

# Witnessing Murder: My Life's Turning Point

It's cold out here and I've been practicing my left hand lay-up for about an hour now. I go up for another lay-up and miss it. It isn't any help that the rim is slightly crooked. I can hear my brother talking about this girl he used to date and how she was good in bed.

I miss yet another left hand lay-up and my brother tells me to keep my eyes on the basket and lift my left knee a little higher. I tell him that I should be practicing on my jump shot instead. He says to shoot 10 jump shots then go back to working on my lay-ups. I tell him that I can just work on my lay-ups tomorrow, he starts to say something in response, but a car pulls up and he tells me to wait.

He approaches the car and I can hear him say, "How much do you need?" I shoot another jump shot when I hear a loud POP sound that makes my eardrums ring. I turn toward where the car is skirting off and see my brother lying in a pool of blood with his body still jumping.

I run towards him and yell for him to get back up. I hear my aunty running towards us and telling me to back up. I ignore her while she pulls me away from my dying brother and all I can think about is revenge ...

I wake up to my mother yelling at my brother, Steve, telling him to take out the trash. I try to stay under my covers so she won't come in my room and yell at me for getting suspended from school yesterday.

"Well, maybe she'll take it easy on me since my birthday is next week." Darn, I hear her calling my name telling me to wake up.

Next thing I know, she's charging into my room. I pretend that I'm asleep and she snatches the covers from on top of me. She tells me to wake up again and I tell her that it's cold, asking her to give back the covers. She throws the covers back at me and asks me why I got suspended from school yesterday.

I tell her that this kid named Melvin tried to show off in front of some girls by calling me out of my name, so I waited until after school to fight him. We fought around the corner, which is off of school premises, but they still suspended us.

She says I had no business fighting that boy for words that don't even hurt me. I hate when she uses that saying "words don't hurt" because some words actually do hurt.

She tells me that I'm going to have to spend the day at my auntie's house because she's working a double and she won't come home until late at night. She also says she will come pick me up in the morning and to be in the house by 9 o'clock. I tell her OK. She leaves after telling me my brother will be looking after me.

After she leaves for work I go downstairs and see my brother bagging up his drugs. He tells me that momma be trippin' and to get dressed so we can go. I ask him if we can play 2K10 before we leave.

He says yes, but that I'll have to hurry up and get dressed. I run up the stairs two at a time and get out my clothes that were already set for the day, then go into the bathroom to take a quick shower. After my shower I go and put on my clothes.

While walking down the stairs I hear my brother talking on the phone. I overhear him saying, "I'll be there in five minutes." Then he shouts for me to hurry up and get dressed. I tell him that I'm ready to go.

I feel disappointed that we weren't going to get to play the

game. We walk out to the car and I get in the passenger seat. As I slide into the car he asks me if I am hungry. I tell him that I'm cool and that I'll eat at our aunt's house. I hate the way he drives because he doesn't stop at the stop signs or red lights.

Finally, through his reckless driving we arrive at my aunt's house. He gets out of the car and tells me to go in the house and to call him from the house phone if I need him.

As soon as I walk inside the house I see a cockroach crawling up the wall, I also hear my aunt yelling at somebody. I follow the sound of her voice, which is inside my cousin Jason's room.

When I get to Jason's room she is yelling at him to get up and go to school, but I can hear him saying he doesn't want to and he's too tired. My aunt sees me in the doorway and asks why I am not at school. I tell her that I got suspended for fighting. She asks me if I won and I tell her I did.

Then she drops it and continues to tell my cousin to go to school. Sensing that my aunt isn't going to let him off the hook easily, he agrees to go to school. He tells her he's about to go to school so he can have his privacy. She leaves while telling him that he should be out of the house in 15 minutes.

As I'm about to go back downstairs, Jason calls me. I go back to his room and ask him what he wants, and he tells me he's just about to skip school and hang on the block if I want to join him. I tell him no (remembering the last time I hung out with him on the block we got harassed by the police), and that he should go to school.

He tells me I need to stop being a square and start chillin' with the homies. I tell him that those are his friends and not mine. He says I'm soft and to get out of his room. I hate when he talks to me like I'm a nerd just because I want to stay in

school and become a basketball player.

Honestly, I don't get why people would rather sit around and do nothing all day like my dad and brother. I remember when my mom told me to be better than my father. On my way back downstairs I see ESPN playing on the TV so I sit down and watch it. At some point while watching I fall into a deep sleep.

I wake up to my brother telling me that our mother instructed him to help me practice on my left hand lay-ups. I tell him I'm too tired, and I don't have any basketball shorts over here. He tells me to go upstairs and grab a pair from my cousin Jason's and to hurry up because it's close to 10:30 at night.

I tell him that my mom said to be in the house by 9, and not a minute after, but he says he had to handle something so he was late coming to get me. I take my time going up the stairs because I don't want to have another confrontation with Jason. When I reach his room he's not inside, so I figure he's outside hanging with his friends.

I grab a pair of his Nike shorts and go meet my brother on the basketball court where everyone usually sells their drugs, but to my surprise there's only my brother and one of his friends. My brother tosses me a basketball and tells me to start doing left hand lay-ups.

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*Byron, 17, is in custody at the San Francisco Juvenile Justice Center on charges of carjacking, assault with a deadly weapon and robbery.*

*This column appeared in The Beat Within, a publication of writing and art from incarcerated youth, founded by David Inocencio in San Francisco in 1996. Weekly writing and conversation workshops are held in California, six other states and Washington, D.C. Submissions and new partners are welcomed. Write to him at [dinocencio@thebeatwithin.org](mailto:dinocencio@thebeatwithin.org).*