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The Challenger

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BREAK THE SILENCE TO
BREAK THE VIOLENCE

In This Issue:

Page 2: I Wanted To Be Saved, Ana Barajas

Page 5: Behind The Hallway Kisses, Megan Phelps

Page 6: Drowning, Nicole Mistic

Page 7: 70 Students Break The Silence

I Wanted To Be Saved By Ana Barajas

Every time the phone rang, I expected a suicide, or a call from prison. I knew as soon as my cousin Droopy picked up the phone—one of the boys was shot to death. This moment registered in my mind because it was the first time I felt a connection to the gang. I developed curiosity for gangs through family members and close friends. It was glorious to see how they carried their pride and tough attitudes.

At age thirteen, I joined SUR 13. All gangs have an initiation process. Some kill, others rob, and in SUR 13, there were a few ways for females to join. You could roll a dice, and whatever number you got equaled how many guys you had to sleep with. The second option was getting jumped into the gang or getting beat up. Another way was an automatic initiation if a family member or boyfriend was a recognized gang member. I was automatically in since my cousins were well known members. However, this did not please me because I did not want to be considered less or *fake*. I decided to be jumped in, although it remains a blurred memory.

My role in the gang was to beat up hynas or girls that cheated or betrayed the gang. Later, when I gained trust, I became “the keeper,” holding supplies for them and assisting during fights.

Women are minimized in gangs because we are perceived as “bust downs” (whores)

and it is hard to gain respect and obtain a high rank. The more crimes and/or the more support one gives to the gang, the higher the rank and respect one receives. I gained respect mainly by fighting rivals and traitors.

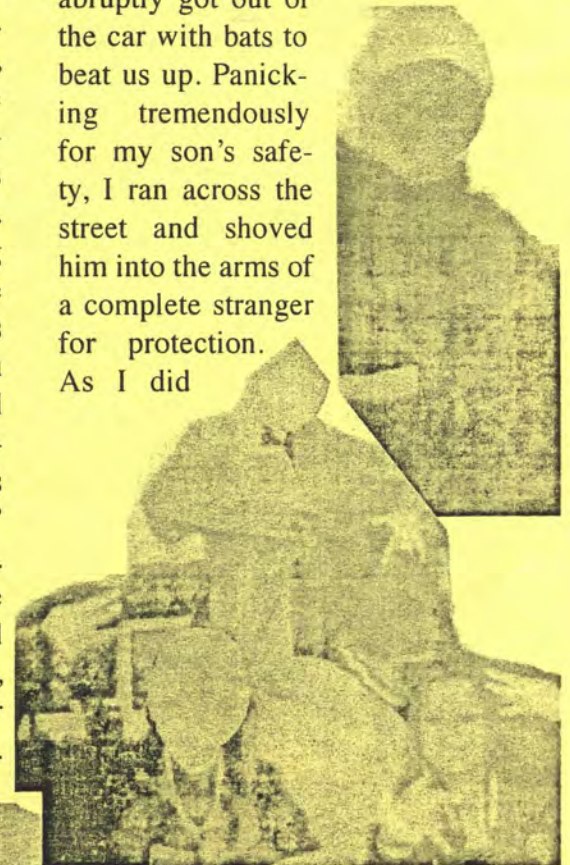
I fought a Latin King in his territory, Baldwin Green Apartment Complexes in Palatine. It was dark outside and I was standing in an open field. I was waiting for my girls who were buying Mexican candy. Two guys approached me, asking me what I claimed. Proudly I answered, “SUR 13, king killa!” This is a great offense to any gang because you are putting them down. My head was suddenly heavy on my shoulders. He punched me! I began to swing punches and landed a couple. He grabbed me, wrapped his arms around me, and told me, “You know that was bullshit you did that, right?” And he let me go. Because I was a cute fifi, and I was tougher than some of the “scraps” in my hood, he now respected me. After this encounter, every time he saw me he smiled at me. And because I was faithful to my gang, I gained their respect as well for lifting them up in rival territory.

I got pregnant at fifteen and discontinued all gang activities for two years. Facing brutal violence in the relationship, I decided to leave the guy. By the time my son was a year old, I was back on the streets.

One day on a walk to a nearby store, my sister Karina, my new boyfriend Cholo—who was one of Carpentersville’s SUR 13’s chief—my son and I encountered the Latin Kings. Their blue car was full of gang members and they abruptly got out of the car with bats to beat us up. Panicking tremendously for my son’s safety, I ran across the street and shoved him into the arms of a complete stranger for protection. As I did



They are throwing up 1 and 3 for the 13, to honor the gang.



this I could hear Karina and Cholo in the background smashing glass on the rivals and shouting curses at them. I joined them, grabbing empty beer bottles off the ground and throwing them at the rivals until they bled. The rivals rapidly fled in their car. Meanwhile the neighbors were

screaming like maniacs and running into their houses like crawling cucarachas. I remember the overpowering feeling of guilt in my chest and thinking, "How could I endanger my little angel's life this way?" I thanked God for not allowing my baby to be harmed.

These events occurred on a daily basis, and the rush with the deep depression I felt is all that remains in my memories. Blacking out was common for me. I don't remember how badly we injured each other, but someone was always out to get me. Most of the people I fought, I didn't know. We fought only to

she might be and continued hitting her even harder for the lie she told. Or so I convinced myself it was a lie to suppress the guilt. I don't know how the fight ended. All of a sudden I was home, at the top of the stairs and sweating uncontrollably. I crawled with weakened muscles to the bathroom to throw up chunks of shame. My stomach was in pain and I was shivering a lot. I was disgusted with myself. I wondered if she



I am in the top right and my sister is in the lower left (2005). We are no longer affiliated with the girls.



2006, I'm 19.

defend a *stupid* belief in our gang. During every fight I felt massive rage. It was rage on top of rage and every punch delivered me from it. I once fought a girl named Lore because she was what we called "a snitch and a bitch," and as we used to say, snitches and bitches got stitches. We stopped traffic in the middle of the street, and drivers were honking and yelling, "fight, fight, fight!" I had Lore up against a truck and kept punching her in the head and kicking her stomach. She yelled, "I'm pregnant! Stop! Stop!" I almost stopped, but then I questioned if she was telling the truth. I ignored the thought that

really was pregnant. I asked God to forgive me because I didn't know *how* to stop. I never told anyone I got sick after fighting, or that I asked God to let them be ok. I didn't want the boys and the girls to think I was weak. The next day I got into *big* trouble, but I didn't mind it because I found out Lore did lie about being pregnant.

With each fight I developed a stronger reputation. I turned to marijuana, and later cocaine and crack, to get the same adrenaline rush I got from fighting. The boys always provided free supplies for me be-

cause the main supplier was my best friend, Mr. Casanova, who was also dating my sister (by the way, he went to prison). I also let them throw parties in my garage Monday through Saturday. Sundays were resting days. We had over fifty people each night.

This included SUR 13's from Carpentersville, Elgin, Palatine, Round Lake, and Fox Lake. Back then we also bothered with Folks: Maniacs, SGD's and some Two Six.

One night, while there was loud music, drinking, smoking marijuana and crack, and inhaling cocaine, there was a knock on the garage door. A SWAT team had surrounded my house. The blue and yellow lights flashed in my face making my mind unsound. There was underage drinking going on, illegal substances, and on top of that, we had weapons. Everyone rushed out, spilling beer and

dropping drugs all over the floor. I saw some of the guys smashing into windows, breaking the glass and bleeding from the cuts because they were trying to get out. Most jumped fences and ran through the neighbors' yards. Others jumped on the rooftop to land on the other side of the street. I remained completely calm, almost oblivious to the situation. It wasn't until the cops arrested some of the guys for illegal possession of weapons and substances that I snapped out of it. I was angry with my mom for allowing the cops to raid the house. I felt powerless and without control. I ran up the stairs to my room, very paranoid, meeting two cops at the top. As their eyes penetrated my mind I said to myself, "Go away, please go away!" I feared getting arrested and going to the juvenile center. They trashed my room. All of my clothes were on the closet floor; only two long dresses were hung. Suddenly, the SWAT team was gone and I was safe. I knew there was an angel protecting me from myself, giving me a chance to wake up. Everything is a blur after this, but according to my sister, we took off to another party.

A great wave of anxiety grew larger and larger within me. I feared everything! Each step out of my house was a question in my mind. *"What if the cops pull us over? What if I get arrested and go to juvie? What if we get jumped? What if the car gets smashed? What if they put something in my drink? What if someone rapes me? What if I have an overdose and they leave me there to die? Do they talk shit about me? What do they think about?"* I couldn't trust anyone anymore. I had experienced too much.

I began to see the gang world clearly for what it is. I was sick,

just sick to my stomach! I didn't want to continue running for my life. I didn't want to worry about unnecessary drama. I didn't want to hurt anyone. I wanted *peace!* I drastically cut everyone out of my life, just like that. That year I abused food instead of crack and marijuana and gained forty pounds. As I slept, I drowned in depression.

One day I made up my mind and decided to go to church with my cousin Carlos. I always had curiosity about God, but the gang life had me chained and blinded with its garbage. I met Jesus Christ and leapt into His arms with complete surrender. I was broken, damaged, my self-esteem on the ground, and I had no will to live. I needed and wanted Him to restore me. I needed inner healing and transformation. I believe Jesus rescued my soul from

the gang life and breathed life into my spirit, freeing me from those chains. Jeremiah 33:3 (AMP) says, *"Call to Me and I will answer you and show you great and mighty things, fenced in and hidden, which you do not know (do not distinguish and recognize, have knowledge of and understand)."* I called to Him because I believed His words. For this reason I believe Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, and nothing is more glorious and victorious than *Him*.



Its been six years since I last saw any on these people. Last I heard, some of them went to prison, some died and most of the women gave birth to more than two kids form different men. I'm an honors student at Harper College and I work with young ladies who are in gangs in Cicero, Illinois. I'm also very active in my church Vida Abundante and prasing Jesus every morning!

Behind The Hallway Kisses

By Megan Phepls

A study released by the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston, Massachusetts says that nearly one in five sexually active teenage girls in the United States admit to having been physically abused by a partner in the past year. What does this study mean for the students at Harper College?

After speaking with Susan McNamara from the Harper College Women's Program, I found that nearly two out of every three women that visit the Women's Program Center report having suffered from abuse from a partner. McNamara communicated that the Women's Program was not originally intended to address the issue of domestic abuse, but due to the overwhelming number of women that have come forward, the Women's Program now offers materials for those suffering from domestic violence. "We changed the program to fit the need," said McNamara.

The program was changed for women like Anais, a current Harper College student who lived in an abusive relationship for over a year. Anais told me her compelling story of her past abusive relationship. Anais stated, "When I was 15 years old, I began a relationship with Tony. He was very possessive and would verbally abuse me by controlling my actions. He felt that I belonged to him, that I was his property. When I would rebel against him, the physical abuse began." Anais continued to explain, "It started with little things, like pulling hair or pinching, but at one point he bit my face so hard that it took three weeks for it to heal." When asked if she ended the rela-

tionship, Anais answered, "No. I stayed with him for an entire year before realizing that I could leave."

Many people read this statement and ask, "Why did she stay with him for so long?" There are many answers to this question. Anais was raised by an abusive stepfather, which meant that in her mind this abusive behavior was expected to take place in a relationship. Anais explained, "My stepdad sexually abused my two sisters and myself. Because we were so young, this created an image in my head that 'this is normal.'" Additionally, because Tony and Anais were sleeping together, a new factor was added to the emotions of their relationship with the hormone oxytocin. Sex creates a physical bond between two people. This is one of the reasons why it may be difficult for a victim to flee from a sexually abusive partner. According to the article "Dating Violence and Associated Sexual Risk and Pregnancy Among Adolescent Girls in the United States," "Oxytocin is the powerful hormone involved in bonding sex and childbirth, as well as in relaxation and feelings of calm. It is the mirror image of the stress hormone, adrenaline, which triggers the 'fight or flight' systems in the body."

The main correlation that must be recognized between relationships and violence is *sex*. This is an element that is crucial to most physically abusive relationships. If there is no sexual activity, there is no release of oxytocin. What must be understood is that most physically abusive relationships are sexually active relationships. The safest way

to protect oneself from an abusive relationship is to first establish the relationship outside of sexual tendencies. This will not ensure the absence of abuse, but it will help each individual to see whom he/she is beginning a relationship with before the first punch is thrown.

In addition to the Women's Program, the Health and Psychological Services at Harper College also offers free and confidential appointments with nurses and psychologists for all women and men suffering from domestic abuse and relationship violence. It is very important that Harper has a department dedicated to wellness of all students, male and female. As Caryn Levington, a psychologist from the Health and Psychological Services stated, "This is a huge issue for many college students."



News Beat. Violence Against Women. 2011. <http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-e3AiKN1yes/ToWH-5wkQx5I/AAAAAAAAA5c/I_AyqmQrHF-M/s1600/3327339071_81907ebece.jpg>. Jay G. Silverman, Anita Raj, and Karen Clements. Dating Violence and Associated Sexual Risk and Pregnancy Among Adolescent Girls in the United States. Pediatrics Vol. 114 No. 2 August 2004; p. e220.

Drowning

By Nicole Mistic

Celebrity drug counselor Bob Forrest stated during his presentation at Harper College, "A prescription drug tsunami has washed over this country." Undoubtedly this includes Harper College. In a survey of 70 students, 7% admitted to consuming Adderall and another 7% admitted to consuming painkillers. An anonymous student taking Adderall to treat her ADHD admitted that once other students find out she takes these pills, they ask her to sell them, offering her between four and seven dollars per pill. However, she refuses because Adderall is expensive and she needs it to treat her ADHD.

Instances like these take place in the worst neighborhoods, and even the best neighborhoods. Officer Tom Koch claims he has worked in them all. He will have been a police officer for thirty five years in June, first serving on the Illinois state police force and now on the Harper police force. Though he can't speak for the other two shifts, during the day shift he sees roughly ten drug-related cases a year.

"I have arrested a few people here before on campus, and they were charged not only with drug possession but for possession of firearms and a large amount of cash," he said. "With one particular case there were sixty grams of marijuana and a gun in the car, and thousands of dollars."

There has been alleged drug dealing on campus, and some of the dealers are not students. Koch talks firsthand about a case with which he was involved:

"One guy I arrested with a large amount was not a student

here, said he was going to come here. But he never did apply to be a student here. It was just a disguise for having so much cash on him, so he could say it wasn't there because he was dealing drugs, but because he was going to pay for his whole tuition in cash."

A likely story. Sarcasm aside, here is a fact confirmed by the Health and Psychological Services: the drug of choice on campus is marijuana (see survey). Koch added, "we also get people accused of [smoking marijuana in their cars] and they're actually smoking a hookah like an idiot in their car."

In surrounding neighborhoods, whatever is cheap--at the moment it's heroin--becomes popular. Koch has observed that, "people are becoming more creative [with heroin]. They're making it into a powder form and smoking it like cocaine." Another trend he has witnessed at parties is "skittling," where everybody goes through their medicine cabinets, brings the pills they find and throws them into

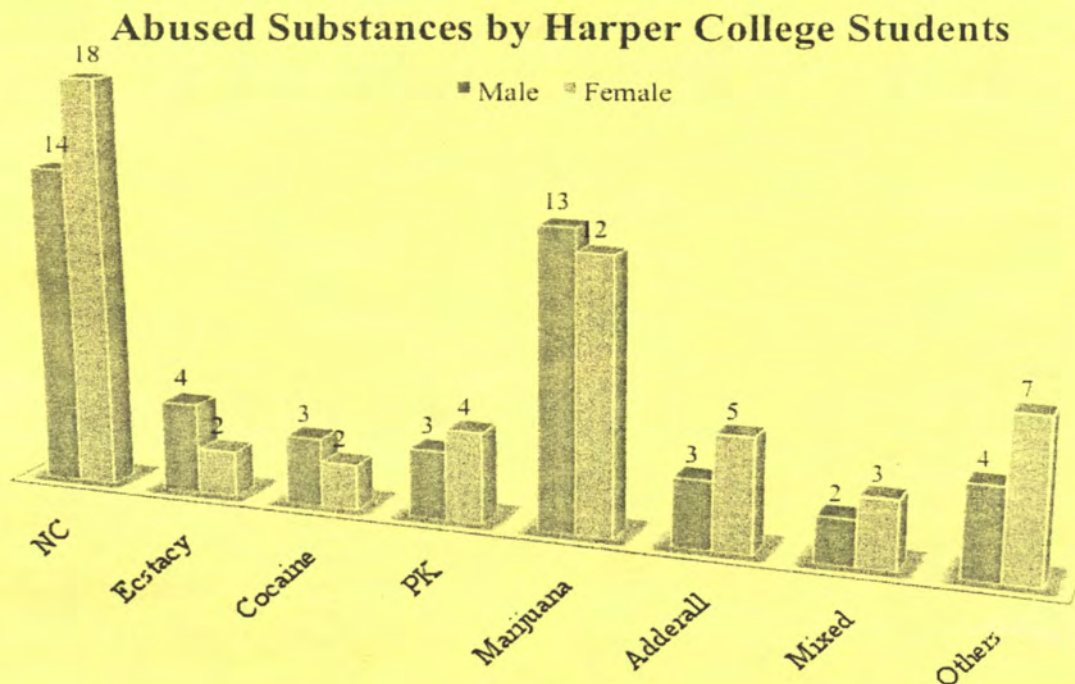
a bowl, and eats them--like Skittles. This was confirmed through Atina, another current student who had taken the survey. She said she turned to Adderall when her main supplier, also her best friend, had run out of crack.

Koch made his most recent arrest for DUI around Super Bowl Sunday. In the parking lot he found a guy passed out behind the wheel of his car who smelled of marijuana and alcohol, had his pants and underwear down to his thighs, and had urinated all over himself.

Besides embarrassing themselves, people who show up to school intoxicated--students and non-students--"can sometimes cause problems with disrupting class and disrupting the educational environment for other students, which is not a good thing for anybody. When you're infringing on other people's rights and safety," Koch said, "that's something we [the Harper Police Department] really need to address. Period."



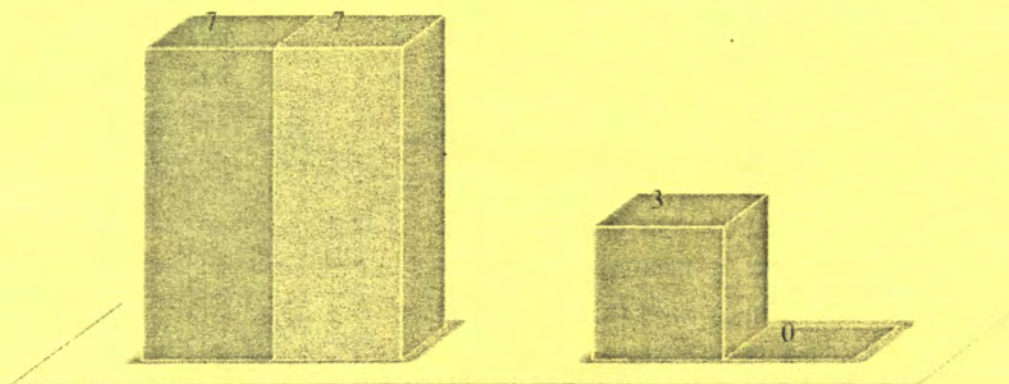
70 Students Break The Silence



Others Include: Crack, Heroin, Morphine, LSD, Alcohol, and Mushrooms
PK = Pain Killers; NC = Never Consumed

Substance Abuse Fallouts

■ Male ■ Female

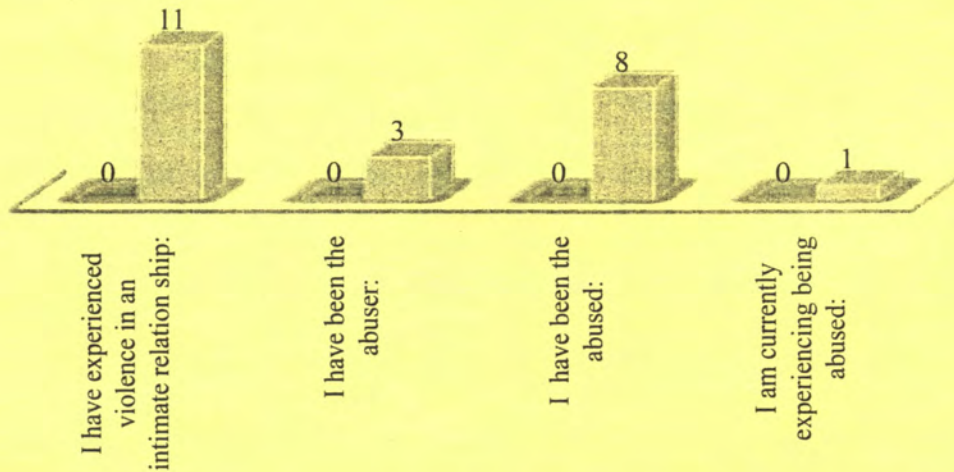


I have blacked out under the influence of substances:

I have engaged into sexual acts for substances:

Violence in Intimate Relationships

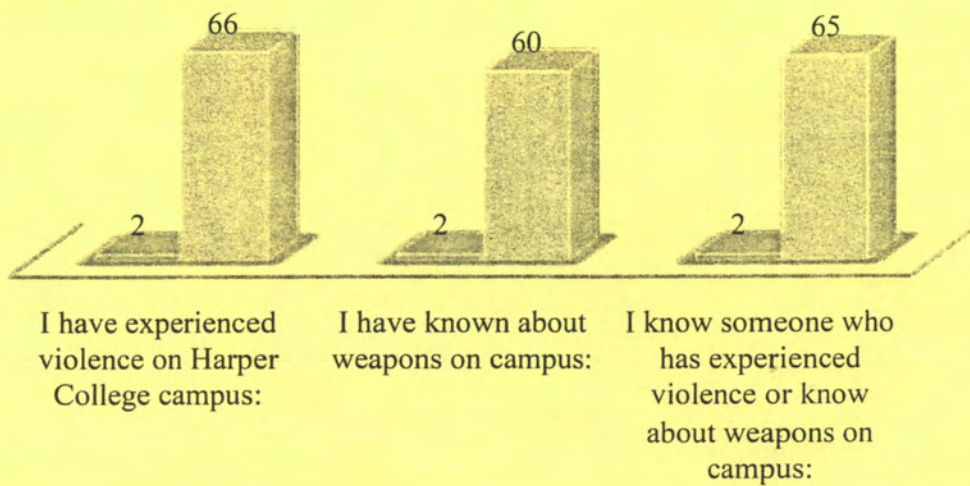
■ Male ■ Female



All other women answered no. Some men did not respond. Most answered no.

Violence on Harper College Campus

■ Yes ■ No



A few didn't respond.