

*The following is an account taken from the medical records of  
Samuel Harris PhD, PsyD.*

*The names of some people and places have been changed in order  
to maintain the ambiguity of the account and its author for further  
use in the medical and liberal fields.*

*This manuscript only contains the text we believe the author  
intended to be read, thus items scratched out, marked over, or in  
any way defaced in the original document have been left out.*

*Specific observations which we feel are important are noted in  
brackets.*

*Nothing else has been altered.*

When I was ten, I experienced what would forever change my life as a functional member of society. The events which took place that summer day of 1996 have left me in a permanent and ongoing decline in physical and mental health. I must let it be known that, by writing this, I am fulfilling the advice of my doctor; however, I wish that this account not be viewed as just that, but as a cry for understanding from my wife and son, and as an apology to Sloan, Annie, Max, and Cameron. Dr. Harris, I hope this helps me like you say it will.

I am Jacob Barns, and this is my story.

I like to believe that Dr. Harris found me and that I was not forced upon his doorstep by an anonymous group of psychoanalysts, neurologists, and psychiatrists who saw no other option for me. I like to believe this because Dr. Harris is one of the only people whom I can trust, one of the only from whom I find the consolation I so desperately need. It is this belief which has led to what Dr. Harris calls “major personal breakthroughs” on my account.

I remember what he asked me during our very first session. “When did you first begin to distrust people, Mr. Barns?”

I cannot remember exactly how I answered him then, (I’m sure he has it recorded somewhere) but I can say now, in this harsh testament, that it was not a matter of *when*. It was a matter of *whom*.

In 1994, my older brother, our mother, and I moved to a dilapidated, claustrophobic house on the poor side of Chicago. I remember everything about that day: The road, the house, the people.

We arrived during the night, when the demon crows flew undetected in the night and the trees reached at you with their withering fingers. I sat in the backseat of our car, watching, hiding, sinking lower and lower into my seat the farther we inched down the road. The street lamps flickered, briefly illuminating the ocean of concrete. That was to be our ground—concrete, cracked and stained. Sometimes, if the crack was big enough, you could find a pretty weed to pick and give to your mama.

The houses were dead, with less than two yards between them. (One time, I tried to lie between our house and the neighbor’s. I could not straighten my knees.) The houses were tiny, but seemed huge due to the debris which covered the gray yards of every lot like kudzu. The windows laughed at the frowning porches.

There were people there—wild and dirty people—lingering by the dumpsters. They were people who scared my mother so badly she told me and my brother not to look at them.

I didn't, but Ben did.

*Iron Gates*, it was called. There were no gates. No security at all for that matter. The police were always in the city; it was rare to see a man in uniform in those parts, unless that uniform was the garbage man's jumpsuit. There was so little authority that not even the well-behaved prisoners were brought there to pick up trash.

My brother, distraught over the death of his father, fell right into the scene, wrapping it around his morose soul like a blanket. Iron Gates changed Ben. It changed him without even trying. Ben needed something to give all his attention to lest he be eaten up by depression.

Sometimes, he would bring home things. Pretty things—nice watches and shiny knives. One time I saw him holding a handful of silver and gold teeth. He never willingly let me see his pretty things. I could always tell when he had something new by the way he came through the front door and went straight to his room. As soon as his door would close, I'd press my face against it and look through that old keyhole as he played with his new toy.

One time he caught me spying and came at the door with one of his knives. I jerked my face away and covered the keyhole with my hand instinctively. I remember hearing the blade scrape the bone of my ring finger and watching the blood go all over my nice pants. Ben grabbed me by the shirt collar, yanked me up off the floor, and shoved me fast against the wall.

"You say one word to Mama about this and I'll cut that finger all the way off and give it to Marco's dog!" he shouted.

"Who's Marco?" I whined under his weight.

"You don't say nothing to nobody and I'll let you keep that finger. I *never* want to see you watching me again. You understand?"

He pressed his elbows hard into my ribs, forcing an immediate agreement out of me. He dropped me at his feet and backed clumsily into his room. "Clean this up!"

I waited until he had closed the door to relax. I wiped off the rabid foam he had spat onto my face and squeezed all feeling out my finger as I ran to the kitchen. I stayed in there a long time, holding my hand over the sink, breathing, wondering. He was acting like Dad, even hurt me like him. "*If your daddy ever touches you again, you tell me immediately, Jacob,*" my

mother had told me. I debated with myself, whether or not to tell her. Each hour that passed in indecision, was an hour closer that my mother would be coming through the door.

I thought and thought, until I heard a car door slam shut. I looked down at my finger—it was already scabbed over, and the blood in the sink had dried. I had been standing there so long that I had forgotten why I was, and I had nothing to show for it.

I washed the blood out of the sink and made a decision right then to say nothing. I chose not to prevent the horrible things which would follow. The things which have put me here, cowering in the corner of a dark, dank cell within the prison that is my tormented mind, scribbling harsh words that shall live as my only written testament.

If it has to be this way, Dr. Harris, so it will be.

I have no feeling in that finger now. Ben had severed all communication between it and my brain. I never told Mama. In fact, after it happened, the only people I told were the neighbor kids, Cameron and Max.

As my brother's reclusiveness increased, the time I spent in the house decreased. I would go in only when he was not home. I was afraid of him, and I did my best to avoid him. I spent a lot of time in the yards of my friends. Cameron and Max were the only kids my age in the community. There were a few babies, a couple teens, and an over-abundance of the elderly.

Cameron lived right across the street, providing quick and easy access anytime I needed an excuse or a getaway. He even went to the same school as me. He quickly became a huge part of my time in Iron Gates.

Max lived on a different street. He'd walk to Cam's house almost every day in the summer and every weekend in fall. He'd bring his bat and ball and we'd play in the yard till we had drunk the lemonade pitcher dry and soaked our shirts with sweat.

This day was not one of those days.

Cam and I sat on his porch, talking in low voices.

"A gun?" Cam asked with wide eyes.

I nodded, assuring him he had heard correctly.

"Wha—What kind of gun?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. A small wooden gun, with a long silver barrel. I didn't get a good look at it. I was afraid he'd see me."

Cam sighed. "Do you think he's gonna use it?"

I shrugged again. "I don't know if it works. I don't even know if he'd know how to use it if there were bullets in it." I paused a while. "What about Mama?"

Cameron patted my back. "Hey man, she'll be fine. Maybe you could steal it when he's asleep or something before he can use it on somebody."

"Are you crazy? He'd catch me! Then he'd take my whole arm off!"

"You're probably right. You can always stay here though if you need to."

"Thanks," I mumbled.

"There's Max," Cam said, and we leaped off the porch.

Max propped his bat on his shoulder and tossed the ball up in his hand. "What's going on, boys?" he called as he approached.

"Nothin', Max. I don't think we are gonna be playin' ball today," said Cam.

Max hooked the ball for the last time as he came up on the yard. "Whatcha talking 'bout there ain't gonna be no ball?" Max looked at Cam's stern eyes, then at me. "Did Ben do something?"

"He brought home a gun last night," I told him.

"So what if he brought home a gun? How's that stopping us from playing the game?" Max tossed the ball and hit it across the lot.

Cam reared up to say something in my defense, but he was cut off by the recipient of Max's hit.

"Watch it, Max, or you're gonna hit my girl!"

It was Sloan, the tall, cool high school kid on our street. I was always intimidated by his presence. I liked the way nothing mattered to him, everything was always cool. I had only spoken to him on few occasions with Ben.

Sloan bent down to pick up the ball, revealing his girl behind him, Annie. She matched him perfectly—dark hair, slender hips, big eyes. I had never talked to her, but somehow I loved her, the way a ten-year-old boy could love anything. She might as well have been slow motion to me anytime the wind blew through her hair.

Sloan carried the ball to us smoothly and (when he was close enough as to not embarrass himself) tossed it to Max.

"Sorry," Max whispered.

Sloan brushed it off as he did everything else. "You all know Annie, right?"

We all nodded excitedly. "Yeah, we know her." Max looked at her like a caged dog looks at meat.

"Hi guys," she said with a silvery voice.

"Annie can play ball, you know that?"

We shook our heads.

"Yep, she played..."

I stopped listening to his cool talk and focused on the background. Ben was walking out of the house, and he was looking at us. He was a wildman; his hair swallowed his face, his clothes ran away from him, his feet were bare and dirty. This was not the Ben I used to know. This was the Ben I had been avoiding, the Ben whom I had not seen in months.

I nudged Cam and nodded toward the wildman approaching. He stiffened and looked at me. "What did you do?"

"Nothing!"

Sloan cut off his story, seeing that no one was listening, and followed our eyes to Ben. "Why are you looking at him like that?" Sloan chuckled. "It's just Ben." He raised his arm happily. "Benjamin!"

Ben walked across the street without so much as a blink and stopped in front of us. "Hey, Sloan."

He was closer now, and I could see him vividly. His teeth were brown and yellow with rot. Puss bubbled out of large bumps covering his face. The hollows of his cheeks matched the black under his eyes. If he moved just right I could see a star etched into the left side of his neck. Who was this man?

"What's going on?"

Ben's eyes narrowed on me. "I just came to apologize to my brother."

I was physically taken aback. "What?"

"I've not treated you so nice lately. I've not treated any of you so nice. I'm sorry." Ben smiled out of the corner of his mouth.

Sloan hit him on the back and chuckled, "Hey, it's all good, man!"

Cam believed him, (I could tell by the way he smiled at me hopefully) but I was reluctant.

“Anyway, to make up for it, I’d like you all to come over. I got a new game I think you all will like,” Ben said, rubbing the star on his neck. I could practically smell the rehearsal on his breath. “It’s about to rain, anyway.”

Thunder clapped over him.

“Yeah, sure,” Sloan said willingly and followed Ben away.

Max and Cameron did not follow. They stood, waiting for a response from me which would decide their course of action.

“Come on,” I declared to them and marched on. They hurried behind me until we were all following Ben in a line through the house to his bedroom. My heart was still and cautious. I watched every move Ben made with sharp eyes. I had a horrible feeling about it. A sick feeling, one that burned inside my chest and made my eyes water.

Ben stood at his door, watching everyone walk in. I slowed as I passed him and whispered, “Please don’t hurt—”

He forced me into the room before I could finish. I turned around as soon as I had secured my footing to see what he would do next. He lowered his hand to the doorknob, fiddled with it, and closed the door behind him as he entered. I had no clue what he had done, and thousands of possibilities stormed through my head within seconds. It all left when I turned around to face his room.

It was a barren, abandoned scene. The floor had been cleared of all obstructions. His mattress hugged the wall with saggy determination. His bureau was stacked precariously on his desk. Clothes, boxes, books, and anything else considered to be in the way had been stuffed into his closet tightly; the cheap wooden door bent and buckled, fighting to keep it all in, like pants two sizes too small. The only window had been painted over with black, letting in no natural light.

The only thing on display was a small, round table sitting in the middle of the dust-laden floor, surrounded by a variety of hokey chairs. The furniture used in his scanty setup were things I had never seen before; I wondered where he had gotten them, and how he’d managed to get them in the house in the first place without any sign of it.

Bodies hovered lazily around the chairs, unsure whether to sit down or to make a run for the door. Sloan slid his sunglasses off coolly and hung them on the neck of his shirt after pointing them around the room. “What’s with the windows, Ben?”

“Don’t be silly, Sloan. You know I work at the factory now, right?”

Sloan faintly expressed that he might have known something about it.

“Third shift. The sun rises right out my window! The light kept coming through the curtains. One of the other third shifters told me he had painted his windows. Gotta get some sleep somehow,” Ben said casually.

I knew he was lying, but it was enough to convince Sloan.

“Come on, guys, have a seat.”

Chairs screeched across the floor as we obeyed his command. Cam nudged me in the midst of the din and whispered, “Top corner.”

I did not have to look far to see the camera in the corner of the room, mostly hidden at my angle by the mattress thrown against the wall. I stared into it, looking my fate in the eyes. My brother was putting on a show, a dangerous game of charades. I knew he was going to do something bad, but I did not say.

“What are we playing?” Max asked impatiently.

Ben had his back to us all, fiddling with the pieces of the game. He turned around holding a large, blue, plastic bowl. (I recognized it as the bowl Mama used for cake batter.) He set it in the middle of the table and politely took his seat. “It’s a roulette game,” he said as we all peered into the bowl. It was filled with pills of more variety than the chairs beneath us. Reds, yellows, blues, whites. Long, round, flat, spherical.

Ben continued, “*Drug* roulette.”

“*Drug roulette*?” Max exclaimed, his eyes wide with shock, but his mouth grinning with wonder. Max lacked steady morals. He had nothing to keep him from saying no. He liked it that way, and I couldn’t have imagined a life in which he was any different in that aspect. He was the definition of *choice* and *freedom*—the things which many people seek, but never find. Max had found them, but I believe they are things better left hidden.

I watched Annie hug Sloan’s arm for protection from the deranged man beside her. She was so quiet; she might as well have not existed.

“What’s the game?” Max asked from the edge of his seat.

Ben smiled at his eagerness. “We go around the room and each person takes a pill.”

“What’s the catch?” said Cam.



“Some of the pills are poison, others are placebos.” Ben’s grin stretched across the room. I refused to look into his dark eyes; they heated me up in a very unpleasant way, like God was watching me.

Sloan stiffened. “Where’d you get these?”

Ben cleared his throat nonchalantly. “Marco.”

If Sloan had have been drinking, he’d most surely have spit. “Marco? Marco Santiago? The Latin Kings leader?! How’d you get involved with him?”

“*He came to me!*” Ben said with fierce eyes.

“Well, what are you talking about they’re poisonous?”

“*I mean,*” Ben began, “THEY’LL KILL YOU!” Thunder boomed outside. “What do you not understand about that?”

Tears streamed down Annie’s face as panic ensued us all.

“No way, man!” Sloan shouted. “I’m not touching that!” He stood up defiantly. “Come on, Annie. Let’s get out of here.”

Annie held tight, easing out of her chair and following Sloan to the door.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you!” Ben called, halting their heavy, deliberate footsteps at the door.

Sloan turned to him after a moment. “What?”

“You turn that knob and it triggers a small explosive on the other side that will kill you both instantly.” His words fell like lead out of his mouth and shook the floor upon impact.

Those words banished any calmness left in us. [*Writing becomes erratic*] My heart was about to beat out of my chest as I violently stood up, knocking over my chair in the process, which prompted Ben to stand, as well.

Sloan backed away as if his presence alone would set it off. “Are you joking?”

Annie cried into his arm. “I just want to go home!”

“If you think I’m joking, then go ahead. Let your sacrifice be an example to the others!” Ben said maniacally.

Cam pulled on my shirt. “Ben, sit down! Sit down!”

He lifted my chair back up and forced me into it when I had failed to respond. I barely noticed it; I was trapped by panic, watching Sloan trying to calm Annie. Whatever he said had some effect, because by the time they were back seated in their chairs she had stopped crying.

Cam whispered to me harshly, “Get that look off your face, Jacob! You look like a maniac! Just calm down! I’ve got a plan.”

I became aware of the tensed muscles in forehead and loosened them immediately. I had not blinked the entire time.

Ben breathed heavily for a few moments, leaving us all stiff in his taunting silence. “Any more questions before we begin?”

“How do you win?” Max said.

“You live.” Ben waited for any other questions, then continued. “Let’s begin.” He looked at Sloan. “Close your eyes and pick one.”

“Why do I gotta close my eyes?”

“Everyone has to close their eyes, ‘cause after a while they’ll start to see which pills are the bad ones and which ones aren’t. You just happen to be first, so close your eyes.”

We were quiet. We did not move.

Sloan’s eyes shut like shutters over windows. His hand shook as it pushed through the air and landed in the bowl. He did not search, instead he picked the first one his hand touched: A blue capsule.

Ben smiled, watching Sloan put it to his lips. “Swallow it,” he coaxed.

Sloan swallowed the pill along with his pride, and he forced back the tears clinging to the rims of his eyes.

“Good job.!” Ben laughed and slapped him on the back. “Let’s see if your girlfriend is so brave.” Ben pushed the bowl in front of her.

“Why are you doing this?” Annie asked quite bravely.

“Annie,” Ben began, “did you not here me say, ‘Any more questions?’ just a few seconds ago?”

“Answer me!” she shouted. “Tell me why you are doing this!” Her harsh voice scratched my eardrums.

Ben cocked his head in annoyance, and slowly rose out of his chair. “Annie, my dear, you wouldn’t understand.”

Annie stared, burning a hole through his adamance until he spoke.

“I have to.”

“You have to?”

“I have to prove myself to the gang.” Ben was noticeably disturbed by his own actions. He spoke diffidently, without any pride. “I have to prove to Marco that I can be one of them.”

Annie did not know what to say. She only looked at him blankly with her mouth slightly open.

Ben hung his head. “Please, sit down, Annie.” His voice was quiet. His tone was kind. The atmosphere shifted to something less scary—for only a second.

As Annie eased down into her chair, Ben’s face lost its innocence immediately. At once, his hand left his hip, holding his pretty weapon.

*Bang!*

My eyes were closed. They were closed so tightly that not even air could penetrate the seal. The shot rang in my ears over the chaos abounding around me. I did not want to open my eyes, but I could not stop them; they wanted to see.

Cam and his chair were pushed close to me in an attempt to get as far away from the action as possible. His hands were cupped over his mouth and his eyes were wide with sheer shock. Max stood over her chair looking at the body on the floor with bemusement.

Sloan’s face was drawn in horror, void of all color, except for the red splattered across his cheek. He was frozen in his chair, petrified. It seemed even his dark, beautiful hair was now gray. His mouth began to tremble, and his face curled up in anguish. “Oh,” he choked. “*Awh!*” He could not get any English out of his mouth.

Ben fell on his knees before him and laid his hands on the sides of Sloan’s distraught and twisted face. He spoke to him soothingly, “Sloan, it’s okay. It’s all right. You were too good for her anyway. She just asked so many questions. She wouldn’t stop!”

Max, Cam, and I were utterly paused, for fear any motion would land us a spot in the floor next to Annie.

“Y....ou,” Sloan spat, “killed her!”

Ben pet Sloan’s wet face. “No, no, no. See, I just—”

Then, without any warning, Ben sharply twisted Sloan’s head, producing a harsh pop and killing him instantly. If I had blinked, I might have missed it.

Ben laid Sloan’s limp body in the floor and stood up, meeting our terrified expressions. He shrugged and assured us, “The pill would’ve killed him anyway. Trust me, this way was much prettier.”

I looked at the bodies. For what seemed like a long time to my panicking mind, I looked at them. This boy whom I had admired and this girl whom I thought I loved were just torsos with arms and legs and a head. In a mere moment, they had become insignificant. They would never feel, or hear, or see ever again. And I was supposed to believe that? I was supposed to instantly adjust to the fact that whatever had been fueling their lives was gone from them?

I looked at them then, at ten years old, and did not understand. I could not change their batteries or get them new parts. I could not wrap duct tape over Annie's broken skull or glue Sloan's head on straight and have them work again.

*[Indecipherable lines of scribble]* It messed me up.

Cam and I knew we were stuck there, stuck in Ben's trap... But Cam was smart. As Ben called us back to our seats, I could see it in Cam's eyes—he was thinking. He had probably been working out the math in his head since the moment we stepped into the room. I trusted him, and it gave me hope.

"Sit down. It's Max's turn."

Max was calm. He willingly closed his eyes and dropped his hand in the bowl. He felt around for a few moments, choosing his poison carefully. At last, Max pulled his hand out of the bowl and opened his hand for us all to see: A white disk. He looked at it playfully, then at Ben, and popped it in his mouth. It took him a few moments to swallow it without any water, but Ben did not mind waiting. His eyes bore a hole through Max. I could not tell if it was from disappointment or excitement.

"What was it?" My voice shattered the suspense.

Ben's head creaked toward me and smiled. "I wouldn't want to ruin the surprise."

"Was it bad?" Max asked with panic trailing at the back of his throat.

Ben chuckled.

"Was it bad?!" I stood up and slammed my hands on the table, shaking the bowl.

Ben's laughter stopped, and the room grew cold. "Jacob, you have a lot of nerve talking like that." Ben stood up angrily and pulled his gun out. "How quickly you have forgotten, brother. I am not afraid to use this and you know it."

I was flustered and ill and scared. "Ben, I... I just wanna know if Max is gonna be okay."

I felt hot tears roll down my face, and I quickly became embarrassed. I was looking down the barrel of a gun that my own brother was holding, across a table with a blue cake mix bowl, which did not have cake mix in it at all. Everything was backwards. Everything was wrong. I was so confused.

I gripped desperately at the table, and my faced curled up into something horrible.

“Jacob, calm down,” Ben said with human concern.

I did not.

“Jacob, you’re freaking me out,” Max murmured.

Ben lowered the gun. “Jacob, you are being very rude. It is Cameron’s turn! Sit down and continue the game!”

I relaxed my face slightly.

“SIT DOWN!”

A thunderous applause from outside shook my knees into collapse.

“Thank you.” Ben pushed the bowl in front of Cam. “Go ahead.”

Cam was sweating and shaking. He was doubting his math.

I whimpered, “Cam—”

“Let him pick, Jacob!”

In a final act of selflessness, Cam nodded at me assuredly, as if to tell me that everything would be okay.

He could not have been more wrong.

Cam’s eyes closed and his hand reached out in front of him. The devil was grinning, and I felt as though I was failing. Cam had accepted his fate, he was ready to face it, but he was stopped. We were all stopped. Ben’s face flattened. Cam’s eyes opened.

Our attention was all directed to Max. A wet, gagging noise had left his throat, leaving us frozen. A milky glaze hid his eyes, and his face was blue with suffocation. We watched, wondering if he was conscious. A splatter of foamy blood erupted from his mouth, breaking the silence with its dangerous presence, and Max fell fast out of his chair.

Without any hesitation, we fled to his side, grabbing at him and looking him over as though he was carrying a vast treasure somewhere on his body. I stepped on Annie’s cold body without a care, trying to get as close to my friend as possible. He jerked and shook in the floor

with jolts of suffering and pain. Cam and I mumbled meaningless interjections to each other over the chaos, and I don't think either of us understood the other.

*[There are spots on this page which we suspect are tear stains]*

I was afraid to touch him, afraid I'd make him hurt more. I looked all over his body, hardly visible behind the water hugging against my eyes. *[Indecipherable scribble continues for a few lines]*

Blood, redder than the stitching on his ball, leaked out of Max's nose, then his ears, then his eyes, until he no longer looked human. Cam and I just yelled and cried, until Max's body fell limp and our voices were hoarse.

I felt worthless and guilty. After seeing Sloan and Annie's fires capped, I was not so shocked to see Max dead. I hated it, because I wanted to be shocked; if anything, Max deserved that *raw presentation of love*. I felt even worse seeing Cam collapse on Max's chest and sob hysterically. If I could have, I would have taken some of the humanity Cam still had left and given it to myself to spare him the immense, sickening power of all the emotions raging inside him.

"I'm so sorry, Cameron. I'm so sorry," I cried, hoping he could understand me despite the hyperventilation in my voice.

I got ahold of myself in time and managed to stand Cameron up as soon as he had calmed down. Ben did not pressure us to move any faster. In fact, he had said nothing the entire time. I hoped, in that moment, that there was still some humanity left in *him*, some love that had made him not shoot me like he had Annie.

But it did not matter if there was any sentience left in him; we were trapped in a nightmare that was not over.

"Jacob!"

It was my mother.

"Jacob, I'm home! Where are you?"

I looked at Cam in horror. "It's Mama. It's Mama!"

Cam hushed me. "Don't say anything!"

[*Writing becomes erratic again*] I held my hand over my mouth for as long as I could, but her footsteps just got closer and closer to the door, and I could not hold back. The fear swelling inside me forced me to run to the door.

“Mama! Please don’t open the door!” I screamed, ready to save her, ready to sacrifice myself for her, but there were hands grabbing me away by my arms—Ben’s hands—and we fell into the floor at the sound of the explosion covering my mother’s scream.

I jumped up, not knowing what exactly to look at first. Cam was just as overwhelmed as I was. He stood by the window, frantically searching the room with his eyes. As soon as he spotted Ben’s computer, he ripped it from the wall and threw it through the window. He covered his head with his arms as the glass shattered over him.

“Come on!” he called as soon as the last piece had fallen.

I looked at Ben, bloody and wriggling on the ground, regaining his senses.

“You saved me,” I whispered to myself. “You saved me.”

Cam yelled from the window, “Jacob! Come on! We gotta go!”

My Mama lay broken and disfigured in the doorway. She was already dead; she did not have to suffer like the others. I never would have looked away from her if I hadn’t heard Ben mumbling behind me.

I turned around, catching him wiping the blood out of his eyes and getting a grip around his gun.

“Jacob! Please!”

I looked at Ben. He looked at me. And his eyes were the biggest they had ever been. I felt sorry for him, having to live with his tormented soul. The only good in him was battling the evil that had taken over. He was already gone, and he knew that as well as I did. There was no hope for him.

He aimed the gun at me. “Don’t go.”

I shook my head with shame and slowly stepped back.

Ben was overcome with grief. “DON’T LEAVE! I’LL SHOOT YOU!”

I dashed to the window as bullets flew past me into the walls, and I fled. I still remember the rain; it washed away my sins.

Cam and I escaped that night, and I never looked back. I left my brother to die in the name of Marco Santiago and the Latin Kings.

I remember how upset their parents were. They fell on their knees in the yard as the EMTs brought their children's bodies out in black bags. None of them said they hated me, but I think they did. I was as much a victim as their child, but the fact that the same blood ran within my veins as Ben's could not be looked over. I think even Cam did not care to ever see me again after that. I understood; he had to battle his demons his own way.

[*Writing is calm*] I lost everything and everyone I cared about at the hands of my own brother. I never thought I would be able to feel again—I did not want to feel again—but I did.

Dr. Harris, I don't know if there is any hope for me, and, if I don't get to see my wife and child again, please tell them how much I loved them. Tell them how much they were able to make me feel again. Tell them they were all I had left.

I hope my mama forgives me. I hope Cam, wherever he may be, is happy. I hope the families of Sloan, Annie, and Max have not had to carry the burden which has left my mind crippled.

I am *lost*, I am *troubled*, I am *hopeless*—but as I write these last words, I am *free*.

*End of document.*