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2010 STORIES FROM ONE FAVOR STREET

SHAKA'S STORY

My journey began on November 10th, 1994.
Here in Rochester.

Every night when I hit my knees I ask the Lord not to let it end here...because there is so much I wanna do with my life, and so many places I wanna go.

I like to read books about beautiful people and beautiful places. Places where like, you can look in the clear blue water and see tropical fish, or even see all the way to the bottom of the ocean. Places with mountains so high they seem to touch the heavens. You know what would be cool, to go to Africa and go on a safari, learn about my ancestors, to literally touch my roots. Or go to the Australian outback and slap box with a kangaroo.

Knaw but fa-real fa-real, I wanna live. And that's why I am here at YFC. Here in this building, standing before you. Because I was told by Mr. Jeff Smith, (and he's pretty reliable), that it's because of some of you that I, and hundreds of other kids, have been blessed with a place like YFC to come to almost every day; and, I mean almost every day! ***I thank God that Youth for Christ is here for kids in Rochester!***

Now, I would be lying if I told you that I didn't have other places to go. But here I can look into the staff's eyes and see their hearts. I can look into their hearts and see the beautiful things they want for me and all the other kids that come here on a daily basis. Here I am surrounded by my



Justice "Shaka" Hill

surrogate family, and my true friends. I need them if I'm gonna live to see Africa and touch my roots. Sure I got other places to go, but in those places they talk about death and destruction. Here we talk about life and the resurrection. Out there they are dying in their sins—in here I've learned our Father has already died for us, so we don't have too.

Every night I hit my knees and I ask the Lord not to allow death and mediocrity to be my legacy, even though sometimes it seems like my inheritance. In 2005, I lost my cousin Jason—We called him J-Wiz. I hadn't spent a lot of time with J-wiz, but I really loved him. He had just finished doing a bid for robbery. In less than 3-months after he got home from jail he was shot and killed. And that was only a couple days after Christmas. The whole family was hurting.

In 2008 I lost my uncle Jim, who was one of the coolest guys I knew. Uncle Jim loved football. In 2009, I lost my Uncle Mont. Uncle Mont was really smooth. Me and my cousin, his son, used to just chill together and talk about life. He always talked about taking me to the court, that basketball court that is. Uncle Mont was shot in the head by a girl that I play with and who went to my school. Then two days later I lost one of my best friends. He was like family to me. His name was Tory.

You might think that is a lot for one person to bear... but shortly after that my Dad got really sick. And he fell into a diabetic coma. The doctors had to cut off both his legs. At one point I thought he was starting to get better. He was following my voice with his eyes, trying to talk, and my mother and I were hopeful. But when I was looking at him, and he was looking at me...my dad started to cry. I knew he was dying. The big boy in me said "*You gotta be strong*" but the little boy is still suffering and kicking and screaming today. On a Sunday morning, a few weeks ago, my father passed away. And boy do I miss him.

But I know that the same God that guided me away from the concrete and onto a soft patch of grass with I fell out of a two story window, when I was just a baby—and the same God that allowed me to walk away after being jumped by 3 boys—and the same God that helped me get away when I was chased with a gun at 11—It was that same God who brought Mr. Jemel Baxter into my life. Jemel was there to bring me to Church. And Jemel was there when my father died, to hold my hand, and walk me through it. This is the same God that has my father now— And he is a good God!

I hit my knees every night and I thank Him for my mother, for Jemel, for the YFC Staff and friends I've made here. And tonight I'm going to thank Him for you because if I wasn't a part of YFC, if I wasn't here, who knows where I would be—probably somewhere trying to claim my inheritance.

Thank you for listening to my story. God bless!