

ADVANCE READER'S SAMPLER (NOT FOR RESALE)

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LECRAE

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UNEDITED SAMPLE CONTENT

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LECRAE



NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

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O I - D A D D Y I S S U E S

**Dear Uncle Chris, Uncle Keith, Uncle Ricky,
Before the Lord get me I gotta say something quickly
I grew up empty since my daddy wasn't with me, shoot,
I wasn't picky I'd take any male figure
You stepped in at the right time...**

**I just wanna be like you,
Walk like, talk like, even think like you
The only one I could look to,
You're teaching me to be just like you**

Lecrae "Just Like You" (Rehab)

“Somebody get the doctor in here.”

A nurse shouts down a hallway at Houston’s Harris County Hospital. She rushes back into the room and tries to calm a screaming woman who is drenched with sweat and gripping the bedside in pain. It’s just past 1:30 pm in the afternoon on October 9. The physician finally arrives, and a handful of heaves and grunts later, a 7-pound-1-ounce baby with a stack of black hair running down

the center of his head takes a first breath.

Cradling the child in her arms, the woman looked into the eyes of her new son, Lecrae Devaughn Moore.

And so my story begins.

My mom, Ormie, had unexpectedly gotten pregnant when she was only 23. She had already broken up with my dad and the two knew they were young and immature, but they decided to get married anyway. That's just what you did in those days under such circumstances.

But my parent's biggest problems didn't stem from their ages; they resulted from my father's abusive personality. He was using drugs and drinking heavily. His unpredictable temper combined with her fiery disposition made for an explosive situation. Not one conducive for raising an infant. My mom knew he was one bad trip away from getting really ugly. Before I even reached my first birthday, my mom snatched me up and escaped. I became a fatherless child before I could even pronounce the word "daddy".

Raising me by herself meant struggling to make ends meet. We were on government assistance, but my mom worked multiple jobs to make sure we never lacked basic necessities. We always had food on the table. It may have been liver and cheap meat and government cheese, but the table was never bare. Our clothes came from Goodwill, but we were never without shoes or shirts. As a result, I didn't realize I was poor as a child. I knew we didn't have as much as some of the other kids in school, but I assumed we were like a lot of other normal people.

We were in Denver's Park Hill neighborhood by the time I reached first grade, but things only improved slightly. Poorer communities in Colorado aren't as bad as 'hoods in other parts of the country, but they aren't vacation destinations either. Crime was common, and drugs were everywhere. My mom grew weed behind our house, and one of my babysitters cooked up crack in the kitchen. (Before the "war on drugs," these sorts of things were more common.)

Whatever I lacked in terms of financial resources, I made up for with machismo. In first grade, when most children learn basic addition and subtraction, I knocked a kid's tooth right out of his mouth. In fourth grade, when kids are experimenting with the scientific method, I was formally (but incorrectly) accused by my school administration of gang activity.

Part of my bravado was a way to hide the nagging feelings of insignificance as a young kid. My mother and my aunts tried their best to encourage me and tell me they believed in me, but the unspoken forces in the world made me feel like "less than." Even though I wrestled with self-esteem and a lack of identity, I couldn't articulate it. And when I did, others didn't seem to care. So I began to believe that my problems and pain weren't important. That I should keep these thoughts bottled up, which only worked until the anger built up and spilled over on those around me.

"Why are you always acting out, Lecrae?" my mom often asked me after I had gotten into trouble.

I shrugged my shoulders like I didn't know.

But deep down, I *did* know the source of it all.

★ ★ ★

Underneath all of my pain and misbehavior was a sense of emptiness. After my mom and I escaped my dad's instability, he decided to stay gone and stay away. And the hole left by my father's absence throbbed constantly like an open wound that refused to scab over. On a lazy Saturday, my mind would sometimes flood with questions:

Where is my dad right now?

Is he thinking of me too?

If so, why doesn't he find me?

Why doesn't he at least call me?

Countless questions. Zero answers.

Sitting in class with my elbow propped up on the desk and my head leaning against the palm of my hand, I'd stare out of the window and begin to daydream about what it would be like to have a dad around. My imagination filled the hole my father left with romanticized versions of what I thought he would be like. Laying in bed at night before falling asleep, I'd picture my dad showing up and making our family complete. I could almost hear the knock at the door and could almost see the door swing open. My heart rate increased as I imagined him walking into our home and fixing our problems. He was an absentee struggling with addiction, but in my young mind, he was a superhero. He had the power to swoop in and save the day, to save me from my confusion and frustration and woes...if he wanted to.

I mostly held it together during waking hours. After playing in the neighborhood, when a man's voice would call a friend of mine home for dinner, I wished it were *my* dad calling *my* name—but I wouldn't let others know. On occasion, however, I would shatter like a window pane and break down. Tears, tears, and more tears. Telling my mom I wanted to go live with my dad. Asking her where he went and why he didn't want to be with us. She would try to offer answers that painted a dignified picture of him, but it never satisfied.

The years rolled on, but the pain never disappeared. I mourned my dad's absence and yearned for his presence. Every child wants and needs a father, and mine didn't want anything to do with me. No phone calls. No birthday cards. No arm around the shoulder after a bad day at school. (Actually, one call and one card.)

I'm not the only kid to grow up with this pain. Millions of fatherless children in America struggle with this reality. The loneliness. The missing person in the stands when they finally hit the

home run. The pain of watching their mothers struggle to bear the burden of a two person job. The sinking feelings one gets when the sun rises on yet another Father's Day. And, of course, the hundreds of aching, unanswered questions that leave them wanting to scream, "How come he don't want me?" like Will in that famous scene from "Fresh Prince of BelAir" after his deadbeat dad leaves again.

I've heard people say that the traumas from our childhoods follow us into adulthood. That's certainly true for me. If you could trace my life's biggest struggles back to their origin, most of them would lead to a childhood version of me wrestling with my father's absence. Even when I wasn't rebelling or having an emotional breakdown, there was a dull, throbbing sense of rejection and abandonment.

Because I felt like my dad valued drugs more than having me as a son, I've constantly wrestled with my self-worth and craved the approval of others. Because I thought the person who should have found me easy to love didn't, I wondered if I was worthy of love. Because he didn't consider me reason enough to stay, I always felt like a disappointment to others. Because my dad's nonexistence stirred up so much anger, my temper flared and hurt those around me. And because I lacked a consistent male role model in my life, I had no idea what it meant to be a man.

In the swirling pain of abandonment and insignificance, I searched for someone—anyone—I could look up to. My cousins and uncles filled this role somewhat as the only older males in my life. They were my surrogate role models, but no one filled in the cracks completely. They were more like pieces of a composite dad. Each had their strengths.

My Uncle Keith, for example, was introverted like me and passionate about music. He introduced me to Reggae, and was always introducing me to new artists. We would listen to Yellowman and Marley and all kinds of records together for hours on end. My Uncle Ricky was stylish and creative and taught me how to be well groomed. He was always encouraging and affirming, and he actual-

ly enjoyed spending time with me. We looked alike and sometimes when people would mistake me for being his son, he'd claim me. My Uncle Chris was as tough as steel, and I drew strength from him. Hanging with him was exhilarating, and I always felt like he had a plan for me.

But unlike the father I wanted, I didn't see my uncles and cousins everyday. Some lived close by, but most were half a continent away. I wanted role models who really understood me and never left my side. I wanted role models who spoke my language and were willing to tell me the truth about life. And this is where hip-hop rushed in like water to fill the cracks left by my father's absence.

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My first encounters with hip-hop took the form of covert missions. At least, that's how they seemed as a five-year-old. I spent the summers at my grandmother's house with my middle school-aged cousins. After I was put to bed, my cousins would turn on "Yo! MTV Raps," an early hip-hop music show. Laying in bed, the music would filter under the door like an alarm clock and I'd spring out of bed. Staying low to the ground, I'd sneak into the living room and peek at the television from behind the couch.

For two hours, the "Yo! MTV Raps" hosts, Ed Lover and Fab 5 Freddy, would introduce videos by the likes of Ice-T and DJ Jazzy Jeff. The images would reflect off my eyes, and I would sit mesmerized. One of the first music videos I saw was by Eric B. and Rakim and featured a kid who looked like I did. My head turned to the side, and I began to imagine I was him, fun and free. The language, scenes and sounds felt familiar, but embellished. It made my world seem glamorous and attractive rather than unfortunate. It was instantly relatable.

On Saturday mornings, I'd wake up before anyone else and go to the living room to watch cartoons. But one morning, I discovered a channel that played rap videos early on Saturdays. From then

on, there was an internal battle about what I should watch. Some mornings Bugs Bunny would win. Others, Nas came out victorious. But over time, it wasn't a contest. I went straight to the hip-hop.

When I returned home to my mom's house, I wasn't able to watch MTV because we didn't have cable, so I sought it out other places. I'd borrow tapes from friends and even watch the free previews for the pay-per-view music channel over and over.

My mother worked at a halfway house, and when she had to work late, sometimes she would take me with her. Whenever the former inmates would rap at the table, I observed and took mental notes about their style and song choices.

"Here you go, little man," an old resident whispered to me one day.

He reached into his pocket, pulled out a mixtape cassette, and slid it across the table to me.

It might as well have been a \$100 bill. I played that tape on repeat. Day after day after day. Memorizing every lyric from every song by every artist he included—NWA, Beastie Boys, LL Cool J. It was all I wanted to listen to. The music consumed me.

As I aged, hip-hop became a regular part of my life and not just something I encountered once in a while when no one was looking. My mom always played music in the house, and as I grew older, she became more comfortable playing MC Hammer and other rappers when I was listening.

My friends and I began hunting down rap videos and emulating what we saw on television. We'd sing the songs and try to replicate the outfits. In the afternoons, my cousins would put down cardboard in the front yard and break dance in their old school Adidas jogging suits. They would pop and dance and have rap battles with other kids in the neighborhood. By the time I was 11 or so, all my free time consisted of listening to music and watching videos. Like most of my friends at the time, I had no other aspiration other than being a rapper. No doubt. It was going to happen one day.

My obsession with hip-hop stemmed from more than my love

of music. It also filled the vacuous cavern left by my father. When I was younger, not having my dad was like losing a security blanket. Without him, I didn't feel fully safe or fully loved or fully wanted. But it became painful in a different way as I aged. I didn't have anyone to teach me to shave or talk to me about women or answer my questions about what it meant to grow and mature and act responsibly. There was no one there to say, "I know what you're going through; I've been there." Young boys need their fathers to model and teach them what being a man means (just like girls need mothers to help them grow into women). Without any constant male role models, hip-hop artists became my heroes.

This is actually a common social phenomenon in poor communities where fatherlessness is rampant. As one African-American writer who grew up with an absentee dad wrote, "In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, the answer [to fatherlessness] for many of us was hip-hop. Nowhere was there a more ready supply of black men with something to say and the ability to articulate it in a way that allowed others to relate and learn than in the booming hip-hop culture. For young black men in search of guidance from someone with a face that looked like their own, rappers became the surrogate fathers."¹

Tupac became my second parent. He was sort of like my mom and my favorite uncle wrapped into one person. My mom was passionate about cultural empowerment, and my uncle was a gangsta. When loneliness grew heavy, when I needed advice or direction, when happiness morphed into sadness, I'd listen to Tupac. Unlike my father, he was always there for me. I could trust him.

On days when I felt the sting of abandonment, for example, I'd play his "2Pacalypse Now" album. A track called "Papa'z Song" might as well have been written with me in mind:

1. Mychal Denzel Smith, "Hip-Hop Father Figures?", *The Root*, June 30, 2011 http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2011/06/hiphop_father_figures.html

*Had to play catch by myself, what a sorry sight
 A pitiful plight, so I pray for a starry night
 Please send me a pops before puberty
 The things I wouldn't do to see a piece of family unity
 Moms always work, I barely see her
 I'm startin to get worried without a pops I'll grow to be her
 It's a wonder they don't understand kids today
 So when I pray, I pray I'll never grow to be that way*

I rarely spoke about my traumas, but Tupac seemed to speak about them for me. He gave voice to *my* angst and frustration, *my* life and situation. Tupac was so special to me that when he was killed, I wept while watching his funeral procession on television. It was almost like my actual father had died.

For those who grew up in a rural town with both parents or in a comfortable suburban community where your biggest concern is what time Applebee's closes, my relationship to hip-hop might sound a little farfetched or silly. But it makes perfect sense for those who were raised in the inner-city during that time.

When I was a child, most people feared urban communities and the people who lived there. "White flight" was taking place in cities across the country, and this meant that many cultural influencers—filmmakers, authors, journalists, preachers, teachers, politicians—didn't understand those of us without the means or desire to leave. Whenever politicians and TV preachers talked about inner-city neighborhoods, they often promoted stereotypes. Television and film rarely projected images of black youth in these communities unless they were cracked-out troublemakers. The implicit message from culture to kids like me was that the world wasn't made for me or at least didn't understand me.

This disconnect to the broader culture was further intensified by an inner-city culture that encourages hardness and machismo. A kid in the hood couldn't just sit around whining about wanting a daddy or family unity without being laughed at or told to toughen

up. Yet somehow rappers like Tupac and Ice Cube got away with it. And this brought kids like me relief.

Hip-hop gave me hope that even though I felt alone, I wasn't. It reminded me that there was often a difference in the value people ascribe to you and your actual worth. It told me that my pain was valid. That even though I wasn't speaking of my struggles, they were worth discussing. And at a time when I didn't feel heard or seen, hip-hop made me feel significant.

★ ★ ★

As time progressed, the music sank deeper and deeper into my soul. But things got real when the music started to flow back out of me.

Throughout grade school, I didn't feel like I had much to offer society. In the hood, the way you form your identity is to find something you're good at and then form a mini-community with other people who are good at the same thing. But unlike other kids, I wasn't the star anything. I wasn't good at fighting—my scrawny frame wasn't going to be scaring anyone off my turf on the playground. I wasn't an athlete—I wasn't interested, and anyway, there was no one to take me to practice. I wasn't the most intelligent—I wasn't flunking classes but I wasn't headed for Harvard either. I wasn't stylish and fashionable—we didn't have enough money to hang with the best-dressed kids.

So there were kids who played basketball and kids who jumped rope and kids who solved math problems. I was only good at hanging out. At after school programs, I'd run around on the playground and goof off with the other hanger-outers, but I lacked any cultural currency or credibility. I felt like I had nothing...but then I enrolled in a talent show.

The Boys and Girls Club ran an after school program that I attended during grade school and they decided that the kids needed something to show off their gifts. I remember there were a lot of dance groups. I wasn't a part of one of those, but I knew I could rap.

So I signed up. I liked performing, so I was excited to have an opportunity to prove I was good at something. I decided to do “Stone Cold Gentleman,” a song by Ralph Tresvant from New Edition. Every morning for the week leading up to the talent show, I would sing into my comb standing in front of the mirror. I practiced my moves and my facial expressions. By the time the day I arrived, I owned it.

My name was called, and I was introduced. Deep inhale. Slow exhale. And then I let the music out. The cadence, the tone, the pitch was perfect. I was dancing and singing and rapping. Halfway through the first verse, I looked out at the crowd. People in the front were bouncing from foot to foot. Slowly it spread, and then people were feeling me. Their cheers grew.

The praise fueled me to perform harder, to dance faster, to rap better. I had listened to the song so many times, I could probably have sung it in my sleep. It was all muscle memory now. My pulse quickened. Adrenaline rushed. My face beamed, but I was locked in. Euphoria.

Suddenly, kids were slapping their hands over their mouths and shaking their heads in disbelief. I heard one yell, “Oh, shoot. Is that Lecrae? I didn’t know he could rap.” And when it was all over, they erupted in applause.

Like I said, where I grew up, one’s currency comes from what they’re good at. From then on, kids would ask me to rap on the playground. The brave ones would challenge me to battles, but no one could beat me. I practiced at night to make sure I’d be on fire when the time came.

My social status rose at the Boys and Girls club, but the deeper longings remained. Childhood inched toward adolescence, but in some ways I remained that baby boy born in Harris County Hospital a handful of years prior. I was still crying out for attention, nourishment, and love. I didn’t have athleticism or toughness or fancy clothes or the highest intelligence. I didn’t have a father at home or any consistent role models to show me what growing up

looked like.

But at least I had the music.

Music was my everything. It was my escape. It was my medicine. It was my therapy. It was my identity. It was my companion. It was my sanity. In the face of so many problems, music was my salvation.

Well, almost.

Some of life's struggles are so severe that even music is powerless to overcome them.

IF YOU LIVE BY PEOPLE'S ACCEPTANCE, YOU'LL DIE BY THEIR REJECTION.

Two-time Grammy winning rap artist, Lecrae, learned this lesson through more than his share of adversity—childhood abuse, drugs and alcoholism, a stint in rehab, an abortion, and an unsuccessful suicide attempt.

Along the way, Lecrae attained an unwavering faith in Jesus and began looking to God for affirmation. Now as a chart-topping industry anomaly, he has learned to ignore the haters and make peace with his craft. The rap artist holds nothing back as he divulges the most sensitive details of his life, answers his critics, shares intimate handwritten journal entries, and powerfully models how to be Christian in a secular age.

This is the story of one man's journey to faith and freedom.

LECRAE is a Grammy award winning hip-hop artist whose 2014 album, *Anomaly*, debuted at #1 on the Billboard 200, Rap, Digital, Christian, Gospel, and Independent charts. His seven studio albums and mixtapes have sold more than 1.5 million copies. Lecrae has been nominated for five Grammy Awards, including a win in 2013 for Best Gospel Album, as well as 14 Dove Awards, one Billboard Music Award nomination, and received both a Soul Train Music Award and a BET Hip Hop Awards nomination. Lecrae resides in Atlanta, Georgia with his wife and three children.



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