

How One Teen Escaped Gang Life and Lived to Tell About It



By JENNIFER GUERRA ·
MAY 7, 2014

CREDIT JENNIFER GUERRA /
MICHIGAN RADIO

A street in southwest Detroit

Gang life is a reality for a lot of kids who live in poor neighborhoods. There are parts of Detroit, for example, where gangs run the blocks. Here's the story of one 17-year old's experience in and out of a gang.

How it all began

Alberto was just eight years old when he witnessed his first gang fight; it broke out on the sidewalk in front of his house. Just a few years later and Alberto himself was in a gang. He said it started out pretty innocently, just some friends hanging out, fooling around. "But then," explains Alberto, "it starts getting more serious. Oh this guy is fighting our home boy, let's go help him out. You're like, ok, he's my friend, he's been there for me, let me go do the same thing for him. Then you fight, you make new enemies. And it just progresses after a while."

I caught up with Alberto at an after-school program where a lot of former gang members hang out. When he first started telling me about his time in a gang, the first thing I wanted to know was: How violent did it get?

"I had about three friends killed, one or two family members shot at," says Alberto. There were constant shoot outs in front of his house, too. "I grew up with a lot of violence around, so [I'm] hoping that my brothers don't go thru the same thing as me is a big hope for me."