



Unity Care Group, Inc.
"Creating Healthier Communities"

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

How Many More?

San Jose, Calif., (October 17th, 2002) - *It is June 17, 2001, a sunny afternoon. "Happy birthday My," I whisper over my mom's grave. As I look to my far right, I notice a young girl with a rose in her hand; she too is standing over her loved one's grave. I notice a familiar face coming my way. It's my sister Mayra. I can tell she is wearing a certain perfume that was a gift for her birthday. She has never worn it before. She has two roses. I knew, right away, whom they are for. "Happy birthday My," she said in a low tone. She's taking a deep breath, like she is trying to get a hold of herself, begins to cry and apologizes for disagreements they shared. As she wipes her tears she says, "Remember when ..." As she starts to remember the good old days, I start to reminisce too.*

It was 1991; we lived in South Central, Los Angeles on 47th street and Broadway in a ground level, three-bedroom house. The inside was covered with hardwood flooring throughout the entire house. Pictures of grandparents, cousins and other family members were posted on the walls as if My was living in the past and didn't want to face the present day. The house was a dull white color with a brown, triangle-shaped rooftop. We had a big back yard with dirt scattered along yellow grass and a front yard too, but it was half the size of the back. A low metal fence surrounded the perimeter of the front yard. The sidewalk was heavily chipped and cracked, as if that part of the earth wanted to break away. A nearby liquor store wall was spray painted with nicknames and initials that represented the local gang. Children were playing "cops and robbers" in the neighborhood. It was the season of summer, which meant no school for the next two and a half months.

I was nine at the time and my big brother Tony was 14. Growing up without a father figure, I looked up to Tony. I had no intentions of completing school, just like Tony. We would skip school and attend a D.P. (ditching party.) Sometimes, I'd noticed that Tony would leave money in one of the cabinets of My's desk. "Where does he get this money?" I asked myself, but it didn't matter. What mattered was how I could get some money to help My and, of course, myself. My worked two dead-end minimum wage and long-hour jobs. She also had a side job selling her luscious, mouth-watering, homemade tamales.

I could tell Tony was getting worse and worse as the years passed by. One day he came in saying, "Help me, carnalito," as he was gasping for air. I could see the bold bruises, the blood pouring out of his lips, eyebrows and elbows. I knew to phone Mayra knowing that if I called the police they would show up hours later (sometimes, never at all for the fact that I lived in a low-class environment.) Tony was never like this. He was into art and sports. He played for the Dallas Cowboys peewee team and he won first prize in a couple of art contests. Still, he got "C's" and "D's" in his academics. That was better than my grades. But, as time flew by, he began to get in trouble at school, at home and with the law, and he was in and out of juvenile hall. Slowly but surely he was falling into the path that will determine his – our – future. By the age of 18 he was heavily into drugs and parties, his whole body was covered with tattoos. I guess his artwork really paid off.

For my 16th birthday, My gave me a flannel jacket with the multiple colors of gray, white and black. Tony was setting up a party at his "homeboy's" place. During the whole week a lot of people were informed, too many. At the party my friends were dancing to a DJ, who was playing some up-tempo, Latin freestyle mixed with dance and hip-hop music. My brother tossed me a nice cold beer. The party ended around 2 a.m. because the police had shown up and told everyone that the party was over. That ended our enjoyment for the night but still it was fun. Tony and I were on our way home, leaving "homeboy's" place a mess. Coming to a red light, we were laughing at the "homeboy," discussing who was at the party and who wasn't, and what a party she or he missed. Three rival gang members, cruising the late night streets, interrupted us by slowly pulling onto Tony's side. "Where are you from?" they questioned. "Calle 47th Locotes" (Crazy 47th street), Tony replied with honor and pride. They responded with rage, "Forget 47th street." Both passengers reached for their weapons and Tony did the same but was too slow. Tony was shot twice in the back. I was shot six times. Bleeding severely, I remember Tony yelling, "You gonna make it, you gonna make it Danny, you gonna make it."

I stared helplessly at the bright light above me, hearing the beeping sound of the heart monitor going faster and faster and the murmuring from doctors trying to save my life, but there was nothing they could do.

Tony lived to tell about the incident to his friends. My and Mayra were devastated about this situation. Whose family wouldn't be?

A month later, they were still seriously depressed. Everybody could tell by the heavy bags underneath their eyes that they hadn't been able to sleep for numerous days.

Five years later, My received a phone call from the authorities regarding Tony's arrest for murder. It was revenge for my death. She hung up the phone without saying a word and walked to Tony's room. She grabbed his gun and shot herself.

Soon after the suicide, Mayra got a call from the morgue. The following day she visited the penitentiary and broke the horrible news to Tony. This was the first time, which I remembered, Tony shedding some tears. He's currently on death row at Pelican Bay. Mayra found the money that Tony saved from his dealing and paid for the funeral but had never attended the ceremony and never visited our mom's or my gravesite until now.

As I finish reminiscing so does Mayra. She gets on her feet, giving the lovely rose to My, and the extra one is for me. "Rest in peace, carnalito," she makes the sign of the cross. Those are her last words as she leaves. I stand quietly and hear the shouting of the question "Why?" over and over again. It is a ceremony that recently finished. The family of the loved one gathers on one side as the gang of the missed "homeboy" unites on the other side. I overhear one of the gangbangers telling the disturbed parents, "Don't worry, we'll get our revenge."

"How many more?" I asked myself in discouragement. "How many more?"

ABOUT UNITY CARE GROUP

Founded in 1992, Unity Care Group, Inc. is a community-based non-profit multi-service youth and family development agency. Founded with the goal of developing educational and social programs to enrich the lives of at-risk youth, our mission is to provide quality youth and family programs for the purpose of creating healthier communities through lifelong partnerships. For more information contact the Development Department at (408) 971-9822 or visit us at www.unitycare.org.

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