

THE FOLLOWING IS AN EXCERPT FROM MY BOOK - MY AMBITION AS A RIDAH: ONE MAN'S STORY OF HOW PURSUING A STREET DREAM BECAME A NIGHTMARE REALITY

WHAT YOU'RE ABOUT TO READ IS NOT A WORK OF URBAN FICTION OR A GLORIFICATION OF THAT LIFESTYLE. IT IS A WARNING. SOME OF THE NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT THE IDENTITIES OF THE VICTIM'S AND PERPETRATORS. BUT ALL THE STORIES TOLD HEREIN ARE TRUE.

## PROLOGUE

ONE OF MY EARLIEST MEMORIES IS BEING LIKE SIX YEARS OLD PLAYING T-BALL. MY TEAM WENT UNDEFEATED AND TO CELEBRATE THE COACH TOOK US ALL TO GET HAMBURGERS AND WE THEN WENT TO HIS HOME TO SWIM IN HIS POOL. I WAS THE ONLY BLACK KID ON THE TEAM. ONCE WE GOT TO HIS HOUSE EVERYONE CHANGED INTO THEIR TRUNKS AND AS EVERYONE ELSE BEGAN TO JUMP IN THE POOL I REMEMBER STANDING BACK, LOOKING AT THE POOL IN AMAZEMENT. I'D NEVER SAW ONE BEFORE. I DONT THINK I'D EVEN SEEN ONE ON T.V.

ONE OF THE KIDS NOTICED ME STANDING BACK WATCHING AND HE YELLED OUT TO ME, "DEMETRICS AREN'T YOU GOING TO GET IN THE POOL?" THEN IT SEEMED EVERYONE WAS LOOKING AT ME. SO I RAN AND JUMPED IN MYSELF. IT WAS ONLY WHEN I BEGAN TO CHOKE ON THE WATER I WAS SWALLOWING THAT I REALIZED...I CANT SWIM!

I REMEMBER THE CHLORINE BURNING MY EYES, CHOKING ON THE WATER AND SINKING TO THE BOTTOM. THIS LADY NOTICED ME DROWNING AND JUMPED IN AND PULLED ME OUT. ONCE OUT I WAS COUGHING UP THE WATER I'D SWALLOWED AND SHE ASKED ME, "YOU CANT SWIM?"

"NO." I ANSWERED.

"SO WHY DID YOU JUMP IN?"

"I SAW EVERYONE ELSE DO IT."

"BUT YOU CANT SWIM!" SHE EXCLAIMED.

"YEAH, BUT EVERYONE WAS LOOKING AT ME."

LITTLE DID I KNOW, BUT THAT DESIRE TO FIT IN THAT ALMOST COST ME MY LIFE AT SIX, WOULD ONE DAY PLAY A PART IN MY TAKING A LIFE, AND IN THE PROCESS, COST ME MY FREEDOM.

## CHAPTER 1: AROUND MY WAY

I'M FROM CHARLESTON, MISSOURI. ITS A SMALL, ECONOMICALLY DEPRESSED, RURAL COMMUNITY IN THE SOUTHEASTERN PART OF THE STATE. GROWING UP IN THE 80'S AND 90'S THE POPULATION WAS NEVER MORE THAN A LITTLE OVER 5,000 PEOPLE. THE POPULATION WAS EQUALLY MIXED BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES. THERE WAS OCCASIONAL RACIAL TENSIONS, BUT FOR THE MOST PART, THERE WASN'T MUCH OVERT RACISM THAT I CAN RECALL WHEN I WAS YOUNGER. WE ALL WENT TO THE SAME SCHOOLS FROM ELEMENTARY THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL, AND PLAYED ON THE SAME SPORT TEAMS. THAT'S WHERE THE COMMONALITY ENDED.

THE TOWN WAS PRETTY MUCH SEGREGATED. THERE WAS A DEFACTO WHITE AND BLACK SIDE OF TOWN. MOST OF THE BLACKS LIVED IN THE SECTION 8 PROJECT HOUSES RAN BY THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OR IN THE HOUSES THAT SURROUNDED THEM.

IN OUR NEIGHBORHOODS THE STREETS WERE DIRTY, POVERTY WAS RAMPANT AND AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER THERE WERE GUYS STANDING ON THE CORNERS DRINKING, OR JUST HANGING OUT. THERE WERE ALSO VERY FEW TWO PARENT HOMES THAT I CAN RECALL. IN FACT, I CAN COUNT THE PEOPLE I KNEW WHOSE FATHER WAS IN THE HOME ON MY HANDS. THE BIGGEST EMPLOYERS WERE THE BROWN SHOE COMPANY AND GATES RUBBER COMPANY. THE BROWN SHOE COMPANY SHUT DOWN IN THE EARLY 90'S AS THE RUBBER COMPANY BEGAN TO HAVE LAYOFFS. FOR MANY WHO WERE FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO HAVE THOSE JOBS, THEIR ECONOMIC SECURITY BECAME MORE PRECARIOUS AND MANY BEGAN TO HUSTLE IN THE STREETS.

AS YOU GOT INTO THE WHITE SIDE OF TOWN EVERYTHING WAS DIFFERENT. THERE WERE NO SECTION 8 HOUSES, DIRTY STREETS, MEN HANGING ON CORNERS, HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT, OR MANY SINGLE PARENT HOMES. THE FURTHER YOU WENT INTO THAT SIDE OF TOWN, THE HOMES GOT LARGER AND LARGER. THOUGH THE POPULATION WAS EQUALLY MIXED THE SOCIAL, POLITICAL, AND ECONOMIC POWER WAS DISPROPORTIONATELY DISTRIBUTED TO THEIR SIDE.

IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD ALOT OF FAMILIES HAD TIES TO CHICAGO AND FAMILY MEMBERS WOULD OFTEN COME DOWN TO VISIT. AS THE 90'S APPROACHED THE EPIDEMIC OF CRACK COCAINE AND GANG VIOLENCE THAT SATURATED MAJOR CITIES LIKE CHICAGO, MADE ITS WAY TO CHARLESTON INFECTING GENERATIONS TO COME AND ALTERING THE CULTURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD. FOR ME AND MANY OF MY FRIENDS, THIS NEW CULTURE WOULD FOREVER CHANGE OUR PERCEPTIONS OF OURSELVES AND THE WORLD WE LIVED IN, AS WELL AS THE ASPIRATIONS WE'D ADHERE TO.

## CHAPTER 2: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF MY BROTHERS

I'M THE MIDDLE OF SEVEN CHILDREN, THE THIRD OF FOUR BOYS. I WAS RAISED BY A SINGLE MOTHER. MY MOM ALWAYS WORKED HARD TO PROVIDE FOR ME AND MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS. SHE MADE SURE THAT SHE KEPT A JOB RATHER THAN DRAW A WELFARE CHECK TO PROVIDE FOR US. I WATCHED AS SHE CAME HOME TIRED EVERYDAY AND THEN HAD TO DEAL WITH A HOUSE FULL OF CHILDREN. SHE NEVER COMPLAINED ABOUT IT NO MATTER WHAT TROUBLE ME AND MY BROTHERS GOT INTO, WHETHER AT SCHOOL OR WITH POLICE, SHE WAS ALWAYS THERE FOR US.

I HAVE TWO OLDER BROTHERS WHO INFLUENCED ME ALOT COMING UP. MY OLDEST BROTHER, MONTIA, IS EIGHT YEARS OLDER THAN ME AND WAS ALWAYS INTO TROUBLE. HE STARTED GETTING KICKED OUT OF SCHOOL AT A VERY YOUNG AGE AS WELL AS GOT INTO TROUBLE WITH THE LAW. HE WAS IN AND OUT OF GROUP HOMES FOR DELINQUENT JUVENILES. HE WAS LOCKED UP SO MUCH THAT HE WAS IN NONE OF THE FAMILY PORTRAITS THAT DECORATED THE WALLS OF OUR HOME. HE WOULD EVENTUALLY GRADUATE FROM THE DIFFERENT JUVENILE FACILITIES TO JAILS, AND THEN PRISONS. I REMEMBER I WOULD OFTEN GO WITH MY MOTHER TO VISIT HIM WHENEVER HE WAS IN A GROUP HOME. AND WHEN HE WAS HOME, HE ALWAYS GOT INTO ONE THING OR ANOTHER. MY MOM COULDN'T CONTROL HIM SO HE DID WHAT HE WANTED.

TAY WAS A GD, GANGSTER DISCIPLE, AND BEGINNING AT AROUND EIGHT YEARS OLD HE WOULD ALWAYS TEACH ME AND MY LITTLE BROTHER THE GANG LITERATURE AND HOW TO THROW UP THE DIFFERENT SIGNS. HE'D MAKE SURE THAT WE KNEW THE LAWS, CREED, AND CODES OF THE GANG. AT THE TIME WE DIDN'T REALLY UNDERSTAND WHAT WE WERE LEARNING, ONLY THAT IT SEEMED IMPORTANT TO HIM THAT WE DO SO. HE'D OFTEN SEEM PROUD OF US WHENEVER WE RECITED THE CREED OR LAWS FOR HIM AND HIS FRIENDS. HE'D WAKE US IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT AND HIS FRIENDS WOULD BE AROUND AND HE'D TELL US TO SAY THE CREED, THE 16 LAWS, OR TO SHOW THEM HOW WE STACK THE GANG SIGNS.

HE WOULD QUIZ US ON IT. WHENEVER WE SHOWED THAT WE KNEW IT HE'D DO THE GANG HANDSHAKE WITH US AND WE'D THEN SHAKE HANDS WITH HIS FRIENDS. I REMEMBER HIS PARTNERS USED TO SAY STUFF LIKE "THEM LIL NIGGAS ARE ON POINT" OR "YOU'RE RAISING THEM RIGHT." TO CELEBRATE OUR KNOWING THE LITERATURE HE'D PASS US A BEER AND TELL US TO DRINK IT OR JUST SMILE AT US AS IF HE WERE PROUD. IT MADE ME FEEL GOOD TO HAVE HIS APPROVAL.

I REMEMBER ONE TIME I GOT INTO AN ARGUMENT WITH THESE TWO BROTHERS,



BABY CHARLES AND TERRANCE. THEY WANTED TO FIGHT ME AND I TOOK OFF RUNNING. THEY CHASED ME HOME AND ONCE I RAN INTO THE FRONT YARD I SAW TAY SITTING ON THE PORCH.

"WHAT ARE YOU RUNNING FOR?" HE ASKED ME.

AS SOON AS HE ASKED ME, THEY RAN INTO THE YARD AFTER ME, BUT SAW MY BROTHER AND FROZE.

"THEY'RE TRYING TO BEAT ME UP!" I TOLD HIM AND HE WAS IMMEDIATELY ANGRY.

"NIGGA WHAT YOU RUNNING FOR? YOU EITHER BEAT THEIR ASS OR I'M GOING TO BEAT YOUR ASS!"

I DIDN'T WANT TO FIGHT THEM BUT NEITHER DID I WANT HIM TO BEAT MY ASS. I FOUGHT THEM BOTH ONE AT A TIME AND WON. I WAS SO PROUD OF MYSELF AND THOUGHT HE WOULD BE AS WELL, BUT HE WAS PISSED THAT I'D RAN IN THE FIRST RACE. HE TOOK ME INTO THE HOUSE AND BEAT MY ASS ANYWAY.

"NIGGA I BETTER NOT EVER HEAR ABOUT YOU RUNNING FROM NO MOTHAFUCKA AGAIN! IF A MOTHAFUCKA IS TOO BIG OR ITS MORE THAN ONE OF THEM PICK SOMETHING UP AND BUST THEIR HEADS. BUT I AINT RAISING NO SOFT MOTHAFUCKAS!"

I NEVER FORGOT THAT AND IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE I'D HAVE TO PUT HIS WORDS TO USE. A SHORT TIME LATER MY MOM SENT ME TO THE STORE TO GET HER SOME CIGARETTES AND I HAD TO WALK THROUGH THE PROJECTS TO GET THERE. IT WAS ALOT OF GUYS OUT THERE SLIGHTLY OLDER THAN ME AND THEY USED TO ALWAYS TALK SHIT TO ME. I WAS SCARY AT THE TIME AND WOULD ONLY FIGHT IF PUSHED. A PERSON COULD SAY ANYTHING TO ME AND I'D IGNORE IT, SO WHEN I WALKED THROUGH AND THE GUYS STARTED TALKING SHIT TO ME I JUST KEPT WALKING. ON THE WAY BACK THROUGH THEY NOTICED ME WITH CIGARETTES AND MY MOM'S CHANGE AND A FEW OF THEM APPROACHED ME.

"GIVE US THEM CIGARETTES AND THAT MONEY." ONE OF THE GUYS NAMED LON-LON SAID.

"MAN THIS IS MY MAMA'S STUFF." I TOLD HIM.

"I DONT CARE WHO'S IT IS, GIVE IT TO ME OR I'M GOING TO BEAT YOUR ASS."

I JUST IGNORED HIM AND KEPT WALKING AND THE NEXT THING I KNEW HE'D SNUCK UP FROM BEHIND AND TRIPPED ME CAUSING ME TO DROP SOME OF THE MONEY.

"TAKE YOUR PUNK ASS HOME." HE TOLD ME.

I KNEW I COULDN'T GO HOME WITHOUT MY MAMA'S MONEY. NOT ONLY WOULD IT HAVE BEEN EMBARRASSING, IT WOULD HAVE LED TO ME GETTING MY ASS WHIPPED. IT WAS THEN I NOTICED THAT I'D FALLEN ON A SMALL BRANCH ABOUT THREE FEET LONG. MY BROTHER'S WORDS TELLING ME TO PICK UP SOMETHING WHEN FIGHTING SOMEONE

BIGGER CAME TO MIND. I GOT UP AND JUST STARTED SMACKING LON-LON WITH THE BRANCH. HE STARTED CRYING, DROPPED THE MONEY AND RAN. I PICKED IT UP AND HURRIED HOME MYSELF THINKING HE'S GOING TO TELL HIS MOM AND I'M STILL GOING TO GET THAT ASS WHIPPING! I GUESS HE DIDN'T TELL HIS MOM BECAUSE NOTHING CAME OF IT BUT I WAS NOW WORRIED ABOUT THE NEXT TIME MY MOM SENT ME TO THE STORE. I HAD NO NEED TO WORRY THOUGH, BECAUSE THE NEXT TIME I SAW LON-LON HE WAS SO NICE TO ME, AS IF NOTHING HAD EVER HAPPENED. I THINK THAT WAS THE FIRST TIME I NOTICED THE AFFECT THAT VIOLENCE HAS ON OTHER PEOPLE. LON-LON AND THE GUYS WHO WERE WITH HIM WENT FROM CONSTANTLY BERATING ME TO BEING NICE, TEACHING ME A LESSON I WOULDN'T SOON FORGET.

EVEN WHEN TAY WASN'T AROUND, WHENEVER I WAS OUT AND SAW ONE OF HIS FRIENDS THEY'D CALL ME "LIL MONTIA" AND WOULD COME SHAKE MY HAND. I WAS ALWAYS PROUD WHENEVER THEY'D RECOGNIZE ME AND HOLLER AT ME. THEY'D ALSO SAY STUFF LIKE, "LIL MONTIA, LETS GO ROB A STORE. LET'S GO ROB A BANK!" I'D ALWAYS TELL THEM "COME ON." THEY'D LAUGH AND TELL ME ITS GOOD THAT I GOT HEART AND THAT I WAS JUST LIKE MY BROTHER, DOWN FOR WHATEVER.

IN MY MIND THAT WAS LIKE THE HIGHEST COMPLIMENT TO ME, AND NO MATTER WHAT THEY'D SUGGEST WE GO DO, I'D ALWAYS TELL THEM TO COME ON. I'D ALWAYS LET THEM KNOW THAT I WAS DOWN. SOMETIMES THEY'D SEE ME AND ASK ME IF I NEEDED ANY MONEY OR ANYTHING. IF I TOLD THEM I NEEDED SOMETHING THEY'D GET ME WHATEVER IT WAS OR PUT A FEW DOLLARS IN MY POCKET.

EVERYONE DIDN'T LIKE TAY. I'D HAVE SOME GUYS WHO WERE HIS ENEMIES FROM A RIVAL GANG, VICE LORD, SEE ME AND TALK SHIT ABOUT HIM. THEY'D TELL ME HOW THEY WERE GOING TO FUCK HIM UP WHENEVER THEY SAW HIM OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. I'D ALWAYS TELL THEM THAT THEY WEREN'T GOING TO DO SHIT TO HIM. BUT EVEN HIS RIVALS WOULD LOOK OUT FOR ME.

THESE SAME GUYS WHO DIDN'T LIKE TAY WOULD BUY ME STUFF OR GIVE ME MONEY. IT TAUGHT ME, EVEN IF THEY DIDN'T LIKE HIM, THEY RESPECTED HIS GANGSTA SWAG AND WOULD LOOK OUT FOR ME BASED ON THAT GRUDGING RESPECT. THEY TOO, WOULD ALWAYS SUGGEST THAT I GO WITH THEM AND COMMIT ONE CRIME OR ANOTHER. I'D ALWAYS AGREE TO DO SO, AND THEY'D LAUGH AND ALSO TELL ME HOW DOWN I WAS. IT ALWAYS FELT GOOD TO GET THAT ATTENTION FROM THE OLDER GUYS, AND TO SEEMINGLY HAVE THEIR ACCEPTANCE. IT WAS DUE TO THE RESPECT THEY HAD FOR TAY AND I LOOKED UP TO HIM BECAUSE OF THE LEVEL OF RESPECT HE RECEIVED FROM HIS PEERS.

MY OTHER OLDER BROTHER CARLOS, IS SIX YEARS OLDER THAN ME AND HE WAS THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF TAY. LOS WAS ALWAYS AROUND, NEVER GOT INTO ANY TROUBLE

AT SCHOOL OR WITH THE POLICE, AND WAS THE LOCAL BASKETBALL STAR. COMING UP ME AND LOS WERE VERY CLOSE.

I REMEMBER WE'D WRESTLE ALL THE TIME FOR A "WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BELT" THAT WE'D MADE OUT OF A LARGE BROWN PAPER BAG. HE'D OFTEN LET ME SLAM HIM TO THE GROUND AND PEN HIM AND I'D GET TO WEAR THE CHAMPIONSHIP BELT. I ALWAYS KNEW HE WAS LETTING ME WIN, BUT IT STILL FELT GOOD HAVING THAT BELT AROUND MY WAIST.

WHEREAS TAY WOULD ENCOURAGE AND PRAISE NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR, LOS WOULD CONDEMN AND PUNISH ME FOR IT. WHENEVER I SAW TAY'S FRIENDS I'D DO ANYTHING, BUT WHEN I SAW LOS' FRIENDS I KNEW TO BE ON MY BEST BEHAVIOR BECAUSE THEY'D TELL HIM ABOUT ME DOING ANYTHING I SHOULDN'T BE DOING. SO I HAD TO REIGN IN ANY NEGATIVE BEHAVIOR WHENEVER HE OR HIS FRIENDS WERE AROUND.

LOS WOULD OFTEN ENCOURAGE ME TO PARTICIPATE IN SPORTS. HE'D ALSO ENCOURAGE ME TO DO WELL AT SCHOOL AND TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE. HE'D ALWAYS TALK ABOUT COLLEGE AND TELL ME THAT WAS HIS WAY OUT OF THE HOOD AND SUGGEST THAT IT COULD BE THE SAME FOR ME. I WAS ALWAYS PROUD OF HIM AND HOW WELL HE WAS DOING IN BASKETBALL AND WENT TO AS MANY GAMES AS I COULD. WHEN I WAS YOUNGER HE WAS MY BEST FRIEND AND AT THE SAME TIME THAT I LOOKED UP TO TAY, I ALSO LOOKED UP TO HIM. OBVIOUSLY, FOR DIFFERENT REASONS. I NEVER IMAGINED IN MY WILDEST DREAMS THAT A TIME WOULD COME WERE NOT ONLY WOULD I NO LONGER LOOK UP TO EITHER OF MY BROTHERS, BUT I'D WANT TO KILL THEM BOTH.