

LOS ANGELES (1977-1981)

My earliest influence and experience from the gang world is an easy task of remembrance for me. My story begins when I was living on the east side of Los Angeles, on 116th Street between Main and San Pedro. The year was 1977, and I was attending a nearby elementary school located on 118th Street, respectfully called 118th Street Elementary. Most of the youngsters I knew and grew up with in the surrounding neighborhoods and I proudly and boldly displayed the gang banger's influence upon our lives. The scientists, who often analyzed our epidemic, labeled our experience an "environmental impact", but we simply called it "becoming ghetto fabulous". The neighborhood, in which I lived, was reputedly known as Crip territory. There were two local gangs: The first and smallest of the two were the 116th A-Line Crips (A-Line meaning Avalon Line), located on 116th and Avalon; the other and larger of the two was known as the 118th E.C.B.C. (East Coast Block Crips). As far back as I can remember I always found myself fascinated by the local gangsters and the war stories of their lives.

At the innocent and youthful age of eight, my friends and I were considered what everyone called wanna-be's (fake gangsters), but to us even that degrading title was okay. At the school I attended, there were two youth gangs: the one that I belonged to and another one, which hung out mostly around 115th and San Pedro. Neither groups had names, but my gang and its members were identifiable by the way, in which we wore our button-up shirts. Of all the buttons, the only one that would be attached was the upper most top one. Every day during the recess times, my fellow youths and I paraded throughout the school grounds mean mugging and harassing the other school kids; often time we'd never be chastised for our misbehavior. Every day there would be some after school entertainment; simply put there'd be an after school fight. Usually the opponents would be unknown youths from other nearby schools looking to make a reputation for themselves. As time would have it and combat skills acquired through plenty of squabbling, I developed a decent reputation from these after school brawls.

I would soon receive the honorable titles *King of the Block*, and the more appreciated one *King of the School*. I probably fought every young-

ster defending these titles. My style and choice of combat would prove simple and effective. I'd position myself dukes held high, and once I realized I had my opponent's undivided attention focused on my hands, and on our merry-go-around dance, I'd quickly and skillfully dive bomb for his legs, lifting him up and over my shoulders, dropping him head first to the waiting pavement down below. Dazed and half-conscious from the impact of the fall, my opponent would soon be finished off, and I quickly and confidently would add yet another victory to my title.

Eventually my fights in and around the school grounds would land me into trouble with the school staff, and soon enough with my mom. The more fights I had, the more detentions and suspensions I received at school; and the more ass whippings I received at home. Not much later, I found myself bouncing from school to school because of my disruptive behavior. From 118th Street Elementary, I would be transferred to 116th Street Elementary. After one too many troublesome situations there, I was subsequently transferred to Figueroa Elementary. But it would be the same attitude displayed at every school I attended fights, disrespect toward the teachers, and little or no interest at all in wanting to learn the much-needed knowledge that would help and possibly secure a decent life for me in the near future. Unconcerned at that time, and unknowingly to me then, my lack of respect for others would lay a future foundation that would eventually set the pace for my over all mentality in the world of gang banging. Memories searching, I vividly recall one particular summer afternoon.

I was enjoying myself skateboarding up and down the block, when I noticed a commotion in the far of distance. It seemed to me at first glance to be an uneven gang fight, but after further investigation I realized, it wasn't even close to a gang fight. The local A-Line Crips were stumping out a guy merciless. Rumors had it that somebody spray-painted the nearby walls with an insignia of a Blood gang, known as the Nickerson Garden Bounty Hunter Bloods, located in Watts. Since the Avalon Crips claimed 116th as their turf undisputedly, the banging on their walls was an act of war and had to be addressed immediately with a show of strength through the usual beat-downs. Most of the gangsters wore blue bandanas covering their faces like the cowboys from the wild-west movies; and in no particular order, they proceeded up the block chanting their call "A-Line Crip, A-Line Crip", and stumping guys out, who merely had the slightest resemblance of a Blood member.

The one particular guy they were harassing that day was known as Baby Huey. Huey looked like a typical L.A. gangster in demeanor and through dress, but to those, who knew him from the neighborhood, it was clear that he didn't give a damn about banging; whereas the A-Line Crips figured he was hooked-up with somebody, and due to that unwrit-

ten rule he was guilty as charged. And to make their point valid to any hidden rivals, they spray-painted their hood on the back of his t-shirt, took his much-admired ghetto blaster, and commenced to whipping his ass as an after thought.

From that one event in the 70's I had been exposed to enough rawness to develop a deep desire of belonging to a gang. I wanted to bang. The naked excitement, the untaught drama, the unquestioned power, and the gang bangers' respect were all things I desired as a young man growing up in South Central, Los Angeles. The gang influence started to become evident through my clothing, I soon chose and adopted an exact replica to the gang bangers' dress code: khaki suits, Chuck Taylor tennis shoes, Croaker Sacks tennis shoes, Pendleton shirts, golf hats, beanies, and Puma shoes. To the much experienced eye it was obvious I was imitating the role of a wanna-be gangster, but for the inexperienced and untrained people like my mother and others, I was just a youngster growing up with a simple desire of wanting to change my clothing style.

In the latter part of 1979, my fam-bam (family) and I picked up our lives and our few belongings, and decided to head west of Los Angeles. My mother figured it would be much nicer on the West Side, especially when in comparison to the gang-infested East Side; but little did she know the gang epidemic had already swept the Los Angeles County in its entirety; and the problem of the gang world she was trying to avoid, had already engulfed me. My thoughts, my desires, my emotions, and my near future were centered on the lifestyle of a L.A. gangster. Our new apartment and neighborhood were nice and a tad bit cleaner in comparison to the two-bedroom stucco house we'd just dearly departed.

47th and Hoover was now our new address, 5-Duce Hoover Crips were our new local gangsters; and a short time later Ronald Reagan would become our nation's 40th president. It was a beginning for us, Reagan promised an improved nation, and our new environment provided fresh opportunities. But as the years snail paced along, Reaganomics soon engulfed the entire country, as the gang world and its violence replaced our simple lives by misplacing them deep into a realm of an uncertain future.

I was totally craze ridden with our new neighborhood, and it didn't take me long to place names with the local gangsters. There was Mr. Chim-Chim, who lived up the block about three houses down. He was a short stocky dark skinned brother. Then there was Bam-Bam, who on the other hand was the total opposite of Chim. Bam was about six foot two with an approximate weight of two hundred pounds of solidness. Chim and Bam were considered roll dogs (best friends) and were always seen parading together throughout the neighborhood. Then there was Casper-Loc, who lived on the east end of 47th one house from the street of their self-titled

hood Hoover Street. Casper was probably a year or two older than I was, and surprisingly we got along pretty good. He was considered a rarity when in comparison to the other young Hoover Crips: C-Dog, School Boy, Coke-Dog, and Bear, who were all young hoodlums. They were out for a gang reputation, for a reputation at anyone's expense including mine. I learned fast and quickly enough to keep them at a safe distance.

The new school I went to was called Menlo Avenue. Menlo was a far cry from the elementary schools I'd attended on the East Side. The only thing I truly and totally disliked about Menlo Avenue was the irritating fact of it being so far away. I grew up being used to walking only two blocks to school. Menlo Ave would definitely prove a challenge for the legs, being it was approximately eight blocks north of where I lived. But what I remotely appreciated about the distance was the freshness of the neighborhood, and the many unexplored scenic views that I readily absorbed with my young eager senses. Actually, I loved my new school, and quickly enough I developed new friendships. I enjoyed my new teachers, and at the youthful age of ten, I especially liked and enjoyed the girls.

It didn't take long for me to fit in; eventually I became a part of the new neighborhood and as the 70's passed, my new neighborhood and my new experience would become just another brick laid on my stepping stone journey through the City of Angels, soon to be labeled the killing capital of America. But to many throughout the South Central enclave it would be notoriously remembered as the home of the body bags. The gangs swept L.A. by storm, and my mother bounced us from neighborhood to neighborhood desperately trying to find some decency for us. Our new neighborhood after a year or two soon became our old neighborhood. From 47th and Hoover, we eventually landed ourselves on 41st and Main.

When 1981 had rolled around, I was graduating to the local district junior high. At that time, most junior high schools in Los Angeles were furiously becoming recruiting grounds for the Bloods and the Crips. The L.A. gangsters were systematically absorbing and claiming nearly every square block, corner, school, liquor store, park, and even the churches.

The 1980's would soon become the decade of the drive-by shooters; the decade of crack and the crack smokers; and sadly enough it would become the decade that would leave most of the South Central residents in a state of total confusion. Countless numbers of young men would die from the drive-by madness, and a countless many more would be murdered from the crack-slanging epidemic that would eventually blend itself and go hand in hand with the L.A. banging. The 1980's would be my turning point of not just graduating with good grades. It would also become the decade when I'd eventually graduate from my wanna-be status to become a notorious member of a gang calling themselves the "Neigh-

borhood Rollin 20's Bloods", and soon I would be adding my own misery to the already miserable lives of the residents of Los Angeles, the home of the body bags.

