

Inspired to Keep Others Out of Gangs

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

it's my mom's picture that's over my shoulder, so it just made me think, 'she's watching over me,' Taylor said. "I promised her I wouldn't stop."

Taylor said the movie, which she collaborated with a former rival gang member to create, is also set to premiere at the Los Angeles Film Festival later this year.

"I promise you I am so excited about this. Lord, I can't believe this," she said.

New sections of her book were also added to include modules on cyber-bullying, domestic violence, and mental health—using

stories others have shared to make the curriculum well rounded.

Taylor is also one of the founders of Neighbors Against Violence, a community organization founded by other female former gang members.

She said she witnessed firsthand the beginning of Portland's history with gangs brought in from California in the 1980s. The film goes back even before that when many of her friends were affiliated with a gang called "15th Hood" in northeast Portland which became the "Woodlawn Bloods" when the larger gangs arrived, she said.

Taylor was a witness to the first confirmed Bloods gang slaying which happened right outside her house as she celebrated her "Sweet 16" party in October 1987.

"I wasn't in the gang at that time," Taylor said. "I was friends with the Crips and I was friends with the Bloods. But you can't control your whole environment that you're in."

Distressed by the killing and suffering from the shock of a seeing a church pastor drop dead from natural causes in the middle

in 1999 she began to rethink her lifestyle.

"It just all came like domino effect."

Knowing she didn't want her son involved in gangs, she decided to write a book to serve as a cautionary tale for the next generation, preceding her son's birth in 2000.

Taylor recalled a time at the height of her gang involvement when her auntie plucked her from a street corner where she was dealing weed and took her to church, returning only to find a yellow-taped crime scene and somebody dead lying right where she had stood. She chalked up the close call to divine intervention.

She also credits her grandmother, mother and auntie for being positive influences on her.

In 2015, gang-related violence in Portland reached a peak with 182 gang-related shootings, stabbings or assaults, the highest number since the bureau began tracking the data in 1998. More than a third of the 34 killings that year were believed to be gang-related. There were 81 gang-related shoot-

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—Nicole Taylor, author of 'Ask Nicky'

of a sermon the next day, Taylor, unfortunately, found comfort from the dozen or so Blood members on her neighborhood corner. They enveloped her into their bosom. That same day she threw on a red Pendleton and started down the path of gang banging for the next decade.

"I used to wake up be like 'damn, who am I going to shoot today?' You know, for real. That was our thing," Taylor said. "It's crazy 'cause now-a-days we got Crips killing Crips and Bloods killing Bloods."

She stopped her gang activity briefly in the 90s when she started popping pills to cope.

"I think that has something to do with like depression--seeing too many bodies, going to too many funerals, and being shot," Taylor said. "Your bones never, they never come back to normal. I be achin' in this cold," she lamented.

When Taylor became pregnant

ings in 2017 and in January five homicides suspected to have had gang involvement occurred.

Taylor now dedicates her life to keeping the next generation out of the gang life. Her book, Ask Nicky, which comes in a teacher and student edition, has a built in curriculum of exercises and activities designed to help young people make decisions that won't negatively impact their futures. She has gone on tour with the book and plans another west coast tour with both the book and movie this spring. Eventually she'll also release "The Nicole Taylor Story, Part Two," currently in post-production. Both the book and movie are available on Amazon.

Taylor also plans to expand the reach of her Neighbors Against Violence organization this summer by educating more youth about gangs and providing them with activities like t-shirt printing in a program called "Lots of Love Factory."

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