

IN TOO DEEP

LUIS

"I started changing. I started getting more (material items), and my grandma would ask me, 'How you doing this?' and I wouldn't say nothing, and as I got older, she figured stuff out.

"She'd always speak her mind, but there was nothing she could really do. She would say, 'You gotta move out!'"

"I always wanted nice things, but I didn't like to ask, so I just started doing my own thing so I could get it myself.

"The idea of working a job wasn't appealing at that time and age. You're young, so you want to have fun.

"I was raised around all the gang stuff, all my uncles, everyone in prison. Honestly, the only reason I never joined one was because they were all locked up. We just started getting into drugs, selling and stuff.

In 2010, when he was 16, Luis and his accomplices robbed three other youths, taking their marijuana at a public park. The incident came out later as a bargaining tool when one of the three youths they had robbed got into trouble, he said.

Luis was arrested when he was 18 and was found guilty of first-degree robbery in Multnomah County.

"I didn't really have a big circle, when events like this took place, it was a small circle, it was all about loyalty, understanding that if this is the type of lifestyle you want to live – a fast lifestyle – this is what comes with it."

Back then, he said, he didn't see any other paths he could take.

TREI

"I just had a baby. I got a kid, you know, times was rough. I was doing everything in my power to provide, and my mom, she wasn't really the open arms (type). She gotta get out; she gotta get it too. She got like six kids, not counting me, so it's like, 'I can't take on another one.' So I was like, whatever, shot her the middle finger and went about my business, selling dope. It was just the way to go – robbing people, it was just bad. At the time, my life was pretty bad.

"All I could think about was like, I was a baby that had a baby. I was 15 turning 16.

"I didn't know what to do, and then I found out I had a warrant, and I was like, I gotta go. So I got me a Greyhound ticket, and got on the first Greyhound to Oregon (from Texas)."

According to Multnomah County court documents, Trei had two active arrest warrants for robberies he committed in Texas that same year, 2012.

"Told my auntie I was on my way. Within a week of me getting to Oregon, I moved out by myself. Stayed with a girl. She knew I had a kid and it wasn't forever, and I was on the run. It was like, let's party.

"I came down here with quite a bit of money, so I wasn't like mooching. Then my pockets was running dry, so I clicked up with some of the homies out here, because I'm known all over, and I just fell right back into it. And one day, nothing specific, we was all getting drunk, and me and one of my co-defendants – I'm the only person that got

Bradshaw said gangs are often not lucrative, despite expectations.

"There's the intent sometimes that you're going to go into this and have your BMW, your Mercedes and have all this fancy stuff. In reality, that's not true for most people. There might be some financial gains, but it's pretty limited, and half the time it seems like some of the girls they're hanging out with are the ones who are actually paying for their phone, buying them clothes, and giving them some money here and there. Most of them aren't really making it financially from doing this."

caught. Long story short, we went to the store – I'm only 17, and he's fairly older, he's like 24 – I gave him some money for the drinks, and started walking up the streets, and seen the opposition, and he was like, 'Let's kick it,' and I'm like, 'Fuck it, we banging right? Why we gonna stop now?'

"I just ran up on him, ended up stabbing the dude eight times. But that's just the price of gang banging. It's like if I chose this lifestyle, then I'm eventually going to have to do things I don't want to do. But since I been doing it for so long, I became equipped – it's almost just like an instinct to just keep doing it. It was weird – you get a gun in your hand, you shoot. You get a knife in your hand, you stab. That's just the way it was."

Court documents tell a slightly different story. According to reports, Trei, with an accomplice, committed two robberies within minutes of each other late one night in July 2012. One victim suffered a cut on his hand, and another was stabbed in the chest, deflating his right lung. At first he thought he'd been punched.

JOSEFINA

Josefina said that as a teenager, the most important thing to her was respect.

"That's what I thrived off of, like having a bigger reputation for myself, for like fighting or whatever. I wanted to be known like that."

Juvenile offenders can be granted a second-look hearing halfway through their sentence to determine if they are rehabilitated and can be released early. All four of the youths interviewed for this story were denied this hearing, and have no chance of early release.

Multnomah County District Attorney's Office recently changed its policy regarding second look hearings. Before May 2014, the district attorney's office unilaterally asked youths charged with Measure 11 offenses to waive their right to a second look hearing during plea negotiations. Now, if youths are charged with certain Measure 11 crimes – there are five out of the 21 crimes that are eligible – and they plead down to a crime that is not Measure 11, they are eligible for a second look hearing, dependent on a list of

She said at the time, she thought she was getting that respect.

"But looking back, probably not. I guess I thought people looked up to me, since I didn't have anyone to look up to. I wanted to be that person that people looked up to and wanted to be like. I was a bit of a show-off. I had a big ego, and I still have a big ego. But now that I look back, I don't see it as respect. I don't think I got what I wanted out of it.

"In 2009, when I really started getting involved in gangs and stuff, I had this boyfriend and we were tagging on this school. We were stupid and we put our nicknames on it, and the cops knew us. They saw me and took me downtown Gresham, and I got on probation for a year.

"In 2010 I was in (rehab) for four months."

Josefina said she started using drugs and alcohol at age 10. She started using methamphetamine occasionally at age 13.

"When I got out, I was doing good. I was sober for a few months. And in December I had alcohol poisoning really bad, and I had to go to the hospital, and my mom, she couldn't take care of me anymore, and so she basically put me in DHS custody. I went to court, and they told me to pack my bags, and they put me in a program, and I didn't stay there, and I kept running."

In 2011, Josefina lured a 13-year-old gang member to his death, at the request of her boyfriend. She claimed in court that she didn't know her boyfriend and his brother were bringing guns to the altercation and that the victim would die.

She is serving a 15-year sentence at Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility in Albany.

"He was telling me, 'Set him up, set him up,' and I told him no, because he was my friend, and I told him I didn't want to, and he's like, 'If you love me, you would do it.' and that's where he got me, because I did love him and I would do anything for him, and I said 'OK.'

"Right after it happened, I didn't want to hang out with that crowd anymore. I wasn't about any of that stuff no more. I automatically became weak, and I didn't want to go out anymore. I became afraid of everything and everyone. I wasn't who I

other mitigating factors, such as criminal history. This change would not have granted any of the youths featured in this story a second look hearing.

"I wish all youth were granted a second look," Puentes said, "so that they could go in front of a judge at their halfway point and show a judge what they've done, and the person they are that day, and have a judge make a decision on if they feel it's beneficial and in the community's best interest to spend another however much – whether it be two and a half years, or 15 years, or 20 years, more. I wish every case had that."

Puentes said most of the gang-involved girls incarcerated at Oak Creek are there because they did something under the influence of a boyfriend.

"It wasn't something that they did on their own. At least the ones I've worked with. I can't think of one girl who had gang issues who did it on her own."

built myself up to be.

"I think about how (the victim) is never going to have a birthday or Christmas, or any holidays with his family. I think about it every time there's a holiday, or on his birthday. I think highly of him.

"I know the media made me seem like I didn't care, or that I was like cold-hearted, but I'm actually a very caring person. I care about people and how they feel, I think I used to be a bully because I was bullied, and once I started realizing my patterns, like I became – especially in here I realized that – and I became very caring.

"People make mistakes, and some people don't get second chances, but I do feel bad for what I did."

MARSEL

For Marsel, fitting in was important, and being in a gang was all about the camaraderie.

"It's friends! It's not even about money. Part of the lifestyle is getting fast money, but getting fast money and the gang lifestyle are kind of separated, in my era. It's kinda like not mixing business with personal, you know. And like, the gang is more like your personal beliefs or your personal friends."

Marsel got a gun his sophomore year of high school. He traded his Xbox 360 for it.

"At first it started with just shooting in the air and then shooting at nothing and then shooting at a tree."

"But then, I started having it every day and playing with it and doing shit with it to get myself ready for the moment."

Did he know he'd eventually shoot someone?
"No. I mean I thought about it, like if something happened then yeah, but it wasn't, 'I'm going to shoot somebody. I'm going to kill somebody.' But that's what can happen and that's what may happen, because that's what this thing is used for."

At age 16, Marsel shot and killed a rival gang member at a bus stop in East Portland, resulting in a 19-year sentence.

He said he pulled the trigger "to prove to myself and to the people that I was around, that this is the life that I want to sign up for."

"It started on the bus, the altercation, words being exchanged, and from there, one thing led to another. I told myself, 'Shoot.' And then, 'Don't shoot. Shoot, don't shoot.' I was going back and forth. Then I just turned around and started shooting.

"The altercation, and getting off the bus, all that's happened, so now you just have one choice to make, you going to shoot or not going to shoot. I chose shoot.