

## The Transition

Tuesday, May 11, 2004, midmorning, I was released from the Wisconsin Department of Corrections prison, Green Bay Correctional Institution, located in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Mother waited for me outside of the prison's front entrance gates.

As the enormous gates opened, I saw mom leaning against her black, 2003-04 Lexus. I saw her smile and I quickly walked towards her. I sat the box of prison property I had in my arms down and immediately hugged mom for what seemed like eternity. After the embrace, I told mom there were a few more boxes I had to retrieve from the prison and asked her to, "Pop the trunk."

Mom drove closer to the gates as I retrieved the other boxes of property from inside the prison. "I got to get me one of these mom! This is what I'm talking about! I see you riding on chrome feet! What's them, 20's?" I admired the rims on the Lexus. "How much this bad boy cost?" I asked.

"A lot of money." Mom replied.

As I loaded two more boxes of property into the trunk, I asked mom, "Aye mom, did you bring that stuff that I asked you for? The stuff for my beat machine?" A couple weeks earlier, I asked mom to bring a pack of double-A batteries, a tape-converter, and a few other electronic gizmos so that I could hook up my Dr. Rhythm BOSS DR-5 Electronic Drum Machine to the Lexus' stereo system.

"Yes, I brought it. The batteries are in the glove box and the other stuff should be in the trunk." She told me while she sat in the driver's seat. "Come on now, hurry up because I have to be somewhere later. We haven't that much time." Mom exclaimed, wanting me to hurry up.

I opened the property box labeled, "Electronics", and retrieved my beat machine, headphones, cords, binder full of lyrics, and sheet music. I closed the box, looked for the stuff mom brought, retrieved it, closed the trunk, and then entered the passengers' seat of the Lexus. I was impressed with the Lexus. I had never experienced air-conditioning seats before. Inside the Lexus, air never tasted, smelled, nor inhaled so cleanly, freshly, or smoothly. The air flowing through my nose and lungs was remarkable. This was not the same air as the air I inhaled in prison. No, this was not prison air anymore, definitely.

"Man mom, I love this car already. When you gone let me have this?" I asked with a smile.

"When you can take over the payments!" Mom smiled back as she reversed the Lexus out of the prisons' driveway and proceeded to drive away from the prison. As we hit the road, I saw Lambeau Field for the very first time. The Green Bay Packers' stadium was a monumental sight for me to see.

Mom and I began a conversation until we approached a McDonald's restaurant. Mom and I decided to dine-in, parked, and exited the vehicle. As I got out of the car, the atmosphere hurt my eyes. Everything seemed brighter, clearer, and more alive. I literally had to squint my eyes until I entered McDonald's. Everything began to become a gaze and blur to me. It was like the feeling one receives after an eye full of chlorine received while swimming. It was almost similar to staring at an IMAX theatre screen.

I entered McDonald's wearing a prison bought gray jogging sweat suit and shirt with white tennis shoes. The feeling was strange to be free. Nobody seemed to worry, watch, care, supervise, and examine what I was doing anymore. However, I was still worried. I was watching, caring, supervising, and examining everybody and everything else I observed. I proceeded with strict caution. I probably looked suspicious to anyone actually paying attention to me. I wondered if these people would and could notice and sense that I had just been released from incarceration. I also wondered what they were thinking and how they would react if they found out. Even though I was legally free from incarceration, my mind was still confined. Strangely, I felt like I had escaped from prison rather than being released. Oddly, I thought police officers and prison guards would surely rush into that McDonald's with guns drawn to arrest me for escape. It was so weird and overwhelming that I needed a moment to myself.

"May I please use the restroom?" I asked mom as if she was a correctional officer.

"I'll be at the service counter waiting in line for us, okay?" Mom replied.

Once I entered the restroom, I cautiously inspected it for anyone around. I approached a urinal closet to the corner wall, looked over my shoulder, and watched the enter-exit door for intruders. I couldn't even relieve myself due to all the excitement. Eventually the door opened and a man entered.

"Um, I'm in here!" I yelled foolishly. The man looked at me with a look of carelessness, approached the urinal next to me, and began his business. Angrily, I stared at him over my shoulder and turned my back slightly towards him. The man finished relieving himself, washed his hands, and left. Unable to relieve myself, I turned on all the sinks. After about three minutes, only drops. Irritated, I decided to just wash my hands and leave. However, as I stood amongst the sink counter, I examined

myself in the mirror. "So this is what freedom looks like, huh?" I thought to myself. It had been several years since I'd seen myself this clear. I could see all my facial imperfections; freckles, pimples, and a poorly groomed beard and mustache. The jogging suit looked dingy and deprived of color. However, my eyes were extremely beautiful and mesmerizing. Finally, I returned to mom waiting at the service counter ready to order.

"What do you want?" Mom asked politely.

"Oh, it doesn't matter. You know I'm not picky." I replied shyly.

"No, get what you want. You can have anything you like." Then mom ordered what she wanted.

"Um, I'll just get a, um... dang! Ah, I'll get the number two. No, wait... the number four... matter of fact, make that a, ... wait! I don't know. I'm sorry." I mumbled as I gazed at the variety of delicious foods I hadn't seen, smelled, or tasted in three years.

"Take your time hon. Here, here's some money to pay for our food. Once you decide what you want, pay for it, and then come over by me. I'm going to find us a booth, okay? Wait here until our food is ready, then bring it over." Mom left me to decide.

After a few moments, I ordered a steak, egg, and cheese bagel with a hash brown, orange juice, and cinnamon roll. I handed the cashier the money and received change back from the cashier. Unfortunately, my jogging suit did not have pockets, so after receiving the receipt and change, I went to find mom. "Here mom, here's the change. I don't have any pockets. I'm about to go back and get our food. I just wanted to bring this over here first. Here's the receipt too." I said to mom after I found her sitting at a window booth.

"So what you order?" Mom asked.

"Just a bagel and cinnamon roll." I replied curiously.

"Michael, you better go and get you something to eat! Stop acting like that." Mom politely demanded with concern.

"Sorry about that. I guess it's just a habit."

"I know, but you have got to break that habit. Now here, here's some more money. Get something else to eat because it's going to be a long ride home and I'm not making any stops." Mom said while reaching in her purse for more money.

"Alright, but can I order it when we get ready to leave so that I can take it with us?" I asked.

"Yes, you may do that." Then mom asked me to purchase something for her too and for me to bring back some napkins and condiments. Moments later, I brought the sweet smell of food back to our booth with the condiments. Once I returned, mom had already unwrapped our food and I was hypnotized. Mom and I said grace and then we began eating our meal.

"Dang Michael, slow down!" Mom suggested while smiling.

"Oh, my bad. I'm just so use to having a time limit, I guess. You know if we didn't finish our meals within a certain time limit in prison, then too bad?" I explained to mom and tried to justify.

"Well, you're not in prison anymore. You're free now. You need to get that way of life and thinking out of your mind. That is, unless you plan on going back?" Mom asked.

"Naw, naw, you're right, you're right. I'm cool. I'm cool. I ain't gone do it no more." I ensured. I'm straight now."

"Are you sure, because I'm not coming back up here again? I'm not doing this any more Michael. I'm serious. After we eat, I can take you back to that prison if you want? You can save me a lot of money, time, energy, and gas if you plan on going back to that place." Mom said while intently looking me directly in the eyes.

"I'm sure mamma. I'm not going back! We ain't even got to worry about all that." I ensured back.

"And why is that? How do you know? What is stopping you from going back?" Mom firmly asked with curiosity.

"Excuse my language Mom, but shiiiiit! I ain't going back to that place." I ensured.

"Why not?" Mom asked again.

"Cause, prison ain't got nothing for me and I ain't got nothing for it. I'm serious Mom. You just don't know. I'm not about to put myself in a position like that again. To being told what to do, what not to do, when to do it and when not to do it, where to eat, sleep, and wash up is not my kind of living. What kind of living is that anyways? I mean, who wants that kind of life?" I asked rhetorically.

"A lot of people, and people say what you're saying all the time. So what makes you any different from them?" Mom asked.

“Those people are not me. I heard a lot of guys say that same thing too while I was in prison. Then they would come right back to prison. I mean, these guys swore up and down that they weren’t coming back, but their focus was all wrong. They had already set themselves up for returning to prison by what they were telling me. Most of the guys would say, ‘Only way I’m coming back to prison is for something big or serious.’ And that’s where they failed and set themselves up. They had it made up in their minds already on coming back by suggesting possibilities. I, on the other hand, don’t think that way. There is not going to be an ‘if’ or an ‘only way I’m coming back’ or any possibilities. My focus is on my goals, achieving them, and coming back to prison isn’t on my list of aspirations.” I explained.

“And let that be a reminder Michael. Think of those things when you are out there in the real world, because there will be times when things aren’t going to be easy as you may think. I’m just saying this now so we won’t have to talk about it later. I’m just getting this talk out of the way now, okay? Now, I want to ask you a few more questions so that I can see where your head is at, and I’m going to throw out a few scenarios. Tell me what you would do in the situation if it were to ever occur.” Mom suggested.

“Alright, give me your best shot.” I replied eagerly and excitedly.

“Remember, these are only hypothetical questions. I’m not suggesting that they will happen, but we both would agree that they could happen.”

“Of course I understand.” I ensured mom.

Mom threw out a few examples and we role-played for a short while. I replied with what I believed to be the correct answers, not because I thought they were what mom wanted to hear, but because they were actual choices and behaviors I anticipated if ever approached with such circumstances and or situations.

“I hope you truly mean what you say, because there are also going to be people who you know that will try to act like everything’s all good when they see you. They will be like, ‘Ah Mike man, what’s up man? Did you get that money I sent you man? Ah, you didn’t? Oh, it must of got lost or stolen or something then? You must of not gotten the letters I sent you either, huh? I tried to come see you but you know how it be!’” Mom said while imitating her voice to sound manly.

“Oh, I already know Ma. You ain’t even telling me nothing. Please, they can keep it moving. They ain’t got nothing but ‘hi’s and byes’ from me. They got me messed up.” I ensured mom.

“And what about your little brother, and those guys you were hanging with before?” Mom questioned.

“I mean, like I said. I might say hi and bye to them but I don’t owe them anything and they don’t owe me anything. I’m on a train that’s going places and if they aint on the same path I’m on, then they just gone have to deal with it because I’m not about to get off this train for nobody, not even my little brother or none of my so called friends or any of them. I’m telling you mom, I’m good! I’m good!”

“I hope so?” Mom sighed.

“Look mom, who was there for me through the whole bit? Who looked out for me? Who was there struggling with me? Who was there through thick and thin, good and bad? You were and your friends. Ya’ll took care of me, not my so-called friends, and I owe ya’ll for that. I know I couldn’t possibly pay ya’ll back now, but I will someday one day.” I ensured mom.

“Don’t you worry about paying us back. What we did was from the heart and because we love you, nothing more or less. Just keep a positive mind and do right Michael. That’s all we ask. Now, I didn’t send you money and or the stuff you wanted because I did not want you to get too comfortable in that place. I mean, I sent you a little money here and there for your birthdays and holidays and when I could but that’s I introduced you to Bill. When he heard about your situation, he insisted on helping you get through that experience with whatever he could. And I hope you realize and are thankful for that because he did not have to do that for you. He was not obligated to do anything he did for you. So when we get back home, you need to call them and thank them. I’m serious Michael, you just don’t know how blessed you had it.” Mom explained to me.

“I know, I know. I thank them all the time. I wrote to everybody before I left the prison to thank them, but I will definitely call them when we get home.” I ensured mom.

After mom and I got that conversation out of the way, we talked more on less important topics and finished our meal. Mom excused herself to the restroom while I cleared the table. I then ordered a Butterfingers’ McFlurry, another steak, egg & cheese bagel, a hash-brown, an orange juice, and a cinnamon bun for the road with money out of mom’s purse that she told me to grab while she utilized the restroom.

Moments later after hitting the highway, mom and I enjoyed each other’s company in the Lexus. Mom drove while I set up the DR-5 to play through the Lexus’ stereo system’s speakers. Once I had

everything set up and adjusted, I told mom that I would be a moment. I connected my headphones to the DR-5 and conducted a sound check to make sure everything was good. As I listened with the headphones on, I opened my binder full of rap lyrics and sheet music and recited familiar original lyrics of mine in my mind to prepare for when I would perform for mom in the car moments later.

After I conducted my sound check, I enlightened mom to all of my music I had created while I was incarcerated. I braced her with explaining to her the origins of all the music I had created. Then I told her about all the practice I had while incarcerated and using the institution's music room. Eventually, I took the headphones off and allowed mom to experience my musical gifts. First, I allowed her to listen to each instrumental that I had created on the DR-5. Mom seemed to be very impressed and amazed with what I had created. I saw in her eyes a genuine interest in what I had musically created with the DR-5.

"You created all that on that thing?" Mom asked surprised.

"Yep, I like to consider myself the master of this thing. I probably have done things with this machine that the company who made it couldn't even imagine." I joked. Then I enlightened mom with my lyrical skills and performed for her confidently. I had just written 'Eye Remember'; a song about my deceased best friend, 'Girl-Frenz'; a sort of autobiographical song, and 'Changing'; a song about how I had it hard growing up. Mom couldn't believe her ears. Mom told me that she loved my music and that I had talent, a gift, and that there was something truly special about it and me.

"Do you remember Shenea's old boyfriend, Jamil?" Mom asked.

"Yeah, why?" I replied.

"Well, I think he's the marketing director for, um... what's that rapper's name from Milwaukee? He has a song about the projects or something like that?" Mom asked fishing for an answer while snapping her fingers.

"Who, Coo Coo Cal?" I asked curiously.

"Yeah, I think that's him. Jamil works at a studio with him." Mom replied.

"For real? Yeah right?" I asked in disbelief.

"Yes, and I could probably try to set something up with him to help you make a demo CD or something. What do you think about that?" Mom asked.

"For real!" I asked excitedly in a high-pitched voice.

"Yeah, I can try to give him a call later on, okay?" Mom ensured.

"Bet, that's what's up, for real!" I said surprised.

"So what's your game plan Mike-n-Ike for when we get home?" Mom asked.

"Um, I don't know." I replied.

"Well, you got to have a plan? I mean, where will you go to sleep? Where will you stay? What will you do for food? How will you earn a living?" Mom asked curiously.

In a high-pitched voice, I asked, "I thought I was staying with you until I got on my feet?"

"You can too, but I'm talking about after that, because I hope you didn't think you were just going to lounge around and mooch off of me, did you?" Mom asked seriously.

"No, but what do you want me to do?" I asked.

"It's not about what I want you to do. It's about what you want to do. What do you want to do? What are your goals, aspirations, you know, what's your game plan?" Mom asked.

"Oh yeah! Why didn't you just say that?" I joked. "Well, first I'm going to follow up with applying for enrollment at UMW (University of Milwaukee-Wisconsin). I'm going to try to get my general education credits from them and then try to get the credits I already have transferred to UWM. Then once I've acquired my general education credits and those are out of the way, I figure I'll transfer to Music-Tech in St. Paul, Minnesota, you know, the twin cities. They have my dream courses there. They have an Associates of Arts degree in Recording Technology, Engineering, and Production." I responded.

"That sounds wonderful and like a great plan to start with. And what will you be doing for money in the meantime? You know, until you get into college?" Mom asked.

"Well, if I get into college right away, then I'll apply for an internship through the college's radio station or other local radio stations and or through record companies or something like that. And if that doesn't work out the way I want it to, then I'll have to go the old fashion route. I'll apply for a job. I'll go online. I'll submit applications in person and on the Internet. I'll fax and give my resume. I'll look in the newspapers for jobs and make calls. I'll network." I ensured mom.

"And what would you do or say if you were to get an interview?" Mom asked.

"Well, it depends." I replied. Then mom and I role-played for a while. Mom played a potential employer while I played the interviewee. Afterwards, mom gave me some advice and suggestions, but she

had already given me her stamp of approval. Then I told mom about all the education and training I received while incarcerated. We discussed so much about my future. We were setting me up for greatness and preparing me for my destiny with success in that car at that moment.

After that conversation, mom asked me to grab her cell phone from out of her purse. I found and handed mom her cell phone and she began dialing a phone number. "Hello? Yeah, he's with me in the car. We're on the highway right now, on the way back to the Mil." Mom said to the person on the other end of the phone. "Okay, here Michael. Somebody wants to speak to you." Mom handed me the phone. It was my sister Shenea on the phone. I was glad and happy to hear her voice. We talked for a short while before mom interrupted and took the phone back. Mom told Shenea we would call her once we got home and then mom ended the call with Shenea. Mom called a few of her friends and family and I talked briefly with them as well. Then mom asked, "What time are you suppose to meet with your probation officer?"

"Let me see." I said while searching to find my release papers. "It doesn't say. It just says I have to come to see her when I enter Milwaukee. It says it has to be the first thing I do once I enter Milwaukee." I told mom.

"Well, what she doesn't know won't hurt." Mom said.

"What are you talking about?" I asked confused.

"We're going to make a little pit-stop before we meet with her." Mom said.

"Dang Momma! What you trying to do, get me locked up already?" I joked while laughing.

"Not really, because the paper say, 'once we enter Milwaukee.' Where we're going isn't in Milwaukee. So, technically you wont be breaking any rules. But don't you tell your probation officer though!" Mom demanded with a smile.

"You don't have to worry about me. My lips are sealed. Where are we going anyways?" I asked curious to know.

"You'll see once we get there." Mom ensured. A while later, mom exited the highway and soon thereafter, into a parking lot of a mall. "Lets go shopping!" Mom said with a smile.

"Shopping for what?" I inquired.

"Do you plan on going to college, to interviews, to work in that jogging suit?" Mom asked as she found a parking space.

"Nawl!" I smiled.

"Oh, unless you wanted to wear those rags? We can turn around if you want?" Mom joked.

"You're crazy!" I laughed. Before I knew it, mom and I tore that mall up. I mean we tore the mall DOWN! Mom bought everything anyone ever would need to get a jump-start on life, especially a jump-start on life after being incarcerated. We went to almost every store in that mall and every store outside of the mall on the strip. Mom purchased at least a months' worth of a wardrobe, an outfit for everyday of the month. I had about a months' worth of clothes for job interviews, work, school, and regular things.

We got everything from multiple colored dress slacks and pants to multiple colored and patterned button down short sleeve and long sleeve dress shirts to multiple colored, types, and patterned shirt ties, multiple colored and styles of belts, dress socks, and blazers. We decided not to try on anything for fitting. We tried on one pair of pants and dress shirt and just got the exact same sizes in everything else. We were still on the clock. We also got multiple packs of underwear, boxers, socks, undershirts, wife-beaters, briefs, and other under garments. Mom bought me a nice watch, a couple wallets, two jackets, an Andis clipper, trimmer, & hair grooming kit, various bottles of cologne, and other cosmetics and hygienic items. Then mom took me to Boston Store and bought everything Guess and Girbaud outfits. We even got a few Sean Jeans', Kenneth Coles', and other expensive name brands too. Then we hit up all the male shoe stores; Finish Line, Footlocker, and Foot Action for multiple colors and pairs of Nike Air Force Ones' to match my Boston Store outfits and a couple of Stacy Adams' dress shoes for my casual outfits. We even hit up Wal-Mart for more cosmetics, hygienic, and body products of my preference. I got a few Axes' and Ales' body sprays, some Old Spice body washes, deodorants, lotions, oils, towels, shampoos, and conditioners. Then mom purchased a few snacks, groceries, and supplies. The Lexus was so jammed-packed with merchandise that I literally had to ride the rest of the way back to Milwaukee with several bags on my lap and I couldn't even enjoy seeing the highway road. There was absolutely no space left in the backseats of trunk of the car. Mom wasn't even able to utilize the rearview mirror due to the bag blockage.

Mom bought many other items for me as well. It was a very overwhelming experience. Not because of the purchases alone, but also because of me being blessed to being released from incarceration too. Mom always splurged on me when I was a kid so I knew what to expect when mom took me shopping. This wasn't the first time I had shopped with mom. I always loved shopping with mom, even when I was younger and she would pick out my clothes and have me try them on for her in the dressing room. However, I was gifted and blessed by her generosity, love, and care when she showered me with this shopping spree because I was then a grown, mature, adult. I felt like a million bucks. I had forgotten all about the place I had been residing for the past three long years. It really felt great to being free knowing that I had a jump-start on life.

As we left the mall, I really began to set my priorities in motion in my mind. I contemplated my every move and my plan for success. I was determined and focused. I was inspired and motivated. Also, I wanted to show my appreciation by doing my best when I got home.

As we pulled off the highway and headed towards my probation officers' building, I noticed my old stomping grounds and places where I grew up in Milwaukee as we passed them. Everything looked totally and completely different and changed to me. Grass was greener than I had ever seen it. The sky was clearer and bluer than it had ever been. To see people of my own race, color, and different varieties was very eye pleasing. Even though I wasn't actually at home yet, I finally felt at ease and at home. I rolled down the powered window slightly and took in the atmosphere in silence for a while. The sounds of the city, Milwaukee never sounded so welcoming, lovely, and relaxing. It was like music to my ears. It was like Milwaukee was saying to me, "Welcome home Michael! Welcome Home!" The sights were gorgeous. By then, my eyes hurt no longer, not due to the brightness, but because I couldn't stop moving them. I was too busy looking at everything. Feeling the breeze and air caress my face felt awesome. So wonderful!

Smallest things seemed to amaze and mesmerize me. The bottoms of trees, houses, women, kids, cars, animals, sidewalks, plants, flowers, curbs, trash, colors, streetlights and signs, car horns, sirens, bust stops, and even the bugs hitting the windshield seemed to enlighten me as if I had just been born. Everything that I had taken for granted was appealing to me. I felt on top of the world. I couldn't stop smiling for some reason. Mom and I didn't speak a word until we reached my probation officers' office. We just listened to music.

"Go in there and see your P.O., I have to make a few runs and stop at my job for a minute. I'll be back later on. Here, call me when you're done so I can come back to pick you up." Mom handed me her personal cell phone and told me to call her work issued cell phone. She gave me the phone number and sent me on my way. We had already called Pamela Ivy while on the highway entering Milwaukee, so Pamela was expecting me shortly.

As I entered the probation office building on 600 West Walnut Street, I thought about what Pamela would say to me and what I would say to her. I signed in with the front desk clerk and waited in the small waiting room area for about an hour and a half. There were a few other people in there complaining about their wait time. One guy even left before seeing his P.O. I heard him say, "Man, I got to get to work! I ain't 'bout to be missing money like this!" and then he stormed out of the office without notifying his P.O. or front desk clerk. Several times I paced back and forth from inside to outside of the building until Mom called me on the cell phone.

"Hey what's up? How did it go?" Mom asked.

"I didn't even see her yet!" I responded.

"You've got to be kidding? Well, I'm going to be there shortly, okay?" Mom informed.

"Come in with me?" I asked.

Moments later, mom came in and sat with me in the waiting area. Finally, the door opened and I heard my name called. A beautiful, African American woman was the one who called my name. "Is that you cell phone?" The beautiful woman asked.

"No, this is my mom's cell phone. Here mom!" I responded while giving mom her cell phone back.

"I'm going to have to ask you to turn that cell phone off just until we are finished, okay?" the woman instructed. "Is this your mother?" the woman asked me.

"Yep!" I replied.

Hi, I'm Pamela Ivy, your probation officer." She said while shaking my hand then my mothers' hand. "Please step back and both of you got through the medal detectors. You have to empty your pockets Michael." Pam instructed.

“Um, I would if I could but I don’t have any pockets.” I smiled while patting my pocket-less sweatpants.

Once mom and I passed the metal detectors, we followed Pamela into her office. I couldn’t keep my eyes off her figure as I walked behind Pamela. She was so beautiful to me. Pamela was speaking to us as we followed her into her office but I was indirectly not paying attention. She smelled so good. Finally, we made it to her office and I noticed everything in her office and began commenting on it and telling Pamela my thoughts about it.

After the small talk, we began going over the process, the rules, transitioning, policies and procedures, etc. I was paying strict attention but paying even closer attention to Pamela’s beauty. It wasn’t hard for me to make direct eye contact or give Mrs. Ivy my full, undivided attention. About an hour and a half later and we were finished and Pam sent us on our way. I signed the rules and mom and I exited the building. Mom drove us directly home.

Mom parked in front of her house and instructed to hurry with unloading the car. Mom had removed the bags from the backseat already when she was running errands while I was at the P.O. office. All I needed to do was get the stuff out of the trunk. Mom told me to hurry because she had errands she had to make and was running late. We walked into mom’s beautiful home and dropped off what was in our hands in the living room. Mom stayed and held the door open for me while I retrieved the boxes of property from the trunk of the Lexus. Several trips later, I was in the house and took a breather from all the sweating. Mom told me to head and take my stuff downstairs in the basement where my room was. “When you get time, find the receipts and give them to me.” Mom instructed. Mom made a few phone calls, let me speak to a few close family friends and relatives, and the mom went to run a few errands, leaving me at the house all alone. Mom instructed to take a shower, get dressed, and be ready for pick up by the time she returned from running her other errands.

Downstairs, I entered my room as if I had never left it. I threw all the bags all over the room. I noticed my room had mom’s exercise equipment everywhere but other than that, it was untouched. The big-screen television, G-3 Macintosh computer, computer stand, bed, mountains of books on nightstands were all still there. With no time to tour, I rumbled through bags for potential things to put on for after I took the shower.

The shower was amazing. To be able to adjust the water temperature was relaxing. To use clean towels, a new fragrance of soap, a different feel and smell of good water felt pleasing. I took a long shower too. I think I might have taken four showers in one at that moment. I remember I got out of the shower the first time and I didn’t feel clean enough. The second time wasn’t quite clean either. The third and fourth showers were sufficient and were just plain insurance.

I used the new Andis clippers, trimmers, shaver, and hair grooming kit to sculpt my entire body. No lie, I wanted to be free and brand new of the prison stench that I cut off all of my chest hair, lower hair, front and backside. Then with the trimmers, I cut an immaculate gold-t and beard, mustache and lining. I was sharp as a tack and clean as a whistle. I put on cosmetics and felt for the first time in a long time, like a man. A new man, a real man, and I smelled like one too! I danced in the life size mirror, sung to myself naked, and played around a while.

Then I tried on the outfit I picked out and decided to try on others. Then out of curiosity, I looked in my bedroom closet to see if all my old clothes from before I had got locked up were still in the closet and amazingly, they were. The wardrobe mom had bought me while I was in high school were still there. Everything still looked brand new. Boss, Nautica, Polo, Ralph Lauren, Guess, Kenneth Cole, and many more brands filled the closet. Geeked, I took off my new outfit and put on one of my favorite outfits from the closet; my black shiny Guess jeans fitted pants and jacket with matching shirt. I complimented it with the new black Air Force Ones’ mom had bought, but it was too much black and so I chose the white ones instead. Then I took out one of my black Milwaukee Brewers hats, put it on my head and ran back into the bathroom located only feet from my bedroom.

“Damn, I make this look good. Guess should sponsor me!” I thought to myself while posing in the mirror. “Yeah, this is what I’m talking about!” I felt good. I felt how I looked. “Man, I’m about to get revoked already, because I know I’m breaking one of my rules by looking this fly!” I thought to myself while popping my collar and tilting my hat slightly to the right and posing in my b-boy stance.

Suddenly, I heard, “Michael!” from upstairs. Mom called to me and yelled, “Are you ready yet?”

“Yeah Mom, I’ll be up in a minute.” Then I took one last look at myself in the mirror, winked at my reflection, and blew myself a kiss and head-nod. I had the radio playing in the bathroom, so I turned it off before leaving.

After I ran upstairs to the kitchen, I saw mom and said, "Look mom, it still fits!" with outstretched arms. "The pants may have shrunk, but it's cool." I joked.

"That's not something I just bought you?" Mom asked surprised.

"Naw, this is what I had in the closet from before I got locked up. Remember, you had just bought me all those clothes?" I said.

"No, dang! I forgotten all that stuff was in there. I wish I knew that before I bought you all that stuff." Mom said joking. "Well, you can add that to what you already have."

"So, where we going mom?" I asked.

"I have to go to work. You're coming with me. I'm putting you to work ASAP!" Mom smiled.

"Alright, alright, that's how it's going to be? No problem, let's go!" I said while nodding my head in approval. No time for a tour of the house, mom and I locked up and left. By then it was beginning for the sun to set but still bright out. We headed for Washington High School; my mother's place of employment as principal and my alma mater.

It only took fifteen to twenty minutes to arrive at Washington, but for me it felt like forever. Everything we drove passed I asked mom about. I inquired if such and such still lives here and there, who died, who's living, who's who now, what changed, what remained, what's new, and many more questions. I probably asked a million questions hat ride to Washington. I had brought along my DR-5 and mom and I listened to my music as we talked.

We finally arrived at Washington and it brought so many memories of when I use to attend and was enrolled there. The days I use to visit my mom when I was an elementary and middle school, and all the times I just use to run a-muck all throughout the school from ages 9 to 18 years old. Washington was my school. Purple and gold were our school colors. I remember all my days of playing football, going to football practice, the wrestling meets and practice, the tennis team and practice, the student government, the student community ambassadors club, the principals' cabinet group, the after school hangouts, and all the other extracurricular activities I participated in while attending Washington. I thought of all my teachers, the students, staff, guards, administrators, assistant principals, counselors, and other school personnel. Yes, I loved and owned that school.

As always, mom parked in her private parking space located in the back of the school. Then we proceeded to enter through the schools' back doors. Interestingly, all the other students that attended school when I attended always entered through the front doors, but seeing how I was the principals' son and rode with mom to work almost everyday to school, I always went through the back with her. I still entered through the back even when I got my own vehicle and entered through the back. I had all types of access and privileges with that school that other students couldn't even imagine. I thought I was special.

As I entered the building, my heart was beating, thumping fast, hard, and blood was pumping rapidly. I felt an anxiety attack approaching. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know how people would view me. I didn't know if I had disgraced my name, character, and personality, nor did I know if I had embarrassed mom, the school name, and reputation. I felt ashamed for what had happened just three years prior. I didn't think I was ready for this yet. The feelings were overwhelming. Was I a monster to them as the media on the news stations had portrayed me out to be? Was I damaged goods? How was I supposed to act? Should I portray a criminal image of someone who had been wronged, incarcerated, and a bad boy, mad at the world with an attitude that suggested the world owed me something and an apology? Or should I play the victim, the innocent and misunderstood role? Somehow, I didn't know what to do and didn't want to face the consequences of reality, nor did I want to face so many disappointed faces. I mean, I'm the principals' son, I am not suppose to be representing my mom or the school in a negative light. If anything, I was suppose to setting the tone, setting examples, being a model, and breaking new positive barriers. I was supposed to be in my third year of college by then. So how did I look to my mom's friends, family, and co-workers? Who was I at that moment? Did they think I deserved prison time for what I did or did they support me? Did they think I committed the crime with ill will, intentions, and malice, or did they think this was truly an accident?

Either way, I was now about to find out and face reality. However, once I met and reunited with everyone, all seemed to be happy but respectfully remained calm, relaxed, and cool about it. They didn't make a big scene out of it either. They politely greeted me, welcomed me home, and returned to work because night school was still in session. Everyone used the term, "Vacation", instead of the word, "Prison", when referring to my incarceration. It was so humbling to hear. Everyone welcomed me back from vacation, not prison.

"So, how was your vacation...Michael?" People asked respectfully with winking eyes.

Of course, I received plenty of hugs, kisses, smiles, and even a few cries, but we were all happy. For me, it seemed like I was still the Michael they knew from when I enrolled there when everyone would see a huge smile on my face always smiling so effortlessly. It seemed like they were pulling for me to bounce back, to move forward, and utilize my vacation as a learning experience and lesson. Everything turned out okay and I was not as anxious or overwhelmed as I was at first. I ensured repeatedly to everyone I met and reunited with all of my aspirations, goals, and plans of going to college and focusing on my music. Everyone seemed approving and supportive more on the educational part than the musical part thought either way, it was good for them to hear that I had priorities and even a plan.

My future seemed so bright I needed sunshades man. I hit the ground running. I had everything I needed in order to help me pursue success as I saw it. I felt great. I felt loved. I felt compassion for all of the guys who had been released from prison only to return due to lack of what I now had. I had a support team and base. Everybody who meant anything was behind me one hundred percent and they were at my disposal.

I remember returning home with mom that night and I didn't want to go to sleep due to all the excitement. I didn't want to miss anything that the world had to offer me. I wanted to embrace and experience the world and get my three years back that I had lost.

As I sat on my bed submerged in brand-new everything, I looked in disbelief. I began unpacking and going through my property boxes from prison and reflected upon my incarceration. I anticipated writing letters to the few guys I knew locked up to inform them of where I was, conditions and aspirations. I looked at all the pictures in my prison photo album and sighed, "Damn, they had me in there for a while. But they couldn't hold me forever."

Eventually I went to sleep on cloud nine. IT felt remarkable to be sleeping in my own big ole fluffy bed. It was so comfortable, clean, soft, and relaxing. I slept amongst mountains of brand new merchandise and prison property. It felt good to be home and for once, I wasn't dreaming.