

# Chaiya and Bobby

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## SPEAKERS

Chaiya Chan, Kurry Harbour, Bobby Iacoviello, Eugene Ivey

### **Kurry Harbour** 00:06

From the greater Boston area, you are listening to the MyTERN Conversations, brought to you by Tufts Education Reentry Network. These are stories of life during and after incarceration, told by people who lived it, and are working to overcome the odds.

### **Bobby Iacoviello** 00:34

I think growing up, depending on what area you're from, what neighborhood you're in, what set you're in, what school you went to,

### **Chaiya Chan** 00:46

it all played a part of who you hung out with, and ultimately, what gang you end up joining.

### **Bobby Iacoviello** 00:57

And I think that, you know, like kind of right from birth, you end up inheriting enemies, or not liking individuals just because where they're from, what color they're wearing, and what neighborhood they're in. Ultimately, at the end of the day, we're all the same people fighting for the same things. But people that are oppressed, and then you find some sense of meaning in it, and then we set oppressing each other. Where you from, Bro?

### **Chaiya Chan** 01:45

I'm from Lynn, city of sin. Where you from?

### **Bobby Iacoviello** 01:47

I'm from Revere, Bro. Um, so my name is Bobby. I'm from Revere, I was born and raised in the city of Revere, I got very strong ties to my community. Now I am director of community outreach for the Transformational Prison Project (TPP). I work for a restorative justice organization. I once was an individual that was heavily involved in gangs. That was like my way of life. I don't think most people would think that I would have made it. I even got to the point where I was serving a life sentence and never coming home. And now I'm at the point where I'm back in my community, doing the best I can, but not only for me, but for my community. And I believe that restorative justice is the best tool to repair the harm in my community, because I know that there's so many people out here hurting, and the only reason why they're hurting other people because they're hurting themselves. And I was hurting other individuals because I was hurting myself because of the trauma that I've been through in my life. And now I speak about that trauma. I talk about the things that I've been through and I be vulnerable and that's a huge way on how I healed and I want that healing for everybody else. Because as I said before,

hurt people hurt people but healed people also heal people. And I'm gonna pass it over to my friend over here from Lynn, the city of sin. You never go out the way you go in. Never come out the way you go in, my bad.

**Chaiya Chan 03:30**

Hey, what's going on? I'm Chaiya. Yeah, my community is a big part of my life. Now, I coach for the East Lynn Pop Warner. I mainly coach the six year-olds, six to eight year-olds. I just want to get back to my community, you know, keep kids off the streets and give them something to look forward to. Growing up, there wasn't really much for me, besides the streets, gangs; I was heavily the gang involved. And just Lynn's reputation, you know, is mainly gangs. You're either in a gang, or you play sports. I want to give back to my community by just pulling in kids, troubled youths, anyone that needs help. I just want to get them off the streets, you know, and divert them from the life that they could possibly want.

**Bobby Iacoviello 04:41**

That's my city. It's full of gangs. Lynn probably got a lot more, but it definitely is, especially when I was growing up. And I think the predominant or the biggest gang out there was Bloods; different sets of them. I think that's what my city at least is known for. And I think which is the city is known for as majority Crips.

**Chaiya Chan 05:06**

Yeah, majority is, Crips, different sets. Mainly three, four sets that predominantly run Lynn. There's also other gangs, Bloods, Rascals. There's Latino gangs, Deuce Boys.

**Bobby Iacoviello 05:36**

I knew as soon as I walked into the classroom, as soon as I seen him. You know, I just, that's just my thing, but I didn't, it doesn't matter to me, you know, like, I'm passed that point. As soon as I seen that he was Khmer, I already, you know, already figured something. And then he said he was from Lynn, but I just, I just knew, you can just tell. You can just feel it, you know. And I think, um, but that didn't bother me. I mean, I did 12 years in prison. And some of the closest people to me were from rival gangs, you know, because we're all from the same area. And you know, when you go up there, you start looking at things a lot differently. And at the end of the day, the same people that I had, or thought I had issues with were right next to me anytime something happened. And I think... so like, that didn't bother me. If anything, as soon as I seen him, I kind of felt more connected. I felt like a little bit more like, a guy I knew who was going to be in here, so I was like alright cool. I think I sat right next to you, too. So it was like ...

**Chaiya Chan 06:41**

We were just like, Oh, where you from? From Lynn. Oh, where you from? From Revere. I knew. I seen Bobby, I already knew who he was just because his face was on the news, on the newspaper. Because I'm from Lynne, he's from Revere, that's like a 15 minute drive. So everything that's on a newspaper that happens in Revere is on the Lynn paper. I'm pretty sure whatever happens in Lynn is in the Revere paper. So I've seen it, and I know who he was. And I know a lot of Bobby's people. At the time, in the past, I have problems with now I'm actually good friends with a lot of these, these guys.

**Bobby Iacoviello** 07:26

I know a lot of his people too. So it was really, um. There's no awkwardness for me at all.

**Chaiya Chan** 07:34

Same here.

**Bobby Iacoviello** 07:35

Like I said, anything if I felt more comfortable,

**Chaiya Chan** 07:38

Just knowing that like, you know, someone from a neighborhood and with the situation I'm going through, and the situation that he had been in, I felt more connected, and knew that it was like someone that I could talk to, you know, for advice or anything. Growing up, I had problems when people I don't even know why I had problems with them. You know, and I'll see 70% of the people that I grew up having problems with now, I'm good friends with them. Because I actually got to know them as a person and not as a gang member. And, you know, we put our differences to the side and try to give back to the community.

**Bobby Iacoviello** 08:35

I think like, especially around that area, whether it be Revere, Lynn, Chelsea, East Boston, like around there, like everybody knows each other, but don't know each other, even if you don't, because it's like small, but it's big. And if you're in that life, it's kinda like a survival mechanism in some way. You got to know everything.

**Chaiya Chan** 08:59

Like, you got to know who's your prey, and who's your predator. You know, especially living that, the street life. So no one's gonna watch your back. So, I mean, social media played a big part in it, you know. Gangs taking pictures with each other, it gets posted on internet, then you see an enemy and you're like, you go on the enemy's page and you see the picture like, alright, this dude is this guy, this guy and so, you know who that person is. You know their name, how they look, but you don't know them as a person.

**Bobby Iacoviello** 09:50

I think that's like the culture of the world. Like we're all divided. You know? If you just look at the countries you know, like, everybody's divided, everybody's fighting each other. This is mine. We belong here. You belong there. It's like embedded in us. Everywhere.

**Chaiya Chan** 10:07

Yeah. So when you find something that you know two people have an interest in, it brings them more together and more connected. So like, once I found out Bobby does restorative justice and is giving back to the community, it's like, hey, look, I don't do restorative justice, but I'm trying to give back to the community too. Keeping kids off the streets, getting them into sports, so that they don't fall into the streets. There's still a, it's a low percentage, but there's still a percentage of kids who we pull into

sports, who ended up still falling into the street life. But just knowing that we tried, you know, it matters. And I've known a couple of the, of my coaching staff, you know, they played football, fell into the streets, fell victim to the streets, and actually came back into football, as coaching, because they realized, you know, I messed up, I made a couple poor decisions and trying to keep the kids off the streets, just give back to the community.

**Bobby Iacoviello** 11:14

It's not just changing lives, it's saving lives.

**Chaiya Chan** 11:16

Yeah, it's saving lives.

**Bobby Iacoviello** 11:17

Because I wish I had somebody that could understand me when I was growing up. I think growing up, most people it's all about, especially the tough on crime era, it's all about punishment, and telling you what to do. And that just doesn't work. Being real, is what works, being honest, is what works, you know.

**Chaiya Chan** 11:44

Yeah, 'cause I felt like, in the era we grew up, it was just nothing but punishment, you know. Everything you did was wrong. And you were punished in the wrong ways, and not told why. Really, why are you being punished in the way that you're punished? You know, because there were certain crimes, or I want to just say crimes, but just certain things you did that weren't right. And you'd get punished in the worst way possible. You know?

**Bobby Iacoviello** 12:16

Absolutely. I mean, I got arrested in the seventh grade, had nothing to do with school. And they kicked me out of school. Because of zero tolerance. Now, zero tolerance is so ridiculous, so horrible because they don't even do that to adults. When you get charged or in trouble, you're innocent till proven guilty. But when you're a juvenile, you are not. And that's backwards, that makes no sense. Because as a young person, you're gonna make mistakes, things are gonna happen. But instead, when those mistakes do happen, instead of learning from it and working with them, they just kick them out. And I think that's like one of the biggest problems with youth today, or especially back then. It was crazy. Like my whole neighborhood was in and out of DYS, or juvenile detention centers.

**Chaiya Chan** 13:14

Early dropouts, bunch of kids getting expelled.

**Bobby Iacoviello** 13:17

Oh, absolutely it doesn't work, you know? Absolutely. I mean, like, if anything, it makes people worse. That gave me the option to be more with my boys. You know, that gave me the option to you know, they understood what I was going through. And, they didn't like it either. So, I think that we treat young people, like I said, like adults. Actually worse than adults in this country. Period. You know?

**Chaiya Chan 13:54**

Yeah, I definitely agree with that. Like, I know, growing up, like I lived in, growing up in Lynn, there's a bunch of schools in Lynn, so like if you lived in East Lynn, you went to whatever schools were in your district, if you live in West Lynn, you went to whatever school was in that district, but what it was was East Lynn was mainly Crips, growing up in East Lynn, that neighborhood was mainly Crips. If you lived in West Lynn, it was mostly Bloods. West Lynn is closer to Revere. I think that, and the school rivalry, it actually played a part in the gang life out in Lynn. Because like I went to Lynn English High School. That's East Lynn. When I went to school, it was nothing but Crips in that school. I knew people that went to Lynn classical. There was nothing but Bloods there. And so if the two football teams were playing against each other, the two gangs are going to be there. You know, supporting their brothers, their sisters, whoever's on the teams. And just like school rivalry, it was gang rivalry. It's like, a couple of weeks ago, my football team, we, played for the city champion. East Lynn and West Lynn, there's a rivalry out there. Like, I felt that, I was telling the other coach, like it feels like a gang war right now. Like you legit have all the East Lynn parents and supporters, fans and supporters on one side. All the West Lynn on the other side. It's like, you see the colors, you know, we're wearing maroon, they're wearing green. And it's like you're looking, you're like, damn, this is like, I had a flashback to when I was a kid, I was like damn. And, you know, the coaches, we get into heated arguments too on the field, on and off the field.

**Bobby Iacoviello 16:29**

For me, I did 12 years. So when I came home, it was different. I was different. But I came right back to the same neighborhood. And a lot of people said that I was crazy for doing it. But I felt like that's where I belong. You know, if I'm gonna come out here, if I'm gonna bring restorative justice, healing, to my community, well I'm gonna start with the ones around my area. It wasn't easy, because I knew for one that I was gonna bump into individuals that told on me, but I already came to peace with that. And I remember like, the first night I went out, my boy was like, oh, you gotta come out. It was like a month or two. I just didn't want to leave like, it's been so long and and he's like, no, just come out. I had never been to a bar before you know, because I wasn't old enough. So I went to first bar on Shirley Ave. Had a couple of drinks. And then like, we went to another bar. And then I told my friend, like, I don't want to bump into nobody, you know. And one of the first persons I bumped into is somebody that told on me. But, you know, I grew up with him. I knew him since we were kids. Like, I still love him, even though he did me wrong. So I went up to him, and tapped him on the shoulder. And I was just like, What's up, bro? And also yo, I forgive you. And like, he didn't really know what to say. Because like I said, I was a different person back then. That's not something I would have done. I just told him, I was like, you know, I'm not mad at you, man. You just hurt me. You know, you were my brother. And, but I forgive you. And I think my approach definitely shocked a lot of people. But who are them to tell? Who's anybody to tell me what I gotta do? You know? And what's good for me? I did my time. You know, if I did something to him, what's that going to prove? Not gonna prove nothing. You know, I think by me saying that, and showing him that, he'll feel it more. Not saying that I'm doing that for him to feel it more. But I know that he's having more trouble sleeping at night than me because, you know, we knew each other since we were babies. I was like my brother, you know? And I think like, you know, for me, like, I'm really cool everybody now. So I don't have really issues. But for a lot of people, it's not necessarily them not being in that gang life no more. It's people not letting them get out of it. Your enemies, not letting you get out of it. Your friends not letting you get out of it. And that's a difficult approach as well. I

just think that I'm older. And I think people respect me a little bit more. So I can actually have that conversation with individuals. However, I think there's a lot of things that still happen out there, and at times like I get in the middle of it, but in a positive way. Like when two neighborhoods are about to go at it, sometimes people call me like. And I try to defuse the situation because I know how crazy it can get. Then it can get to the point where somebody loses their life, or gets seriously hurt. And I try to break it down from like, what's that worth? What, over a girl? Over this? Really. And majority of the time, it works. Not all the time. Because in that life sometimes for them, violence is necessary. And if you're not violent, people will prey on you. So I get that. So I can't always stop everything. But I do what I can, you know. So I think coming home for me, I think I came to the right spot. I'm right where I supposed to be.

**Chaiya Chan 20:50**

Well, my transition was a little easier for me. So I was only locked up, recently, for about a week. I was released early due to COVID. They were releasing all nonviolent offenders. I was locked up for trafficking drugs. What basically hit me was, I was locked up. And my kids, my kids always been around people being locked up, like family members. So they know, they talk on the phone, they know. So one day I called and I was on the phone and the money was low on the phone. So when your money is low, you only have x amount of minutes to talk for. I was just saying goodnight to them. They thought I was on vacation for work and the Securix lady does the "you have one minute left," and I heard both my kids they were like, "ah, Daddy's in jail." And I was just like, Fuck. That shit, it broke me. It broke me right there. I just dropped the phone, I didn't even say bye or nothing. I dropped the phone. I just walked away, I was like fuck, like damn, my kids know I'm in jail. You know, I was trying to hide it from them. And so I came home and I just made everything about them, you know about them, their mother. And you know, when I was first released, I had thoughts of just going right back to the streets and doing what I was doing. It's what I know. It's what I know, it's what I knew. I mean, I was always, always worked, always had a job was always hard working, but making that little extra money, it helps. Just thinking about my kids, my family, disappointing my father, because he always told me like, you know, you need to get out. He said, you need to get off the streets, you need to do better, you got kids, like, don't end up like me, you know. And just one day, it just find it clicked to me. So, you know, I just try to keep it clean, keep it smooth, stay out of trouble. I stopped communicating with a lot of people that I did in past. And I just try to do positive things.

**Bobby Iacoviello 23:17**

My issue is not the gangs out there. It's not the community. To be honest with you, it's the police. There's a lot that, on the low, support what I'm doing, but some of them try to block me from talking to kids, try to block me in certain areas. And I'm not mad about it. I understand because I harmed them too. I got locked up for taking somebody's life. I got locked up for taking an off-duty police officer's life, in my community. So I hurt them. So I get why they feel that way. I just wish that like, they went through a circle, they went through a process, they were ready to do that, so they can see that them doing that (them blocking me) is just hurting things more and also hurting themselves. Because then when you are open and talk about it, you're gonna heal too. But you just gotta meet people where they're at, and they're not simply ready. So I think that's my issue is more of the police than anything. But in due time, things will work out.

**Chaiya Chan 24:34**

I took a fatherhood program. I did a fatherhood program called The Nurturing Fathers Group. That really helped me out definitely, I reconnected with my kids. I didn't really have a connection with my younger son, because I was so involved in the streets. I was always out selling drugs instead of spending time with my kids. So I always, I was always there for them financially. Physically and motionally, I was never there. I was either out selling drugs or out getting drunk and high. Now that my kids got older, I started realizing, you know, like, I'm like, damn. I'm neglecting my kids how my father neglected me when I was growing up. I didn't give them no attention. My father gave me no attention. He was always working or doing whatever he did. He was never home, I realized that. I said, I need to start spending more time with my kids. And I learned that through the fatherhood program I participated in. And the times that I did talk to my kids was more like yelling, I was always yelling at them always had a higher tone with my kids, because I felt like they were so distracted with electronics or whatever they were doing. So I asked my kids, hey, can you do this real quick, or, hey, clean up your mess, and they wouldn't do it. So I'd yell. And that kind of put a fear, I kind of put a fear in them. So when they wanted something, or if they needed me to do something, or help them with something, they were always afraid to ask me. And I started realizing that because they would go, I'd be right next to them and they'd go find another adult to ask for food or to ask can we do this? Or can we do that? Oh, why don't you ask your dad? Oh, I'm scared. I need to better control myself. And I end up just, it took a lot definitely to change. I had to drop up everybody that I hung out with. I had to keep myself at home, just work, home, work, home. Before, it was work, go out, come home, sleep and go back to work. And then doing that all over. Now it's my life just consists of work, home, school, or coaching. And coaching definitely helped me out a lot. I was always good with kids. Because growing up I always had to help raise my nephews and nieces. I was always good with kids. When I first found out I was gonna have kids. I knew, like, I was ready. I wasn't scared. A lot of people are like, they're about to have a kid and they're freaking out. Oh, how am I gonna do this? I knew how to take care of a kid. But the only thing that made me go crazy was how am I going to support them financially. So what I did was, I always had a good job. But I was like, the money is not enough. So I ended up selling drugs. I've always sold drugs, but I went back to it. And I got more serious into it. Before it was like, you make \$200-\$300, that's okay. Like, when you have a kid, you're like I need to make \$2,000-\$3,000. But yeah, just, transitioning, for me was a lot easier. My kids are my motivation. My kids, their mother. Everybody here in this class. Bobby's my motivator.,

**Bobby Iacoviello 28:39**

You motivate me too, my bro. That strong community bond has always been in us, we just used it in a negative sense. And when we turn it around and use it in a positive light, we can really promote change. More than most people don't even know how to because they don't have that life experience. And you have a lot of people that's in the field and they're doing great work, but they don't fully understand what's going on. You know, I understand it, I feel it, I've been through it, you know, it runs through me. I still have the pains of it, I still have the joy of it. You know and I think that that pain drives me you know,. It drives us. When I see, I know this is off topic, but like the other day somebody got murdered in my neighborhood, you know, and then like I can just see like, you know, and that and that hurt me. Even though I didn't know him, a lot of the young kids around my area knew him, but it's just like, like I don't want that for everybody else. The dude that did it got caught, you're gonna do a life sentence, and two lives are lost. We go at change in a different way. We do it in a punishment or punitive way. We gotta go about it in a restorative way, because that's what works. You're not going to

change nothing. You might solve that specific case or that problem, but you're not going to change the overall problem. I think like, I just wanted you all to get to know us for who we really are, and not judge us by our past or what's on paper. And I think in the future, you're gonna show and prove, we're gonna show and prove that we really are going to make change, because we're doing it right now.

**Chaiya Chan 30:29**

Yeah, I agree with you. I don't think people should judge you on the poor decisions that you made in the past. And rather judge you off of how you transition and how you change, you know. Change isn't easy. It's easy to go back to the life that you lived. But trying to change and putting your heart into wanting to get back, you know, changing other lives, not just yours, but other lives. It plays a big role in my life now.

**Bobby Iacoviello 31:00**

I think too, I kind of want to hit on something that you said too. Definitely with, you know, going back to that life, from coming home. I mean, it's easier to do the wrong thing, it's harder to do the right thing. It's easy to punch somebody in the face, it's harder to walk away, you know. And I think too. I also think that like, there's like, way too many obstacles for individuals when they come home, especially from individuals that we come from and life that we come from. Because one, is even if I try to do the right thing, and I do get a job, my record's always gonna hinder me. They're gonna find some type of way to find out who I am, where I'm from, I'm an ex gang member and find some way to fight me and not let me in the door. And then housing's the same thing. I got denied 40 times for an apartment before I got one. I went try to get one in Revere, Celsea, East Boston. Denied. Finally, I got one in Winthrop. And then, when you do get the apartment, it's like, not too long ago, they put me on the news for doing the right thing, right? Now, all they need to do is find out who I am. Neighbors to find out who I am. And then they do some slime ball stuff, like raise my rent, you know, to get me out of there. You know, um, I also think that like, besides all the other obstacles we have to deal with, because of our past, like real life stuff is always going to be in our way. Our record is always going to follow us, our past is always going to follow us. So it's very, very difficult. And there are times where I understand why people go back to that life. And I understand why people go back to prison, because it's much easier. You can make money much easier. Violence comes normal, comes easy. Feeling that camaraderie, feeling that love comes easy. You know, and doing the right thing in a positive way, being a citizen, is difficult. Because of who we are. And most people don't really get that. And I remember because I was serving a life sentence, you know, before I came home, I ended up overturning my case, and when I was serving a life sentence, I remember individuals coming back. I couldn't understand, like I couldn't understand how they got that opportunity to go out. And I didn't get that opportunity. Like what I would do to get that opportunity to come home, and that has taken it for granted. Then when I actually came home, I understood you know that mental aspect is crazy. Like you're can have the families support, you can have the housing, you can have money, but that mental, that waking up every day feeling like you don't belong here because what you know in the past is the only thing that got you up, you know. It's the only thing that you knew. Then when you wake up, and you feel like the whole world against you when you're doing the right thing. You know, everybody's blocking you in every avenue. So I get that because I get that thinking too. That's, I would never do that. But I think like, what, like, what am I doing? Like, why am I doing this? If I'm still waking up feeling this way, you know. So I get why people go back, I get why people go back to that life, and I get why people go back to prison.



**Chaiya Chan 35:30**

Because like Bobby said, you can have all the support you want. But if mentally, if you're not stable, they're gonna mess up, you're gonna go back, like, like Bobby said, he's seen multiple people leave and come right back. I was only in for a week. And the day I went in, someone went home. Three days later, he came right back in. And everyone's asking, well, what happened was, well, I needed some money. So I robbed the store. And it's like, you just had an opportunity. You just walked, you just sat for a couple years. Yeah, you know, you got to go home. Go do something stupid, because you needed some money. And you know, like Bobby said, our background will always follow us. So yeah, you could get a job. But will you get a good paying job? Possibly, but when you do get that good paying job, once they look into your background and find out who you are, or found out what you did, you end up losing your job, you know. I had a job for two years. You know, I got locked up came out, they gave me my job back. And they knew I got arrested and went to jail. They gave me my job back. I don't know what happened. I don't know. If it was like, probation or something had contacted them to confirm my employment, but I ended up losing my job a few weeks ago because of that. And now, the only reason why I'm working now is through a temp agency. In I lied on my background when they asked "have you ever been arrested?" I put no. Do you have a clean background? Yes. Have you ever been convicted of a felony? No. And I got a job. So in the next few weeks, I may possibly be unemployed again. But it helped me, it's keeping me out of trouble. I'm busy, I'm staying busy. And I'm not at home thinking of ways how I can make money.

**Bobby Iacoviello 37:52**

And I think too like, what I've realized, you know, during my transformation, doing work on myself, dealing with my trauma, my past, I realized that I always did the wrong things, but for the right reasons. So I think when you get into community work, when you get into dealing with the youth or your community, you always loved your community, you loved your gang, and that was part of your community. It's the same thing. We just put different energy towards it, you know. You put in a lot of work in a negative sense, you can put that same work in in a positive sense, you know. It's always been in us. Actually, it's probably been in us more than most people. Because we understand it, you know, like, that bond is strong.

**Chaiya Chan 38:49**

The bond, the loyalty so it's like, our loyalty to our gangs, and to our community negatively – if we would just put it all and just be positive about it and give back to the community in a positive way and just connect and work with each other, we can make something happen. We could change lives. We could stop kids from falling victim into the streets. Into gang life, drug life, everything.

**Eugene Ivey 39:29**

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