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OGs on Reentry Final Podcast - Final Edit.wav

Transcript

00:00:16 David

From the Greater Boston area, you are listening to my turn conversations brought to you by the Tufts University Education and Reentry network: MyTERN. These are stories of life during and after incarceration, told by people who have lived it and are working to overcome the odds.

00:00:40 Sidney

Hi, my name is Sidney. I was formerly incarcerated for 15 years. I'm now 40 and after my incarceration, I got involved in the MyTERN TUPIT program at Tufts University.

00:00:59 Larry

My name is Larry. I'm a father of four children, three boys, one girl. I went to prison at the tender age of 20 and ended up serving 32 years of my life. I had the opportunity to sign up to the MyTERN college program, and I thought it was one of the greatest things that could have happened to me at the time of me coming from incarceration.

00:01:36 Sidney

My name is Sydney and I grew up in Brooklyn, NY, and for me, growing up in Brooklyn, NY was rough, being, growing up in the, uhm, projects. Dealing with four buildings that were connected. And uhm pretty much just on growing up in Brooklyn, NY in an area you can find crack housing and in the hallway and the parks, and seeing people just being shot in broad daylight and things like that. And some of the things I experienced and seen, I think, just at my age, some children shouldn't see.

Where I lived that I grew up and lived in, um, Jackie Robinson housing project. That's in on Bedsty Brooklyn. I stayed in on building 120 on the first floor. Apartment 4, I want to say, my door was if I could remember. And uhm, Just that time like you, you had courtyards, you know, hanging up, going out, going, growing up with your friends in the projects, y'all get into things and… Getting into trouble like young kids do and now with and and and and and now with there you know, just something that that goes through life and just experiencing trouble and. Growing up in that environment and that era in the Jackie Robinson projects, there was a lot of violence, gang violence, shooting. The

whole kit and caboodle. The whole 9 yards, you see it, you know what I mean? You was around it 24/7.

And uhm… In retrospect, it's difficult to explain how I put myself on a path to prison at a young age, but growing up in Brooklyn didn't make me a criminal either. At some point I could have used the “no dad in the house” excuse, but you know, my mom did her job as a parent and showed love to me and did the best of her ability to raise me right. You know, and my father, I considered him, even though he, like he was in my life, but I considered him more like a pop– like a Pop-Tart. You put it in a toaster, it pops up and it's gone. So I looked at my father like that, as a Pop-Tart. He was a pop up dad. He popped up one day. He's here, then next year two, he's gone. Or you might not see him for the next two or three years or whatever, but I experienced that as my childhood and my father and my growing up and stuff like that, but it was interesting how I was beginning to commit crime and stuff at early age and stuff, so you know, that's my part of my growing up.

00:04:23 Larry

My name is Larry. A lot of things went on, you know, I was in the era of… A lot of drug dealing going on. I've seen a lot. Being exposed at such a young age, growing up in the Lower Roxbury, you know we had a… Place we call the Derby Park. That was known for lot of activity and that's where I was exposed to in that neighborhood of me growing up. At a young age, I think. I think I might have started hooking school at like about… 12. And that's why I was like, you know, really started, you know, being exposed to a lot of that. It started early on, but I think 12 years old when I started, you know, I guess hanging out a little bit more...

I was raised by my grandmother. You know, although I did have a mother and father, but my grandmother was pretty much my foundation because there was so much going on with my family, my mother and father, you know, my father's incarceration, my mother, just having it, was just tough for having to deal with children at that time. You know, welfare, you know, wasn’t enough. Mind you she wasn't, you know… she did go to work and. So it was it was. It was definitely different coming from being with my mother and of course my grandmother because it's more of a stable environment for me growing up. I took to the streets more than staying being at home. You know, listen to my grandmother, because she was the one that was, you know, so, I guess, caring, and I didn't really understand that at the time. With, you know extension of that just because there was just so much going on. You know, my grandmother was my rock.

00:06:26 Sidney

Mm. You know, speaking about the grandmas, I know what you're talking about, Larry. You know, because I experienced it with my grandma too, just being in, you know, back

and forth between Brooklyn and Boston. In my childhood, I lived in like some of my growing up too was in Franklin Field projects, so you know. Me, my moms, my aunts, all of us sleeping in that one, you know how the apartments wasn't, Franklin Fielld things is all tight, small, you know, I mean, so you had: me and my cousin, it's my moms, her sister, which is my aunts and my uncles and my other uncle sleeping in the kitchen of the project, you know, you know, I'm saying so. I know you're talking about when you're talking about growing up in the environments is especially you know. In that era of the 80s and you know, I mean there was a lot during that during that during that time in the 80s, bro.

00:07:20 Larry

Mm, yeah it was.

00:07:23 Sidney

It was good times, it was bad things. It was fun times, it was sad times, you know, I mean, growing up in that era of the 80s, man and...

00:07:32 Larry

If we lived in that time, now how things would be, you know, because now I think it's more separatism now, you know everybody wants to. I don't think compared to before was more than giving this, you know, when you had to point out, you know, your mother brought her bags, how we would all help you know. And now, it’s like… the kids don't. Yeah, everybody’s helping, you know. Now say anybody see him as like, oh, you know, they going the other way. So that was the difference where before and now, if we can have those times of, you know, being more family I guess orientated and looking out for your own community, community, right.

00:08:05 Sidney

More community back then and and now it's like it faded to black. You know what I mean?

00:08:11 Larry

Yup

00:08:14 Sidney

You know, like for me growing up in that era, when I was skipping school or go around the way you have the older dudes like yo little Nobby, what you doing out here? Let me, you know, get slapped up and you got to go back to class. You know what I mean? Or they tell your parents? Yeah. I slapped your son up to him because he was out here, you know? So I think that process faded somewhere.

00:08:34 Sidney

You know. I think it's just more so now it's just like what can somebody offer that younger generation that's coming up? Instead of giving them some juice they’d rather give them some poison or something, but you know, like you said, the eras, the generation, it don't change from the 80s to the Millennium, you know, so.

00:08:48 Larry

Right. That's a big difference.

00:08:57 Sidney

Yeah.

00:08:58 Sidney

Big difference, especially you know you going from the time you was out to the time you know, I mean down to the time you came home. You know, I'm saying so it's like you you stuck on pause during that process of going through that lovehellaright, but we experienced everything that we experienced growing up. It was, it was a life lesson force, you know, I mean, turned us out to the person that we are today. Thankfully, we on the other side of the wall instead of you know, I mean, fighting for our freedom. Sure.

00:09:28 Larry

True. Coming from a long incarceration, you know it's a big difference of seeing what it is now, absolutely so. That's tough itself because you you guess you want to say, stuck in the old ways, right? You know, I think the old ways or the good ways, you know, it's, you know, it was good and bad with it. You know, it helped. I mean, it just took me my the, the, the other way, you know, instead of going, you know right I went left because that's you know, where my grandmother, I guess now I guess that's what she wanted, you know, I mean as well I can't take away from my mother she did always push you know school anything that nature but it was just so much other exposure outside of the household, I think that.

00:10:25 Sid

Hmm.

00:10:26 Larry

You know, was kind of shaped me, but giving me that thought. It was cool. I guess that's what I can say. I thought it was, except because that's what was around us around me, you know, I had a lot of aunts and uncles that, you know, kind of raised me to a degree at a young age. So that exposure itself was a tough and–

00:10:48 Sidney

Not, but it boils down to like you know, I mean growing up, you, you, you're in a environment to where you're seeing a lot of drug dealing, gang banging and as us being you. We gravitate to that. Yeah, you know, I mean be adolescents, but we come so accustomed to seeing that in our.

00:11:11 Larry

Everyday life.

00:11:12 Sidney

Environments or neighborhoods, right? That we see the older individuals that's older than us, that's out there hustling stacks of money, jewelry calls the girls, and everything like that. We start to see it with the physical eye and start to try to emulate it and try to play it out as we get older. As we're growing up, you know what I mean and I think the first thing that we gravitate to is that stack of money. That's the first thing that we see. You know what I mean when we're growing up? Because it could be your father. You know what I mean? And at my father and his older men and them and they see me coming to the store and like, oh, little Nobby, What's up, man? You going to the store? Yeah. I'm going to get some candy right here. The first thing they pull out that stack of money, my eyes gravitated to the money. Thinking about the dollar you giving me, I'm thinking about or how can I get that stack in my hand? You know what I mean? So after a while you start.

00:12:06 Larry

You're right.

00:12:10 Sidney

Going back around your way, you're playing with your friends, but you ain't actually playing with them ‘cause you're watching John Doe, right? You know, I mean, do all the moves he do, but I think going through it, man and coming out on coming out right at the end is the best part of our growing, you know, I mean our childhood where we grew up, because where we grew up is what made us and what made us the men and the people that we are today.

00:12:47 Sidney

Just growing up period was a struggle. You know what I mean? Living in? What was it? A three-bedroom apartment with maybe nine of us in there. I had to sleep in a bed with maybe five of my cousins. You know what I mean? So it was just like that alone was a struggle. Then having to wake up and pissy sheets or wear the same clothes or dirty shirts and stuff like that, or not being able to have a brand new pair sneakers to go to

school in was a struggle, with my mom's having to work three jobs just to support me and my sister. You know what I mean? So by me seeing that and coming is just like, OK. Seeing it, what can I do to change it for my moms, but also for myself? You know what I mean, not saying that ohh I'm. I'm ashamed of where I came from. Never because I'm I'm proud of where I came from. I love where I came from. That's what made me the man and who I am today. Because if I didn't go through that lovehellaright in the projects. Who's know where I would be today? You know what I mean? But I'm thankful for growing up in the hood. You know what I mean? Because the hoodshowed me things that most places would never ever show me. You would show me how to survive. You know what I mean. It's show me who I could trust and who I can't trust, who's my friends who ain't my friends, you know? I mean, so when we talk about the struggle, it just. Every day is a struggle. You know, it'll matter what color, what race, what background is? I think if you're dealing with something where you're not comfortable or wealthy, I think it's a struggle. You know, but for me, I think that was. But made me into the person I am and what my mother instilled in me, but also my grandmother, as Larry referred to earlier, his grandmother was his rock. My grandmother was our rock you know what I'm saying so. It's just like, it's just the struggle. It's just like, you know, I was a 14, enough to grow up in with both parents or, you know, I'm saying in a nice house. And once I started from the bottom.

00:15:04 Larry

Now we're here.

00:15:05 Sidney

It was like that was my struggle. It was. There's no sad story for me, but that's just my life and my journey. It hasn't ended yet, but it's going to continue on though.

00:15:17 Larry

You know, I said I am coming from a long incarceration. You know that itself, I think, was a it was bad or I say bad is that you know it. I went to prison. I say at 20 years old, you know, I came out of prison at 52. So all those years you know I had children. You know, you know, I missed a lot of years of their life, all their lives, really. Other than coming inside the prison to visit so. You know, just seeing being have my children without a father to me was a, you know, a big thing. So I always pushed, you know, my visits to see them. So we can keep that link of communication. You know, it was some rough times. You know, me even going to court to get cut, you know, visit rights, all that that went through over those years so it was tough and me having to just deal with that, you know. My baby's mothers, you know, how they would struggle with it. My wife would come up, you know, we had a thing of every Sunday that you know, try to keep the family together for as long as she could deal with it. You know? So it was tough through

those years, you know. You know, as as as the song closes. You know when you're not there, how people Iguess turn it back on you or whatever, so. You know you have to use the things that you you know use on the outside on the inside, you know, to help you survive. You know, it wasn't easy. Doing everything that you probably could do that's, you know, without getting the D report, I guess getting going to the whole whatever it is. So sometimes that you know. You had to make the best, you know, I had a thing where I can say, like every year I was working an industry job. And you know, I wanted to send my children a Christmas thing. Some for Christmas, so I would, you know, do my part as once I came from prison, I would, you know. Order from, you know, we had Sears , the catalogs I would get in. I would send them you know their Christmas and then whatever their mother had it. But it was just my point of contributing. I was like, you know, taking like the the industry job as the job I had on the street if I was out and I provided for my family, that's how I looked at it to a degree. So, you know, I think it was good. It worked. You know, they felt good. She felt good, really. Because that's why I wanted to make sure that everybody will be happy during those times that me not being there, you know? Plus it you know, we every time it was like a vent I had, you know, a visit. I had my children. So that kept us together, you know. And then eventually they took that away, so that put a wedge in the, you know, that visiting process with my children and my wife at the time, you know, God rest her soul. So it was tough just having to go through that part even.

00:18:19 Larry

If you really want, you know, be a part of your children's life and things like that, that you would do whatever you could, you know without, you know, guess, jeopardize yourself. But me being thinking more on a legit side of helping provide for my family and whatever I could do, I would just want to do because I wasn't there. I was gone for, you know, or I'll be gone for a long time. So I need to, you know. Be that man, or be that you know, provide of whatever I can do and not just be, you know, I mean a loser as they would say you're in prison and your your girls, your wives are out here taking care of your business. So you definitely have to play your part and do what you can from the inside. You know, because that does go a long way to believe they appreciate it and they feel the difference you know you, even though you're not there, but just contribute to your household, I think is is the best thing you can do to keep your family together so you know that's how I took at it, you know, because I have, I have four children, but these two where my wife was like the ones that was really a part of, you know, those years. So, you know, I guess that's what I took away from everybody else. But that's where those are really. Those two, my son and daughter, was really there. Like, you know, every day. Everybody else is a is a struggle. But I really, I guess I can say. You know, I hate to say it, but I really focus on them two, because they was there and the other ones because they was battling with bringing it coming for visits that I didn't want

to put that energy into that, yes, I did what I had to do to get the visits, but it's still them not being able to, you know, do the extra things. You know, they had a bus that would come out there for visits. You know, it was, it was always seemed like a struggle to a degree. Then eventually, as time went on, they did come around. So that thing was, you know, my children started asking about me wanting to, you know, be a part of this. Like I said, pilots meaning, you know, be a part of my life. You know, who's my daddy kind of thing? They knew who I was. But now it's being a physical part. We can talk all day or send a letter. But it was nothing like them being there, you know, physically, and we can talk and do whatever, you know? But– pictures was our big thing too, you know, having when you come up, you take a picture. I mean, you know, the whole that reflection, how that memory and yeah it was.

00:20:38 Sidney

That was all set everything you know what I mean? Like without that was like no support. Like, what do you got? And what I mean. So we looked forward to them visits, reflections and I mean.

00:20:44 Larry

Right, right.

00:20:49 Sidney

Pictures– just being able to hear loved ones voice while you going through that lovehellaright, you know and it's funny that you spoke about the kids, and that's one of the things I struggled with during the incarceration was like when I used to watch the news and hear about yo, this teenager got shot and that teenager got shot. I used to always think like damn, hopefully that ain't nobody in my family, you know what I mean, you know? And I always thought about my sons, you know, because they at that age, they teenagers ones an adult, and he’s going through his incarceration right now. And that's a struggle for me because it was just like, damn, I'm going through it about to come home. And now you're going in going in and you about to go through the same struggle that I just went through right that hell that I just went through. You know what I mean? So I think that's just a struggle on just trying to keep them on the right path you give what I'm saying cause I always said to my sons like I'm not gonna be that far. That's gonna be when you're back and all that shit. I'm gonna let you do you that, bump your head a few times and let you learn, but, as your father, I'm gonna try to the best of my ability to do the things that my father didn't do, you know? I mean, that's be there even like you said, you wasn't there. I wasn't there for 15 years, you know, I mean, I let both of them at young ages one, I think my youngest was maybe 4 when I left and I think my oldest at the time my first stay there he was probably like maybe 3 and I was going on five years on that one. I was locked out on in Jersey at the time on that one.

Right. You know, so just like, it's a constant struggle when you deal, when you think about stuff like that. When you got children and you mentioned the children, you know, it made me think of that, like then it was. So I was going through wild incarceration, but at the same time trying to keep them–

00:22:37 Larry

Let me hit you with this one right. There was an individual that I met at Walpole, right. That, you know, who saw that I was big on this family thing. So he was like, you don't love your family. I looked at this dude like, you know, I should punch your head off or

something, right? Because he's on. I love my children and our family, but saying that, I questioned him, why would he say that? So the point was that, you know, if you love your children, you would be there with him. And that was like, damn, you know, it was hard man. So I carried that hard. I'm carrying it now. Yeah, you know, just to say that to somebody, man, you know, if you hear that somebody said that to you, if you really and about your children. But I'm gonna be a part of your lives and somebody says that you don't love your child, you don't love your child, right? You respond a little differently, right. You look at this like, damn well, you know, was I out here in the streets for them or was that for myself?

If the things you would do you know for your child. Regardless, if you really was about your children, that's what it was about. Now you're crying about a visit. You want this, you want that. But you know, you wasn't thinking about it when you was out there on the street.

00:23:34 Sidney

Absolutely.

00:23:53 Larry

You're going to have people you know that's going to count on you relying on you. You know, me and your children, your wife, girl.

00:23:59 Sidney

Whoever it is absolutely real, you're the hero in your child's eyes now. So now our children start feeling like being. Was it me? Did I do something wrong? In all reality, we know it was you. It was us. Because he was in the pursuit of happiness. But that pursuit of happiness was the money that we was chasing. Honestly speaking, like for me, I chose the streets over my over my sons. You know what I mean? Like. To this day, like we build on that, you know what I mean? And my sons know like you know, pops, I understand you had to do what you had to do to provide for us and take care. You know, I was what? 17 at the time 16 going on 17 and had my first child. You know, I'm saying

damn, it's crazy and the streets trapping, that's all I knew I wasn't thinking about going, you know, getting a job and you know.

00:24:52 Larry

Responsibilities, yeah.

00:24:54 Sidney

Flipping no burger for four or five hours where I could stand on the block and make triple that within an hour. You know, I mean, so that kind of made me think of that. When you have brought that up, though. After my trial and my son came behind me. And the look on his face was just, like, damn yo, you're leaving me? But I had to let him know. Like, yo, I'm not leaving. I'm going on vacation. I'm just going on the school training cause at the time they wanted to know, I was going to prison. You know, I mean, but as he got old, I kind of broke it down to him, but once I made it to Walpole I took the decision to to to say to question myself, to be like Yo Sid, what is it that you want? Do you want to continue your life in and out of prison before they fuck around and throw the book at you and you're in there for the rest of your life and you won't be able to get out? Or do I take it as you know, I was saved, you know. I mean, I was rescued because that's how I looked at it. I wasn't arrested. I was rescued because of the way that I was going. And I'm grateful to be here today because the way I was going, I wouldn't have been here because I didn't have a care in the world at that time because I already had my son, born my oldest, so if I died I was like, OK my son's here. He's gonna carry on whatever I left you know, but um going through that incarceration and everything, I took it upon myself to just.

I entered, I entered, I entered prison. fucked up Right. But I wasn’t trying to leave prison fucked up.

You know, I'm saying so I took the initiative to look at it as yes, prison. But what can I benefit from it? You know what I mean? So I took the initiative to go get my GED which is now called the HiSET. Then once I got that, I took the initiative to go do BU. I graduated from that. Then after once I graduated from BU, I took the initiative to get my barber's license. So I looked at the joint as a benefit for me, instead of more like a crutch. You know what I'm saying? So I was determined to fix me before it got time to come home from incarceration. So I took the initiative to just work on self. And look myself in the mirror and just be like, yo, this is who I am and this who I ain't, you know, I mean, because a lot of us are afraid of change because of what change looked like. You know what I mean? A lot of us is afraid of change of because of what it entails.

00:27:44 Larry

Say that again. Say that again.

00:27:52 Sidney

You know, I mean, some people ain't willing to change for the better. Some people might change just a little bit to be like, oh, I'm good with just how I am right here. I got to high school. The program. I got the GED or the license. But I'm just going to still be the fucked up same person I was. You know what I mean? So I think change scares a lot of people. But for me personally speaking for myself, I took the initiative to change my ways, and my actions to better myself for not just me and my family, but those around me.

00:28:25 Larry

You are right on point with being afraid of change because that was, you know, it is deciding to take you out of your comfort zone. You know, you're really used to being said in one way. So if you're this big drug dealer and now you got to go and get an honest job, right. And you look at the money of how, you know, what you was getting. So when it comes to change, it's definitely I can speak for myself, it was hard, but I needed that. You know, if I wanted to get out of prison. Really. So. You know, I bullshitted around for 10 years. Really I can say because I really wasn't set. I came in 20 years and 30, you know, I need if I want anything out of the system. I had to have a GED, you know what I mean? So, you know.

00:29:06 Sidney

Yeah.

00:29:08 Larry

I tried the BU thing but didn’t score high enough, so I chose to go to vocational school. You know, I got a wellness certificate. You know, they didn't allow me to do nothing else in all those years. I got a Wellness certificate. You know, I'm saying but many programs under my belt. So that's where my growth came, I guess. And changing my thinking, you know, now coming out into it, you know, carrying that same momentum of, you know, wanting to change and do better.

Myself, I took it this opportunity of, you know, coming to Tufts and I think that was one of, you know, the best things for me to a degree, and it ain't been easy, you know, because it's here, it is it just change, you know, I'm saying it's something different.

00:29:51 Sidney

It's changeable. Positive, you know.

00:29:51 Larry

You know, we're not, right, definitely it is, but it's how you, you know, I guess adjusting to it all you know so right you have to you know accept this for what it is man and.

00:29:58 Sidney

Being accustomed to it.

00:30:03 Larry

Once you, I guess accept it right, you can, you know, make things better for yourself because you're you're part of it now, right? So that's what it was for me from before you know, it took a long many years, but I'm just continuing that movement of the change because I wanted to continue that change. I didn't want to go backwards.

00:30:24 Sidney

No, absolutely I feel you bro, staying positive, right? Being around the right people as you know, influence, because those influences could bring you to hell you. You're absolutely, you know the saying that they say man: People that you put yourself around is what you're going to get and receive, right? You know what I mean? So they're saying, like, if you eat shit you're gonna get shit But if you eating good, you're gonna, you're gonna get good. You know what I mean? So I look at it from that perspective and I just try to, like, during my incarceration.

00:30:47 Larry

Yeah.

00:30:56 Sidney

I forgot about my hood, bro. Like I wasn't caring about who they was beefing with. 00:31:02 Larry

Yeah.

00:31:03 Sidney

What's going on out there? Because I wasn’t trying to do inside time and outside time, right? Cause we know the two don't mix, right? It's gonna stress you out through the process. You know what I mean? But it was, you know, it was just something, man. I just took it upon us bro. Just like to see us where we're at now is beautiful. You know what I mean, and everything that we experienced and went through. Being in there, you know what I mean and just coming out on the better end of it, and I said yo everything that come from the Office of Returning Citizens. I'm on it, bro. You know what I mean? Whether they shooting emails, whatever, I'm taking it because.

00:31:39 Larry

Right, yeah.

00:31:44 Sidney

Because if I continue to do that, I know I'll be continuing doing a positive path because it’s easy to go to the left. You know what?

00:31:53 Larry

I mean, so you're saying staying plugged into the different resources you utilize? 00:31:56 Sidney

Your resources, just networking, is our biggest thing when we’re coming home from incarceration. You know what I mean getting our feet situated because it's like say you've been home, right and I'm just coming home. But you've been home for five years and I'm just coming home. But if you ain't got $5 in your pocket, how you going to be able to give me $5? You know, I'm saying so when it's coming home, when it's coming home. It's just like we have to think about. So first, before we could think about anything else, we have to get ourselves situated.

00:32:31 Larry

Start with yourself.

00:32:33 Sidney

Make sure we're straight before we could think about anybody else until we try to do for anybody.

00:32:38 Larry

You can't help the next person without helping yourself, so I agree with that 100 percent, you know.

00:32:43 Sidney

Oh, this was a beautiful build, my brother.

00:32:47 Larry

It definitely was my brother.

00:32:48 Sidney

You know what I mean? You know, I'm. I'm looking forward to plenty more. 00:32:51 Larry

Alright, see you on the next one, peace.

00:33:10 Swinks

Thank you for listening to the MyTERN podcast. MyTERN is a community based university accredited program providing education, mentorship and career development support to and by those who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system. MyTERN’s objective is to provide an opportunity for each participant to reframe their skills, interests, responsibility and commitments. Support these students at TUPIT.org. Music brought to you by Elmo Pleitez and Vernell Jones the 2nd.