-praxis. Christ was about lifestyle choices, both physically and spiritually. It is a call to live what you believe.

Personal conversion opens one's eyes to the "signs of the times." It leads one to see the injustices that surround us, the inequities that plague us, and to find the courage to respond. The Youth Forum sees the need to address domestic issues, issues that reside in our own backyards.

As a national faith-based voice for young adults, the Youth Forum sees its role as the prophetic voice of Gospel nonviolence, calling young people to respond to the evils that seem to plague our society. But the call is to respond with compassion and love, not bitterness and cynicism.

Andy Prince
Youth Coordinator
Pax Christi USA
Erie, PA



A HARD LIFE

Sometimes you think just because you're a little kid, your life is going to be easy. I'd always wished my family was like the Brady bunch; maybe, like, that my mother and brothers and my little sister wouldn't suffer with my dad every time he got drunk. Let me tell you a little bit about my family.

I came from a poor family, where we had to be satisfied with anything and everything we had. My father was, and still is, an alcoholic. My mother is a hardworking woman and everyone else in my family is just there. I'm an ex-gang member from Los Angeles, who never cared much about my life until I started to lose my friends to drugs, AIDS, drive by shootings, and playing Russian Roulette. There were times I wanted to kill myself because I was afraid of facing the real world, and afraid someone else would shoot me.

I, myself experienced a lot. Everyday while living in L.A., brought new experiences--whether they were good or bad-- I didn't care. I was homeless for three months, sleeping in cars. Sometimes I had to stay awake the whole night because I had no place to go. Days and nights went by, and all I would do was cry. I cried because I felt alone, even though I had a family to come home to in Boston. All I really wanted was freedom. Freedom that I never had before, when I was with my mom.

Sometimes I wonder if everything that I've done in the past

will come back and haunt me. You know what they say, "What comes around goes around."

I'm a girl that's not afraid of anything, except losing my family. When I was "gangbanging," I'd never really cared much about the people I was with. All I cared about was killing people, and selling drugs to my own people. I felt that I had to prove to my friends that girls could kill people and not feel remorse. That's what I did for two years. I'd always thought that to be in a gang, you had to be tough. Not really. All it takes is a stupid person to do it, and I was one. I think that if you're smart enough, you'll stay away from gangs. If you're in one and want to get out, all you have to do is move away from the gang. Another thing you should stay away from, is drugs. They don't lead to anything except a miserable life. I'm pretty sure you don't want that.

I'm getting my life back together now. Pretty soon, I'll get my G.E.D. and I'll move on to college, God willing. I hope many of you do the same or better than me. One last thing: don't make the same mistake I did. Please.

Reprinted from Teen Voices 'winter/spring 1994 issue.

Loner
Boston, MA