

my name is ANDREW R. SUMAHIT, JR., but for the past 2 years I have been inmate #08A6102. In the past 2 years, I have only seen my daughter 3 times, but I have seen at least 5 people stabbed or cut. I am sharing the story of my life, one man's struggle to break the cycle, the story of the incarcerated father.

I never met my own father, and I've only seen a picture of him once. Just last year, I finally began to learn some details about him. So, needless to say, I was raised in a single parent home. My mother abused me throughout my childhood to the point I would pray every night that I wouldn't wake up the next day. But, everyday I woke up, and everyday I had to suffer again. In 1996, when I was 10, someone finally came to help me. Social services came to our apartment building to take me away. My mother took me and ran out the back door. Later that week, we moved to Richmond, Virginia and she started using a different name. On August 11, 2002, she finally lost her custody and I returned to NY to live with my grandmother.

When I turned 18, my grandmother kicked me out because child support stopped coming. At 18 years old, I was homeless. I slept in abandoned buildings until I got a job as an auto-mechanic and began to support myself. On July 1, 2007, my life changed again. One minute, I was at a friend's barbecue playing cards. The next minute, I woke up on the ground and couldn't even remember my own name. I spent the next week in the hospital having multiple seizures. After a series of tests and observation, I was diagnosed with Epilepsy. Doctors found a tumor in my brain, which causes my seizures. The tumor is the product of blunt head trauma from my childhood. In other words, my mother's abuse stopped in

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2002, but I will suffer for the rest of my life. Due to my Epilepsy, I lost my job as an auto-mechanic and became homeless again.

A few months later, my girlfriend told me she was pregnant. I now had to support a family, so I began to lie about my medical condition on job applications. I ended up getting a job through a temp agency as a forklift operator. I worked in 3 different warehouses and was nominated for Associate of the month in all 3. At the Gap Warehouse, I broke the productivity record by over 1300 boxes.

On May 3, 2008, my accomplishments went out the window. I saw a man attack my 16 year old neighbor, THOMAS TORRES. Because of my history of abuse, I couldn't watch this. So, me and a friend assaulted this man. Me, my friend, and Thomas were all arrested, and I'm now serving a 9 year prison term. 10 days after my arrest, May 13, 2008, my daughter, AYANNA GORHAM, was born.

I always promised myself that I'd be the perfect father one day. Now, I feel as if I'm no father at all. Since Ayanna's birth, I have only seen her 3 times, the most recent was October 2008. In March of 2009, I filed my first visitation petition, but was denied because I had not established Paternity. After that, I began to research Family Law. I found the NY Putative Father Registry, and I filed with them. Then, I learned that a Putative Father has less parental rights than a Legal Father, so I petitioned for Paternity Proceedings. After a long process, I proved my Paternity and received the final paperwork 2 weeks ago. Now, I am preparing to re-petition for visitation.

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In June 2009 however, my worst nightmare came true. I was contacted and notified that my daughter's mother was on trial for child Abuse and Neglect. I wrote the judge, and was allowed to attend the court proceedings. I learned that my daughter's mother, SHATIKA GORHAM, had been hitting my infant daughter. I also learned that Shatika left her 8 year old sister to care for my daughter. My daughter received a series of 3 surgeries to repair her arm after falling down the third floor staircase. Shatika pled guilty and received a 12 month A.C.D. with court-mandated programs. She still has custody of my daughter. Once again, the justice system fails.

As DR. CARL MAZZA said, "Incarceration doesn't excuse you from the role you play as a father." This has become my motto. So far, I have already completed 2 parenting programs: one with the Osborne Association and one with the Alternatives to Violence Project. Just this week, I gave a presentation on Incarcerated Fathers as my final project for my Inmate Program Associate class. Everywhere I go, I encourage men to step up and be men. Because there is a difference between a male and a MAN, as there is a difference between a FATHER and a guy who has kids. I was 23 years old the first time I got answers to questions about my father. I refuse to let my daughter do the same. Every day that passes is one more day Ayanna is deprived of the love I have for her. So, I spend every day trying to get involved in her life. 2 weeks ago, my determination grew a million times stronger when I read my daughter's middle name for the first time. I choose to be a man; I choose to be a father; I choose to break the cycle. My incarceration does not define who I am, but I am the Incarcerated Father.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

FEBRUARY 2, 2010

Enclosed, please find my essay about my life. My essay is titled "The Incarcerated Father" and is approximately 958 words. Everything I have written is fact and comes from the depths of my heart. I hope you will enjoy what you are about to read, and I hope it touches your heart. I welcome and look forward to feedback and comments. I can be contacted via mail as follows:

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I also have a webpage with my music and artwork at:
WWW.MYSPACE.COM/ANDYOMUSIC

Thank you for your time and consideration.

-A/R. St. J. 2-2-10