Jaquita Brown

At the age of 14, just beginning my freshman year at Manual Arts High School, I was a student who used to go to school everyday and be there on time. Then I got used to the school and some students and started hanging around the wrong group of people. I started ditching, being a class clown, smoking weed tryna fit in with the crew. Later down the line, my uncle, the man who raised me as a father passed away from an illness so I stopped going to school for like 5 months on and off. I finally decided to return to school, and when I did, I really started being bad, cursing my teachers out, talking back, then I got kicked out.

Then I started at this continuation school by the name of SEA Crenshaw. At that school it was like we were in jail. We couldn’t take backpacks, iPads, cell phones, binders, etc. inside the school. The only thing we could take in there was a notebook and a pen. We used to have to get searched at the front door before we could even enter the front door. They used to have their own little A.A. program at the school and whoever they catch under the influence, smell like drugs or liquor, they would have to go there for 30 days.

Then I stopped going there and started and started really hanging in the streets, smoking big weed, getting drunk, hanging with gang members, stealing from stores—getting caught while I was doing all that. I wanted to go to school so I checked into Maxine Waters ***(Employment Prep/Adult Education Center?)*** in Watts. I used to go to school everyday high as ever. I eventually stopped going there too and stayed out of school for some months. And while I was out of school I was getting drunk everyday and popping “x” pills, and I was pregnant taking those—and yes I knew—but I didn’t care, I still wanted to fit in with my crew. One day I took about 3 pills at one time. I woke up the next day and thought that I had to do a number 2, but when I looked inside the toilet it was a blood clot—as big as a small watermelon inside the toilet. I bled heavier and heavier all that day. I was in so much pain I couldn’t take it so I went to one hospital, they had me sitting there for hours just bleeding. So I left there and went to another one. I had had a miscarriage because of all those pills I took and the drugs that were in there. I stayed in the hospital for 4 days.

I even went to Crenshaw High and Whitney Young Continuation High School, but after I lost my baby, I realized I had to open my pretty brown eyes and see what life was all about. I was still out of school, just at home hanging with friends and family members. I once met this guy whom I was so in love with I gave my all—did everything and anything he wanted me to do. He used to abuse me when I didn’t give him what he wanted: money, sex, and etc. I had gotten pregnant by this guy more than 4 times. I finally got pregnant that fifth time and decided to keep my baby.

But then I had a change of thought because I didn’t know how to be a mother. The father would always hit me, and I didn’t want that for my kid. When I went to get an abortion, I was already 5 months in, and it was too late to abort my child. So I had to take time and gain balls that I was really about to be someone’s mother. The father had always told me while I was pregnant he was gonna be there for me and the baby. He was there at my son’s birth and after birth, but when my son turnt 2 months, I became mommy *and* daddy because daddy up and walked out of his life. It’s kind of hard being a young mother. My son was a blessing to my family, though, because my brother, my only brother, had gotten killed over gang violence. He wasn’t even a gang member. Then my son came into our lives. I decided to look at life more brightly—more smart—so I could teach my son what life’s all about. My life changed once my son came.

Now I’m 20 years old. My son is 2. I thought: “if I have no education then my son would have no education,” so I began organizing with the Youth Justice Coalition. And once I started working there I again went back to my thought that my son would have no education if I didn’t, so I became a student at FREE LA High School. And I still am and will be until I graduate and get my high school diploma, and teach that school is important and the streets are not: they won’t take you nowhere but to jail or hell, so I thank god that he gave me my change: my son.