

Living the Gang Life

Students resort to gangs when families do not suffice.

Williams seeks family, finds gang

By Haley Hill

All Renee Williams wanted was to belong to a family. Even if it risked her life, she would do anything.

Williams, a junior at North High, has belonged to the gang called the Bottoms since she was 11 years old. This was the only place she seemed to find a home.

"I can't sit there and be like 'no I will leave them [gang]' because I don't think I could" Williams said.

Williams went through a lot to get to where she is now. She was assigned to jump, shoot, and stab someone all within one day just to get accepted into the gang.

Not only did she have to jump someone herself, but she also had to go through the pain.

"I had to stand there, while 11 to 12 people beat me up, and I couldn't fall because if I did, then that would be disrespectful and show that I was a pussy," Williams said.

Williams grew up on 16th street in an unsteady household. By the age of six, Williams had started smoking marijuana with her parents as well as selling it.

She was forced to sell it at school to help raise money for the family.

"If I didn't come back with money I would get my ass whooped, [but] even when I came back with money I would still get my ass whooped," Williams said.

Williams's childhood life wasn't like any normal child's. With selling drugs and watching her father beat her mother, it wasn't what anyone would like to live through.

"He used to bite, punch and burn. He did things to her, things that no one would do to a person," Williams said.

Both Williams's parents were so into drugs that neither of them was ever in focus.

"If me or my brother died at that time, they probably would have never knew, my parents didn't care," Williams said.

Williams's mother was no better than her father. She would smoke just as much. Although the house would always be clean and food on the table, that still didn't mean she was the best caregiver.

Williams stated that the only reason she was constantly doing something was because she was so high and felt she needed to keep busy.

Continued on page 13

Lancer holds onto ties with California gang

By Mackenzie Wyatt

“I live a regular teenage life, straight up” says Omaha North Senior Gustav

Lancer*. Growing up around gangs led Lancer to join. Somewhere around the age of five Lancer decided he would follow in some of his family's footsteps.

According to Lancer, family played a huge part in his decisions stating that he was “put through hell growing up,” and, “when you don't have support you have to support yourself.” Supporting himself was exactly what he intended to do.

At 15 in California, Lancer met up with his cousin. For the three months Lancer was living in California he was committed to the Black Mafia Family and East Coast Crips. The stay in California was short and when he came back to live with his parents he wasn't as involved.

Drug transportations were the

only thing he admitted to doing while being back in Omaha. Eventually he lost contact with the base in California.

“I don't call it a gang, I call it a brotherhood,” says Lancer. To Lancer his fellow gang members were more of a support system than anything else. Foster care and not having a stable home situation also played a part.

“I'm going to college, for sure,” said Lancer. Being in gangs hasn't affected school according to him.

Lancer doesn't think there was any other choice for him. “You grow up in a gang, gotta stay with your brothers. Not saying being in a gang is smart,” says Lancer, “If I was in a better neighborhood, I probably would have been in a little rich boy gang.” However, he does agree that if circumstances were quite a bit different he may not have made the choice he did, admitting “It's better to be gang free.” *Name changed



Photo by Jessica Lafond-Powell.

Anti-gang grants awarded to five Omaha groups

The Nebraska Crime Commission voted in July to award \$280,000 to Omaha-based community groups to help youthful offenders re-enter society, hire a gang-intervention specialist, and educate parents of gang members about the risks of gang life. Omaha has approximately 3,000 in gangs, from associate level to leadership ranks.

The five Omaha-based groups include:

Boys and Girls Club of Omaha - \$50,000
Omaha Police Department - \$60,000
Douglas County Attorney's Office - \$50,000
Empowerment Network/Impact One - \$40,000

Williams Continued

“The only time she would stop is to go back into that room and smoke up some more and then she would be right back out there.”

The older Williams got, the rougher things seemed to be. By the time she was 10, Williams's father was sent to prison and she was forced to move in with her aunt.

Once she moved in, Williams realized she didn't like it, and chose not to cooperate. She refused to listen at home, picked fights at

school and continued to sell drugs.

A year later, Williams had had enough. She started to hang out on the streets more often and spent less time at home.

“That's originally where all the homies chilled,” Williams said.

The ‘homies’ that Williams was associating with turned out to be members of the Bottoms. This didn't bother her even though her older brother belonged to a rival gang.

“I had to meet the OG [original

gangster]; I had to offer money and respect because respect is the number one street rule,” Williams said.

Once she met the OG and got jumped in along with giving respect, she was finally part of the Bottoms.

“I thought I was good, because I had a family,” Williams said.

* Name changed

In their words...

Gang members speak out about gang life.

"If I didn't come back with money I would get my ass whooped, [but] even when I came back with money I would still get my ass whooped."
- **Renee Williams**

"I don't call it a gang, I call it a brotherhood."
- **Gustav Lancer**

"After I got done tagging, they acted like they were going to let me in. Instead, someone crept up behind me and punched me." - **Joey Lopez**

"I thought I was good because I had a family."
- **Williams**

"You grow up in a gang, gotta stay with your brothers. Not saying being in a gang is smart."
- **Lancer**

"The only future is jail or death."
- **Lopez**

Lopez leaves gang, starts anew

By Maggie Peterson

"The only future is jail or death." Sophomore Joey Lopez was referring to the only two options he had in his former gang life. Joey joined a gang at age 13, and a year later, he left that life.

For Lopez, joining a gang was all about protection. After being picked on as a kid for being Mexican in a predominantly black neighborhood, he wanted to be a part of something that would protect him.

Most of Joey's friends and cousins were already in gangs when he decided to join. However, he said, they did not affect his decision to join a gang. Officer

Bonam, a resource officer at North, believes that family and friends can affect a person's decision to join a gang. "Sometimes, it's also a tradition for them," Bonam explained.

To get into the gang, Joey had to first prove that he wasn't scared by tagging something. Lopez thought his initiation was over with. He was mistaken. "After I got done tagging they acted like they

were going to let me in. Instead, someone crept up behind me and punched me."

Lopez spent a lot of time with

his new posse. He participated in tagging, stealing, and breaking into cars. Because of his involvement with gangs, Joey's school performance suffered. "Since I spent so much time with my crew, there was no time to study," Lopez said. He just didn't care anymore. Lopez's gang life was his life now.

A year after living the life of a gang member,

Joey got out. After seeing his closest friends shot, and being shot at himself, Joey had had enough. "I was scared," he admitted.

Getting out of the gang was similar to his initiation, meaning he was jumped out. Lopez's gang life still haunted him after he got out. His former gang members looked down upon him, and his best friend is still to this day in the gang. "All I say to him is, don't be coming around me with your problems."

Despite his quick decision to get out, Joey's gang activity still took a big toll on his life. When asked if he would advise others to get out if they are in a gang, Joey's immediate response was a yes.

"The only power you have [in a gang] is the power to obey."

**Name changed*

"The only power you have [in a gang] is the power to obey."

Gangs: Getting down to the nitty-gritty

By Samantha Robb

Crips, Flatland, Suernos, Eastside, Yakuza, Rebels, Northside; all are gangs in the Omaha area. According to the Omaha Police Department's gang website, Omaha has hundreds of youths who are vulnerable to joining gangs just like these. Only a small percent are actually considered "hard-core" gang members. Those that are considered "hard-core" may have already served time in jail or prison.

Omaha gangs can be all over the place throughout the city. Gangs can range from a neighborhood block to the East or West coast.

Gangs are often small and led by local kids in neighborhoods.

There isn't usually a fixed person in charge, but the oldest or strongest kid is most likely to be the leader. Some of these neighborhood gangs join with others to become bigger and stronger. This forces other neighborhood gangs to join them or fight them.

Occasionally, gangs can be separated by race. People that are interested in gangs tend to flock to members that share a similar background such as a home country where they speak the same language and/or share their same culture. However, this isn't always the case.

When joining a gang, certain things must be done such as an initiation. Every gang is different in what it requires. Sometimes a person might get "jumped-in"

which is when the person wanting to become a new member must endure getting beaten up by several gang members. Other times a person has to steal so many items or stab a person.

There are several factors to why someone would join a gang. A lot of the time it's because that person doesn't have a good family connection in their home life. Also, peer pressure from friends and only knowing the gang life contribute to why someone would join a gang. Gangs can offer feelings of acceptance and protection.

Most gangs operate in a similar way. The gangs have a name and associate with a color and/or symbol. A lot of gangs are also identified with their illegal activities. More often than not, gangs

go hand in hand with the possessing, distribution and selling of drugs. Gangs can also be related to homicides.

Officer Bonam at North High knows all too well about gangs. He spends a couple hours a week on gangs. He said with North being located in gang activity's central location, gangs slightly affect North.

"In past years, gangs were a major problem here [at North]. Now, it's not really as big of a problem."

Bonam still has to deal with gang related incidents though, like gang retaliation in fights. He mentioned that what happens in the streets is brought back to school.

"[The kids] bring back this negative aspect into the school."