



## From Street Life to Success

October 18, 2010

I am 26 years old and before I met Opportunity Knocks I was headed nowhere fast. Since as far back as I can remember I've had many challenges in my life. I was forced to grow up at an early age. I've had my ups and downs. As a child I've gone to private schools. This got me to be the intellectual that I am today. I had some anger and emotional problems as a youngster but my mother did not want me to take medication. I can say living with my sickness through my childhood years I learned and adapted to my mental illness that kept me up and built up my self esteem, which is the very reason I haven't committed suicide.

You may ask yourself why this young man has ever thought his life was worthless enough to where suicide ever crossed his thoughts. And my answer to that is not anymore. I've found Opportunity Knocks who has given me coping skills to help me deal with depression and its stages. It's like the lens I looked through for so long is now clear and I can view with clarity.

I'm now going in the right direction as far as my destiny goes. From when I was born in 1984 until about 1998 I was just your typical average kid growing up in America. It wasn't until age 13 I started messing up. The first drug that I was introduced to was marijuana, and it was a high. When I smoked marijuana there was a feeling that came over me that there was not a thing on this planet I couldn't master.

As I got older, marijuana became one of my prize setbacks. It made me lazy and not want to do the things that young kids want to do. Not being able to control my anger got me into a lot of trouble. I began to skip school and started "gang banging." I was living the street life and at age 13 is when I first ran away from home.

In my stages of growth and development I've been to jails multiple times as a minor for 4 counts of gun possession, of which all were loaded, and 2 counts of possession of narcotics with intent to sell. All of this was before I was 17 years old. By the age of 17, I was shot in two vital places on my body and my best friend who was in my gang was murdered. From age 17 through age 21 I went through the entire juvenile system of corrections and ended up in the California Youth Authority for 3 years and 11 months.

This is where I was finally diagnosed with Schizoaffective disorder, Bi-polar type. I began my treatment and counseling while there but still had some lessons to learn upon my release. I have been hospitalized 3 or 4 times for danger to self or others. I have been in County jail but I haven't been to prison and I don't plan on going. I have gone to OC jail for stealing a van and was assessed for the Opportunity Knocks program while I was there and was accepted into the program.

I was happy because I knew this was something that I needed. In the past I have had major problems getting the help I needed, like medication to stabilize my thinking and that helps me function "normally" within society. I see the doctor every month. I get medication, counseling, attend groups on dual diagnosis, anger management, and have learned some new coping skills to help me deal with my emotions. They are teaching me tools for life that I need to address the problems I have. I am pleased with my performance, and of course, with their performance. At Opportunity Knocks I feel as though I have a family in the Orange County area, and that's what I like. When I need something, there is always someone there to see what they can do to help or give me direction.

There are lots of reasons why Opportunity Knocks is a positive environment and I know others at the program would say the same thing. I have messed up too long to mess up any longer. I've been through what I have been through because my illness, as well as my out of control anger, poor judgment and bad decisions which is why I now try as hard as I can to keep positive people surrounding me. I want to stay grounded and focused with doing positive things and going places that encourage and promote good.

Based on what I have just explained, now I would say I am headed in the right direction and all I have to do is keep my head straight and all things will be made possible to me. I want to have a good job, a nice house, a car, and have money to spend and more. These are my 5-10 year goals.

For now, I am just going to do the thin and narrow road and stick very close to Opportunity Knocks and the treatment they provide for me and others, whom I call my friends at the program.