

Acknowledgements

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Jessica Hall
Executive Director, Prison Writes
August 4, 2017

Introduction

There's so much more to our youth than their eye color, or whether they have kinky or straight hair—Cause I am not my hair, "Thank God!"
And like many youth before, they are so much more than the designer clothes that they feel pressed to buy.

They are more than the designer clothes that are supposed to validate their existence. They are more than the clothes that they so badly want to camouflage the stereotypes of their address.

If you wanted to get to know a person some time ago you would ask, "Where are your people from?"
And some time ago the answer would be South Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, Puerto Rico.

Today we hear the question, "Where you from?"
In BronxConnect the answers ring, "Mitchell", "Eden Wald", "Patterson", "Betances", "Forest", "Kingsbridge", "Soundview", and "Morris".

Listen! Listen as our youth tell you Where They From. Where They From. What's going on where they live and where they are from.

Chaplain Tara Brown Arnell
BronxConnect Director
August 4, 2017

Omar Hooke

Hello my name is Omar Hooke. I'm eighteen years old. My birthday is October 1, 1998. I was born in Kingston Jamaica and raised up in New York. I'm not a bad kid. I just made one bad mistake and I'm here to take responsibility for my action.

The reason why I'm here is because I followed the wrong company at the wrong time but everything happens for a reason because maybe if I didn't get caught I would still be out there doing the same crime.

And I'm here to get this program over with so I could move on with my life without a felony.

I did three months on Rikers Island and the amount of stress and tears I put my family through opened my eyes. I'll never do something that I'm not about. On the day of the crime I was being a follower but I'm facing the consequences, do what I have to do to get my life together and make my family proud for all what I've put them through.

Now I'm a leader. I lead all my friends to do good. I play soccer, go to school and be the good kid my parents want me to be.

Where I'm From

I'm from the trenches
From soccer to stick ups
From marijuana to jail
I'm from uptown where the macks be at
I'm from being broke to making money
I'm from being a player to being a loyal man

I'm from where people sleep on the streets
I'm from where people sell vegetables just to survive
I'm from where kids have to be outside at a young age
Hustling to survive

Where I'm from you can never stay invisible
Where I'm from a lot of kids was raised without parents
Where I'm from politicians fight with each other
Where I'm from soccer and music are the only cure for violence

Bryan Gil Perez

I was away for a few months in Horizons. I was there cause I caught a new charge.
I pled guilty and they was going to send me to a group home for 18 months.
I spent my birthday in Horizons.
One of my birthdays I will never forget.

Where I'm From

I'm from the Bronx where people die every day
where people die in every way
where da police ain't tryin to hear what you say
because of the police someone died today
when you in the hood and the police is up to no good

Every day
people die
when they get shot
when they are in a car accident
people getting stabbed
and crazy people jumping off the buildings

I feel sad that people die
I was 13 or 14 years old when I first became aware
When I saw a man get shot in the park
for no reason

Angel Arroyo aka 'Robby'

Where I'm From

I'm from
Where living to see the age of 18 is a Blessing.
Where I'm from
you got to get on your own.
Where I'm from
you gotta watch your own back.
Where I'm from
you gotta watch who you call your friend.
Where I'm from
everybody knows everybody and
everyone heard or knows everything.
Where I'm from
you gotta step in pee getting on the elevator
Where I'm from
someone's always watching.
Where I'm from
not everyone can go there.
Where I'm from
you wouldn't want to be from there.
That's where I'm from.

Amari Boykin

Amari means to be a leader. I feel like the name fits me because people who really know me respect me. Also, I never go off what other people tell me or follow what others are doing because I tend to do things my way.

My First Day Home

My first day out of Rikers Island. The gates started rising and I knew I was free. The lights were brighter than usual. The air smelled different. I was reminiscing on how one of my mans got sent upstate on Wednesday and somebody got out on Monday in the housing area that I was in and I made it out on Friday.

I was also thinking about how did I go to Rikers back and forth three times. I had heard that it was possible that I could be released to a program but I didn't really believe that would happen.

Where I'm From

I am from New York, the city that never sleeps
White walls of my room
Tyson barking at the door
Most days I am happy
Gangs in majority of the neighborhoods
Constantly watching over my shoulder
Lost interest for basketball
School was hard
Two personalities
Negative thoughts going through my mind
Sometimes portrayed as being quiet
I'm from where people shoot first and fight second
I'm from where women only want materialistic things
They want a man to provide for them before
they can provide for theirself
I'm from where you have to try 2X harder to
be successful in life
I'm from where it's hard to escape old problems
A small mistake could have consequences
I'm from where being gang affiliated can get you
A conspiracy charge

Paris Thomas

Where I'm From

I am from Coney Island
From the subways and buses
I am from the broken down elevators
And messed up walls
I am from the public schools and catholic schools
I am from the naked trees
Where more leaves tend to leave

I am from pizza and Mc'y D's
From corner stores and restaurants
I am from the super egos where everything goes on
I am from the father in heaven and protection of the angels

I am from funnel cakes and hot dogs
From a swollen pinky toe

Zederick Sanchez

Shakey Life

My life is shakey. I have been thinking this day,
I feel like these niggaz gang gonna slay me.
I just heard my judge don't got no heart and if you have been doing something wrong he would make you pay the consequences.
Honestly, if you think about it, it's a good thing, but for myself, I don't wanna be the one who is capable of that, and I know I 'm definitely not the same as everyone else. I'm just someone who has heart and is tough but I know Rikers is not for me.
I'm just someone who wants to grind, get a diploma, and get a good job and just have a different type of life, and in my whole type of time.

Where I'm From

Where I'm from
you always gotta watch your back
and realize you gotta look and see what type time they on
Where I'm from , gotta know you can't
have a lot of friends
they would slay and catch you slippin'
Where I'm from, if something goes down
you all up by yourself and thinking,
'Damn, I'm not nobody, just like them walls.'

Demetrius Pickens (Meechi)

How to Stay Safe in Jail

Some of the things you can do to be safe in jail is minding your own business and don't be friendly with just anyone because the same person you trusted will turn their back on you in jail.

Jail

Jail Jail Jail -Its just a different
form of hell
Emotion is mixed
all you can do is sit
Thinking and thinking
plotting and scheming
Your body is shaking
you wish you was dreaming
Why am I here?
What did I do?
Wish I never did it
I should of thought it through.
I'ma be a man and do my time
This just a wake up call
I soon get on my grind.
I don't want no friend
I will be just fine.
I'ma hold my own
and watch my behind

God is good cause he accept my past
I promise this will be my last.

Kevin Romero

My name is Kevin Romero. I like my name because I believe it fits my personality in many ways. My idea of a 'Kevin' is smart, funny, outgoing and caring person. All my life I've never had a problem with my name, not to be cocky but I'm a funny, smart, outgoing and caring person. As an outgoing person I always keep a positive attitude when it comes to meeting new females. I've always been a smart person when it came to school and real life situations. As an 8th grader I passed a regents assessment with an 85. That was supposed to be taken in 9th grade.

I've always been an honor student. I just got lazy as the years went by.
As a human being I will always be a caring person. I don't like to see others, mainly my peers, down or depressed or maybe even struggling.
I feel most of these characteristics make me a 'Kevin'.

Where I'm From

I'm from a place below the belows
Where a person is committing a crime
And doesn't even know
I'm from a street that intersects,
Simpson & Barretto
Where drugs are sold, guns are fired
and most doors are closed!
I'm from a place where people love
fashion but make wrong decisions just
to bring enough cash in.
I'm from a place where people always
judge but don't take the time to
show the love.
I'm from a place where there's no
respect but once you disrespect you get decked.

School by Kevin Romero

School is bittersweet. Sweet because you can get your education and it also opens many opportunities for an individual throughout life. Bitter because it's a lot of work to get all the education and it also can be a challenge because of what goes on outside of school.

Some of the things that go on outside of school that can affect a person is the environment around them, the bad influences, the drugs, and the violence.

When I think of a bad influence it's a person who is consistently on the wrong track and wants to bring someone down to feel equal. Also a bad influence has a way of convincing one to do the wrong things, making it seem as if it's ok.

Many substances that can throw an individual off track when it comes to school are Marijuana, Xanax, Molly, Percoset, etc. Marijuana, Xanax, Percoset are downers having one feel lazy, tired, and just losing interest in education.

Most of these drugs can get addictive to an individual. Once a person gets used to a substance there is more of a chance that he or she cannot stop or quit.

Yefry Estrella

Where I'm From

Where I'm from is where
you can't trust a soul
breathing
Where when you're doing good
they wanna see you doing bad.
Where people switch up
just because you doing better than them.
Where family is everything
and just say Fuck them all.
Where people say shit behind
your back but not to your
face.

My First Tattoo

I got my first tattoo when I was sixteen. It says, 'CREAM' because Cash Rules Everything Around Me.

Because I really didn't have friends I was getting to the money.
Everyone was switching up on me. They're untrustworthy.
When I got robbed my so-called friend set me up.
He told me to pull up on the block and we were waiting for someone else but the other person he called – he was trying to play it off like she was a female but once he got there they hanged up and I saw he was pretending.

The nigga pulled a gun on me and cocked it in my face. At that moment I thought I was gonna die over some bullshit.

They was telling me that I can't sell dimes on their block and so I left and stopped trusting people that seemed sketchy.
I wasn't selling dimes on their block. They told me to pull up to sell a dime and the nigga pulled a grip on me over a dime. Ten dollars.
But that wasn't the first time.

Naquan Hill

Jail

Jail is like another word for slave.
Everything you do comes from the next man
from sleeping
to thinking
It's all from the next man
even from the time you wake up
It's another plan.

You don't make friends while in jail
Working for 5 cents
Inmates getting violent
Talking about memories
Making you think you learned your lesson

Family crying outside cause
You didn't get the message

God is good
God is great
Thankful for my life today

Joe Jones

Jail

Jail is not a good place to be
Thinking it's greatness but nothing to see
Thinking about the person I used to be
A cell is not an option, no windows
Getting played around like a fool
Getting robbed for calls and commissary
CO's going to the bubble they don't care
Like when you on a block the OG's teach one another
Because they don't' wanna see the mistakes they did.

Where I'm From

Where I'm from is where people have no say
where drug dealers sell crack to get money
to support their family
Where I'm from is where police come mostly
to black communities and breaking bonds
where I'm from is where you see nigga's with guns
so you better run
Where I'm from is where you use your last on
an expensive outfit to impress
Where I'm from you don't wanna
be from
Where I'm from is where selective kids go to college
while others are doing a bid
Where I'm from is a gated community where
you always hear crow crowing
Where I'm from is where you play ball on the
streets to get some cash
Where I'm from is where you get hurt over ass
bet in a dice game
Where I'm from is where people join gangs for
a cover up
Where I'm from is where you think it's a dream
but wake up in the same place
Where I'm from is where faith is taking the first step
even when you can't see
Where I'm from is where you get beat by parents and
take it out on the streets
Where I'm from is where you move independent
and people think you movin' funny
Where I'm from is where every man is trying to make
history and die trying.

Freddy Caballos

Where I'm From

Where I'm from niggas get shot
over stupidity,
Where I'm from young females thotting around
for fun.
Where I'm from anybody could get a gun,
but can't shoot.
Where I'm from young bois think it's
the wave to be in a gang
Where I'm from feens do anything for food
Where I'm from you gotta carry a gun to be
safe
Where I'm from you don't want to be.
Where I'm from you can't trust no one.

Family Vacation

When I was eight years old in the Dominican Republic on a hot sunny day, I was spending the day in a resort with my father and family that had come from the United States. To be specific, it was me, my two sis and mother.

When we first got into the resort I was really excited cuz it was my first time going to one.

What they did first was go to the room and unpack our suitcase. What I did was run up to the first pool and seen and jump in.

Next thing I remember is going down deeper and deeper down below the surface and I just blacked out, but something told me to wake up and I did. I started flapping my hands in the water and got half way up. That's when I felt someone holding my body up up and out of the pool.

The same person pressed my chest back and forth and water started coming out of my mouth.

That's when I opened my eyes and saw it was my father!

Marc Orellana

I can't believe I found myself in jail for eight months. Being in jail you have to shower when staff tells you. You cannot do things whenever you want. You are told when to eat or sleep.

Waking up around people you do not know makes you miss your family. Family is who you need most when incarcerated.

The walls are grey and blue. We have small rooms, like a bathroom with a stool, table, bed, prison bars- that's Horizons. To me it wasn't bad; it's bad for other people though.

People liked me. Staff liked me. They got favoritism in there. They liked me because I would fight for food. If another inmate disrespected the CO I said, "Give me a plate of food and I'll fight them."

I want to finish school and become a fire fighter in the future because my favorite uncle is a fireman. I also would like to be able to support my son. I would like to become a fireman because they never give up and in my life I don't give up.

When I was in jail I didn't give up. I didn't let people bully me.

"It's time to lock in." An inmate told me to go to my room.

"No brother man." I told him and I punched him. If you let someone tell you what to do once, people will do it again and after that everybody gonna try to do the same things.

When you're a fireman you can't give up because people will die. I'm not gonna give up, I'm gonna put out.

Monica

Where I Am From

I am from Prospect
from churches to parks
I am graffiti on messy walls
Pollen in the air
that's dirty air

late nights hearing cop
sirens wondering if it's someone
I know in danger

I'm from a background of
Long, thick , synthetic hair

I am from fake phone personalities
I am from getting money
Hustle at any means necessary

Young girl trying to make it out

Ernan Serrano

Where I'm From

I'm from basketball and gunplay
is all we know
When we can't afford a blanket when it gets cold
Where we have no coats when it snows
I'm from where we sell drugs
So we can feed the ones we love
I'm from where being reckless
is impressive
I'm from where texting is excessive
Where I'm from is no joke
You can see the iron burst out that pole
Where we say we got it for the low
Then the next thing you know
The ones you with just told

Marquise Mason

Where I'm From

Where I'm from
parents use drugs
and young kids
ride around with guns for fun
Where the smartest people
play dumb
Where people talk tuff on the book
but in person they run
Where I'm from
we bang over color
and won't help one another
where the gang are your brothers
and you're lucky
to get home to your mother
I'm from where
you turn nothing to something
where you play the block
all day until you come up on hundreds

Deaven Washington

Where I'm From

I'm from the hood!

Where I'm from niggas get shot every day

Where I'm from the cops mess with you for no reason.

Where I'm from niggas get beat up just for grillin'.

I'm from where people gotta sell crack

to support their family

I'm from where saying the 'N' word gets you 20 push-ups

Where I'm from niggas get arrested for no reason

I'm from a place where people get tattoos at the age of 14.

Where I'm from you can't trust a damn soul.

I'm from a place where you got to
walk around with a gun every day.

Humberto Diaz

Message to a young NIGGER

16, 16, 17, 17, 4 building.
Everyone in here fighting to prove themselves.
16, 16, 17,....bout to be 18 in 3 days.
Birth-day, day no more young boy jail.
No more babysitting, 'bye' to the 4 building.

P. C.step, step, step, cling, cling, cling, the sound of
my shackles, walking down the hall, fresh meat
lil' bitch, ugly nigga, everyone with a different
comment, trying to put fear in your heart.
I close my eyes and remember the words of a
real big homie, MOM...."I love you. Keep our head up."
Step, Step, Step, 'Nigga!' 'Nigga!'
'Eyyyyy yo Nigga', the word 'Nigg'a spread around
Jumping from mouth to mouth like the blunts
we all wish we had in here.

Negros, Morenos, using a word such as 'Nigga' like it was never used to insult
not only your family, your race, but your pride and your honor, in a couple words
Your freedom.

Where I'm From by Humberto Diaz

The Bronx, the type of place where you need to
expect the unexpected
A place where
having to watch your back is a hobby
A place where if you slip
jus know they gon catch you
The kind of place where
even "heroes with a badge" are scared of, The Bronx
Where all and everything is good but also the type of place
where nothing good stays good.
Not the cleanest city, not the most safe

Where I'm from?
Where my people from, where your people from
dont' matter
Culture, religion, race
What puts us together
What helps us learn from one another
but you can't learn and love not only my people
or your people
if you don't have respect
Respect yourself to show respect for other
culture, religion, race
or other beautiful thing
and we are all connected.



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