

## Fatherless Homes: A Profound Crisis

Having spent many years in the prison system, I've had many opportunities to speak with other prisoners about relevant social issues. These discussions sometimes touched upon our personal experiences and one subject seems to always arise and that is the factor of fatherless homes. Fatherless homes profoundly changed our society because the lack of male influence and authority in the family unit has pushed countless children toward a life of delinquency and crime. I don't need to look any further than myself for proof, as I grew up in a fatherless home in a housing project with my sister and mother.

My biological father did little more than impregnate my mother as he left her before I was born. It was always just me, my mother and sister. I remember how confused I was when I'd see families on T.V. being so happy and loving. I could not relate to the plots of these shows because I didn't know what a father was. How he comforted his children and provided them with stability and protection. How he supported his family with financial as well as emotional backing. None of that existed in my life because I lived in a fatherless home.

The issue of fatherless homes presents a profound crisis to society because **the children are our future**. But, their futures are put in jeopardy from the start when they must navigate through their early years without the guidance of a father. While single mothers are doing their best to raise a family, they simply cannot replace the father figure. Children begin to act out at an early age because of a lack of structure. I remember how my mother would have to work all day in a fish house packing fish— which was very tedious— just to put food on the table. While she was at work my grandfather would babysit my sister and me. However, he was old and unattentive. I was basically on my own from a young age and that just led me straight to trouble. I was mainly raised by the older boys in the housing project— who themselves came from fatherless homes. Instead of focussing on the positives like school and sports, I was led astray toward a life of crime by the

older boys. Our focus was not about gaining an education so we could get a job and lead normal lives- our focus was to get money so we could buy what the fortunate kids had; like BMX bikes, clothes with no holes or that were hand-me-downs. We didn't care how we obtained the money, it was by any means necessary. The streets didn't care about morals and values, only the strong survived and the weak were stepped on. We looked upon thugs and drug dealers as father figures because they had the money and women. This false worship of false idols led me deeper toward the life of crime. It is just like what's going on today. Children are living their lives according to rap music. Children are like empty vessels that can be filled up by whoever is doing the pouring. While a father can fill the child with honor and virtue, the streets can fill him or her with vice and sin.

It is clear to see what the ill effects of a fatherless home can bring. But, what exactly are the causes for this crisis? While no two cases are the same, we can attribute fatherless homes to some of the following reasons: first, many men have children with numerous women- knowing quite well that they will not be around to take care of the women and children. Society and urban culture has made casual sex a badge of honor rather than an amoral act. Men boast about how many women they've hooked up with, as to prove their virility and strength. The strength of a man- how he provides for and protects his family- is lost and forgotten in the shuffle. So the end result is numerous women having to raise a family on her own.

While many women are victims of irresponsible men, a fatherless home can also be caused by the women themselves. Some mothers keep the children away from their fathers because the mothers are using the children for power or control; as pawns in a personal game of revenge or are trying to get money from the father and have an agenda. This prevents those men who actually wish to do the right thing. I am experiencing this right now from my younger two children's mother. She has done this in the past with her first child's father before me. It drove him to suicide. I still

feel guilty to this day because I should have stepped up and played mediator. Now there is an 18 yr. old who never met his father and doesn't know his father wanted very much to be part of his life. The only victims resulting from the conflict are the children themselves. Just look at a few of the statistics regarding the impact of fatherless homes; 71% of high school dropouts come from fatherless homes; 75% of teens in jail come from fatherless homes. These are only a fraction of the long list of ills stemming from this profound crisis. The last stat itself becomes another cause of fatherless homes, and that is incarceration.

Fatherless homes are not an immediate threat to the well being of the children. But, it is a vicious cycle which- if unchecked- will affect a family for generations to come. Those children who grew up without a positive role model in a father detours into a life of crime, which unquestionably leads to incarceration or even death. But, before these lost souls are locked up or buried, they follow the footsteps of their irresponsible birth fathers and impregnate countless women themselves. The need to emulate the swagger of so-called gangsters or hip hop artists have injected a false sense of achievement into the minds of delinquent children. All they seek is the fast money and women, enjoying the very fleeting sense of pleasure while trading away their future. This false outlook on life is the direct result of a lack of fatherly advice and direction, and even more shocking statistics arise from this crisis; 77% of those in rehab come from fatherless homes (today's teenagers are sniffing Ritalin and Perc 30's); 72% of teenage murderers come from fatherless homes; 80% of psychiatric patients come from fatherless homes. The numbers speak for themselves, but sometimes a home can have a father but still be a fatherless home.

I have spoken to those who come from a family where the father was physically present, but that's as far as it went. The father was either an alcoholic or drug addict. The result of these addictions cause the father figure to become a monster within the home itself, inflicting abuse and causing terror upon his own family while he is

in the grip of addiction. The father drives his loved ones away- perhaps pushing his children onto the streets where they may feel safer than within their own home, and thus, the vicious cycle continues as the family structure is eroded little by little, to the point where it has become a profound issue which may possibly turn our society into an even more violent and lawless one as it already is today.

The following are interviews that I conducted with three fellow prisoners.

The first was with Dathon X Wright, A 38 yr. old father.

Gomes: Where did you grow up and who did you live with?

Wright: Boston, I lived with my mother and father.

Gomes: Was your father a positive role model, did you look up to him?

Wright: My father was a working man, he drove tractor trailer trucks. I looked up to him because he was my father, but that's it.

Gomes: Do you have any brothers or sisters, any half siblings?

Wright: Yeah, I got 1 sister and 1 brother, and I got 2 half brothers.

Gomes: How do you have 2 half brothers if your father was with your mother?

Wright: Because my father left my mother when I was 6 yrs. old.

Gomes: Where are your brothers and sister now?

Wright: One of my brothers works and goes to school. My youngest brother just goes to school. My other brother is locked up like me, and my sister is a nurse.

Gomes: Did you have any goals in life, what did you want to be?

Wright: I wanted to be famous- that's it.

Gomes: Do you feel that not having a father involved with you affected you?

Wright: Yeah, I felt some type of way towards my father. I felt my father never invested enough time with me.

Gomes: Do you have any children and are they all with the same woman?

Wright: Yeah, I have 4 children, but they are with 3 different women, I have I have 3 children's mothers.

Gomes: Are you with any of them, if not, why?

Wright: No, I am not with any of them due to my incarceration and me mistreating them and cheating on them.

Gomes: How do you feel about your children growing up without a father in their lives?

Wright: I feel bad.

Gomes: Have you changed or bettered yourself to help correct some of these issues?

Wright: Yes, I believe I think much different now. I am a student of the Nation of Islam.

Gomes: So you found religion?

Wright: Yes, because it is a new way of life for me. It gave me an aim and purpose to want to live better and to value life more and also an opportunity to change and correct some of the mistakes and wrongs that I committed in life.

Gomes: Well, I am happy to hear that. I wish you the best and keep educating yourself.

My next interview was with Cory Barry, a 20 yr. old who just arrived at state prison.

Gomes: Where did you grow up and who did you live with?

Barry: I lived in Arlington with my mother and father, but the state threatened to take me and my older brother away from my parents because they were drinking and using drugs around us. So my grandfather stepped in and legally adopted me and my brother.

Gomes: Was your grandfather a positive role model and did you look up to him?

Barry: Yes, I looked up to him because he was the only one there for me and my brother. He was a working man and owned his own business.

Gomes: You said you have an older brother, do you have any other siblings or half siblings?

Barry: I have 2 brothers and 1 sister.

Gomes: If your mother and father were together, then how do you have a half sister?

Barry: Because they split up a few years after me and my brother were adopted.

Gomes: Where are your siblings now?

Barry: One brother is locked up and my other brother is living with my grandfather, and my half sister is living with my father in Arlington.

Gomes: What age were you when you first started to get onto trouble?

Barry: I first started getting into trouble with the law when I was 14 yrs. old. I went to juvenile detention.

Gomes: What do you think caused you to act out?

Barry: I don't know, maybe it was all the shit that I went through with losing both my parents, and then my grandmother passed away a few years later.

Gomes: What caused you to come to prison?

Barry: Drugs! I started to do Perc 30's.

Gomes: What age were you when you first used drugs?

Barry: I started smoking weed when I was 13 yrs. old and then it got a little worse. Then at 15, I was drinking on the weekends and smoking weed and cigarettes everyday.

Gomes: Do you have any children?

Barry: Not yet.

Gomes: Do you plan on having a family?

Barry: When I meet the right woman.

Gomes: What are your plans for recovery from your drug use?

Barry: I am into fitness now and I have no desire to use drugs anymore.

Gomes: How far did you go in school?

Barry: I graduated high school and got my diploma.

Gomes: How did you manage this while you were using drugs?

Barry: Because there were a lot of people who wanted to see me graduate, so they helped me and got on me to do my school work.

Gomes: Do you plan on taking the B.U. (Boston University) entrance exam while you are here and why?

Barry: Yes, because I want to get a degree, it will help me get a good paying job.

Gomes: Well, if you need me to help you study for the exam, just ask me and I will help and prepare you.

Barry: THANK YOU.

My last interview was with Troye Adams II, A 27 yr. old father.

Gomes: Where did you grow up and who did you live with?

Adams: I grew up in Boston, and lived with every one of my relatives at some point in time as a result of my mother's death when I was 2½ yrs. old and my father being in and out of prison.

Gomes: Who was your role model and did you look up to any one?

Adams: Basically my uncle and my father were my role models, but I only admired or looked up to them because of their criminal behaviors. I thought that lifestyle was appealing.

Gomes: Do you have any brothers or sisters, any half siblings

Adams: 1 half brother and a half sister.

Gomes: Where are they now, what are they doing in life?

Adams: My little brother is in DSS custody and he is seeking to excel academically. My sister lives with one of my aunts in Boston. The last I heard, she was studying creative arts (contemporary dance).

Gomes: Did you have any goals in life, what did you want to be?

Adams: I did, at first, I had positive goals. I wanted to play basketball and I wanted to be a writer and a counselor. But, I got discouraged when my father wasn't present at my basketball games or educational events. Then all my aspirations went down hill and all my goals became negative from that point.

Gomes: Do you feel that not having a father involved with you

affected you?

Adams: Tremendously!

Gomes: Do you have any children and are they all with the same woman?

Adams: I have 3 children, each with separate mothers.

Gomes: Are you with any of them, if not, why?

Adams: I am not with any of them, primarily because the lifestyle I chose left no room for a serious relationship.

Gomes: How do you feel about you children growing up without a father in their life?

Adams: To be honest, I don't feel like I'm not a part of their lives. I'm just not physically present. However, with limited contact I do have, I am able to encourage them, inspire them and help them develop strong character. In my opinion, this is what it means to be present in my children's lives. Although, I'd prefer to be physically present as well.

Gomes: Have you changed, or changed your way of thinking?

Adams: I have changed for the better through building a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As a result, my value of myself, others, and life as a whole has improved.

Gomes: Prior to your change, how did growing up in a fatherless home impact your decision to engage in criminal activity?

Adams: As I mentioned earlier, I admired my father and uncle for their criminal behavior. Since they were both in and out of prison often. I ventured out into the streets to find role models like them. When they weren't in prison, this is where they spent most of their time. I became a replica of the drug dealers, pimps, gang members, and stick up kids that I observed.

Gomes: With all the time you spent in the streets doing the things you've mentioned, were you still able to attend school?

Adams: The last grade I completed on the street was the 8th. grade. I couldn't possibly have been a full time criminal and full time student simultaneously. I chose poorly.

Gomes: Since you've been incarcerated, has your attitude toward schooling changed? Have you made any educational pursuits?

Adams: Actually I am very fond of education to say the least. In addition to my own vigorous personal studies, I've been blessed to accomplish my GED and receive acceptance into Boston University. I'm grateful, excited, and looking forward to my first semester in September.

Gomes: It sounds like you're very ambitious! I wish you the best and hope that your new found positive attitude will influence your children and steer them away from your old path.

While the crisis of fatherless homes seems to be too deep a hole to climb out of, I have no doubt that sensible solutions can be achieved and allow us to end this vicious cycle and save the generations to come. There needs to be a combined effort from all those involved to solve this problem- from institutions such as prisons and schools which can foster closer relationships between fathers and their children by implementing programs- to individuals themselves who must take personal responsibility for their actions and truly "man-up" and take care of their own. We try to prove our toughness by taking the backs of our "Boyz" or protecting our "Set", yet, we forget about those who are closest and most meaningful to us- our own flesh and blood. Let us change our thinking and change our ways, for this profound crisis can only be solved by us alone. But, we need not be alone in solving the crisis!

Michael Gomes