

# From Gangs to Grace

continued ▲ from Front

Nicky wanted her party to be perfect. There were streamers, cakes, chicken and punch, but Nicky had a sinking feeling inside. Something was telling her the night would not go off as planned.

As the evening wore on, rival gang members did start "talking." Soon after, a fight broke out between Nicky's friend "Red Dog," a Blood; and a member of the Crips gang. The Crip was asked to leave, but as he walked out the door he muttered, "This ain't over."

Moments later, a Jeep drove up and Red Dog strolled outside. Nicky told him not to go. Judgment impaired and temper flaring, he ignored her. He approached the car and crack, crack, crack, gunshots blasted from a passenger seat shooter. Red Dog took off running and Nicky quickly lost sight of him as he disappeared between houses. By the way he sprinted away, she assumed he evaded the gunfire.

Regardless, the sight made her sick to her stomach.

When she got back inside, she realized no one had heard the gunshots over the thundering noise of the music and dancing. All she said was, "party's over."

Red Dog's "homies" found him later that night and dragged him back to his house. They gave him to his father and asked if he would be okay. Red Dog's father felt his pulse. "My boy is dead," he sadly said.

Upon hearing of her close friend's death, Nicky was confused, saddened, and enraged.

She didn't know what to do with the emotions racing through her. At that time in her life she seldom did. Instead of speaking to her aunt, her grandma, a counselor,

anyone, she held in all her emotions inside. Nicky then decided what she wanted most of all was revenge. Nicky wanted to become a Blood.

That night marked the beginning of her gang life. A stretch of violence, incarceration, and unbelievable pain that would last almost 10 years.

Always in trouble with the law, and always looking for trouble, Nicky took her anger out on anyone that got in her way. Life was not pretty, but there she was with her "homies" who she called friends, "slinging" dope on street corners, and steeped in a war that never, ever seemed to have any winners.

The emotional scarring ran deep and thick. She saw 24 of her friends die by the bullet. She has family incarcerated. She has been shot twice and jailed three times.

That last jail sentence landed her in solitary confinement for two weeks. For the first time in a long time, Nicky was totally alone. She turned inward. The pain was becoming too much to bear. At last, the violence had to stop. There had to be a change. But this time it wasn't about changing something else or someone else. Nicky had to change herself.

Luckily for her when she decided to get out of the gang life, she had the support of family members and friends that had really been there all along, though she chose to ignore them.

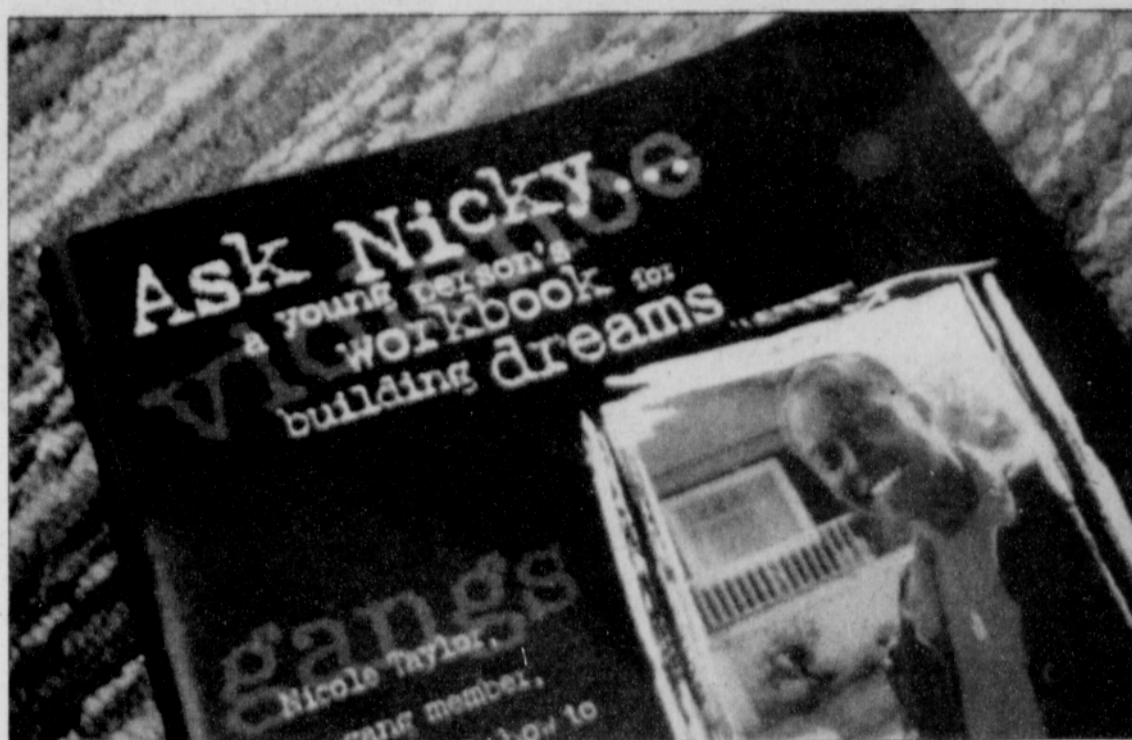
She had her grandma, "Ma", who through everything, never turned her back on Nicky. She had her Aunt Jovita who she could call any time, "just for someone to talk to." Her grandma and "Jojeya" as she called her aunt, never judged

her and were always supportive.

It wasn't easy at first, but Nicky knew she could escape the lifestyle that had claimed the lives of so many friends.

Her head was full of dreams. She was thinking positive. She felt more powerful than ever. Now she wanted to help people like herself. She wanted to reach out to kids in gangs and their parents. She wanted to reach out to those kids just thinking about getting into gangs. She wanted to tell them, show them, what it was really like, on the inside.

Shortly after her release from prison, Nicky quickly outlined an idea for a book, a work book that would tell her story and offer positive alternatives to the gang



"Ask Nicky: A Young Person's Workbook for Building Dreams," was written by Nicole "Nicky" Taylor of Portland, a woman who escaped a life in a gang.

*It's not hard to get out. You just got to separate yourself and stay positive, that's all.*

—Nicole "Nicky" Taylor, author of book about destructive gang life.

lifestyle.

Two years later, she would complete and publish "Ask Nicky, A Young Persons Guide to Building Dreams." Offered in both Student and Teacher/Parent editions, the book now sells at Powells Bookstores, Barnes and Nobles and Amazon.com. for about \$15.

Nicky's personal insight into the destructive life of a gang member makes her perfect for the job.

Her stories offer insight and questions after each chapter that force readers to think about the choices she made and the choices they must make growing up around gangs, drugs, and violence.

Nicky's advice is concrete and undisguised. Her prose is personal, honest and open. The stories are often tragic, but always eye opening.

Nicky has since done presentations at a handful of local schools, and spent months working as a valued employee at the Juvenile Detention Hall where her book is used as a learning and study tool.

Nicky says the kids at schools are responsive to her message, "they listen, especially from someone who has been there and done that."

Nicky says a lot of "gangbangers" want out, but think they can't do it.

"It's not hard to get out," she said, "you just got to separate yourself and stay positive, that's all."

Nicky hopes her book will reach those at risk kids and their parents, "If we can get the parents we can get the kids."

She would love to see the book in Portland's classrooms. In fact, she would love to see it picked up by schools everywhere.

"I don't think there is another book like it out there," she said.

Her mother, Enola is very proud.

She wants to organize a discussion panel with other parents to discuss issues raised in Nicky's book.

"A lot of parents don't know what to do," she said, "its time for peace, they're dying so young."

Nicky now has her sights set on a new goal. She wants to make a movie about her life in Portland s gangs. She has already written the screenplay called "no more tears."

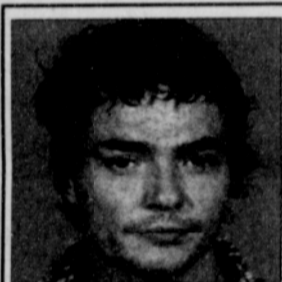
"Its gonna touch everybody's heart," she said.

Her intention is to reach even more youth than she already has.

"I think I'm here for a reason."

Nicky will be available for a book signing on Thursday and Friday,

Sept. 12 and 13 at Reflections, just off Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard at Killingsworth, between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. both days. Parents are encouraged to attend. She has also shared her inspirational story with radio station talk shows and has been featured on TV news.



Lee Woodrow Jackson

## Van Crashes While Eluding Police

Police have arrested a suspect in a domestic assault who is accused of fleeing the scene of an injury accident at Northeast 102nd Avenue and Gilsan.

Police said the Sept. 4 arrest followed a reported assault of a female a few blocks away.

As officers approached the sus-

pect, later identified as 34-year-old Lee Woodrow Jackson, he's accused of backing the van toward the officers and striking a police car. The van then fled the area at a high rate of speed.

Police said they later discovered that Jackson's vehicle had collided with a Honda occupied by three adults.

## Witnesses Dispute Shooting Accounts

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police about the procedure on trying to assist with CPR.

"The officer's response to me was to grab me by the shirt and to push me with unnecessary and

excess force," he said.

Another witness said she told police she was a navel officer trained in life saving measures, but she too was refused access.

Others said it appeared to them that police lacked con-

cern to give medical attention to the victim.

Police, however, reported to media outlets on Sunday that the crowd ignored orders to leave, and the crowd was very confrontational.

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