



Never Let Go

Soundtracks to this post2: This was a song I made for my niece, and played to her, warning her to not let it be her life. – [Click here to listen A Tree Grows In Brooklyn](#) This is one I wish she would've heard – [Black Girl](#)

I have a niece who was born to a 16 year old father caught up in the street. My mother had kicked my brother out when he was 14, let him back in the house, and then put him in Job Corps. He used to cut school and work doing construction for the landlord of the building next door. My mother wasn't having that not going to school shit, so he had to go.

My brother did well at Job corps. He had gotten certified in plumbing and was on his way to getting his G.E.D when he came home to visit. On that visit he found out a girl he had been messing with had gotten pregnant and had planned to keep the baby. He treated her like shit and she thought that if she had the kid, things would change, they didn't. My brother decided to stay so he could be there for the baby but still wasn't messing with his baby's mother. Since her plan didn't work and she couldn't have my brother, her next move was to come to our house, ask my mother to babysit, and never come back, which she did.

The last words my mother told me she heard her say at the custody hearing were, "you can have her I don't want the little bitch". My mother took on the responsibility of raising her, though with 6 kids and a sister with Down syndrome to care for it wasn't the easiest thing to do. At that time we were living in Brooklyn, we later moved to the East Side of Manhattan, "The Barrio". The culture of the Barrio is all about Hispanic pride, the Spanish are mad proud to be Spanish, and a lot of the Black folks get lost in that and want to be Spanish too. Spanish guys want Spanish girls, Black guys want Spanish girls, Black girls want Spanish guys, etc.

I had another niece that was half black and half Puerto Rican. When family would come over, they'd tell her how pretty she was, and how long and pretty her hair was. For a young Black girl growing up around this, my guess is that it couldn't have inspired the strongest sense of self worth. My niece also had a cocked eye as a result of her mother using the bathroom while in labor, after doctors had advised her against it, and birthing my niece in the toilet. The bacteria from the water resulted in her having a cocked eye and later having to wear super thick glasses to school because of the bad vision she had at the time, which also resulted in ridicule.

With the exception of the teasing, my niece loved school. I used to play school with her and my little brother in the house before they started school. I look back on it now and realize the importance of

that. Though I was kind of crazy while doing it, screaming at 4 year olds for not getting multiplication, it helped them a lot cause went they went to school; they were way ahead of everyone else. They both were honor students from 1st grade through High School. By the time my niece had got to High School, my mother had moved to Delaware. The distance became an excuse for my brother to not come see his daughter at all.

She'd cry when he'd say he was coming to see her and never show up until her heart turned cold to it. He had a son by that time and had taken his son's first name as his middle name. He would take trips from NY to NC to see his boy. I know my niece probably felt real rejected by that. She had me though, "Uncle Shawn", the cute guy with the braids that all her friends liked, the guy that was about to be this big rapper, the only person she felt she could talk to, the only person that understood.

I remember one day she had come home from school and locked herself in the bathroom. My mother knocked on the door, but she would answer or let her in, my little brother knocked on the door to try to see what was wrong but she wouldn't answer or let him in. When she heard my voice, she cracked the door open and I came in. She just grabbed me and cried, I don't really remember what it was all about; I think some kids had been teasing her or something. She was my little partner in crime, when I had put out my first CD; I gave her some CD's to give out at her school with some posters. Come to find out, she was selling the CD's and posters to her girlfriends who were pinning the posters up in their lockers and stuff believing I was a big rapper from New York.

The only thing I ever bought her was a pair of sneakers, and she cherished them. She rarely wore them out of fear of getting them messed up. I had created this façade of conceit to help me deal with my insecurities and she kind of adopted that. Though we both acted as if we were the best thing since sliced bread on the outside, I don't think either one of us believed it on the inside.

My mother ended up moving back to New York, where in her teens, my niece got to reunite with her father. While at her father's house, it was like a hood book come true. Other teenagers came through there, hung out and got high, there were fights, arrest and convictions, prison sentences, all the fun and exciting stuff. Captivated by it all, she developed a thirst to be around it more and more. She got freedom over there that my mother didn't give her, but what she couldn't see was that what it was wasn't freedom, but people not giving a damn. I'd try to tell her that when people don't care, they'll let you do whatever you want. It was too alluring to her though, she'd sneak out and leave my mother wondering where she had gone to find out she was at her father's house.

My mother got sick of it all and let my niece go stay with her father feeling betrayed and that my niece was being ungrateful. It hurt my mother deeply. My life had fallen apart and I was in the shelter system so I wasn't of much help to anyone. My girlfriend at the time had developed a real close bond with my niece. My niece revealed to her that she had been having sex, my mother already had known, only one that didn't know was me. I was told by my girlfriend at the time that my niece was scared I would feel she let me down. As time passed, rumors swirled; she's pregnant, she got an abortion, etc. I told her I didn't care about any of it and to just promise me that no matter what she'd do good in school and finish.

A few months passed and I'd periodically stop by my brother's crib to crash on the couch. While I was there, I saw my niece had developed a thing for black oversized shirts, it looked like her breast had gotten bigger but I couldn't tell if it was her titts or the shirt. I brushed it off, later I found out she was pregnant. I wanted her to get an abortion; she didn't want to, everyone said if she would have been forced to get an abortion she would have hated me. She decided to keep it; a baby having a baby for unconditional love is how I saw it.

My mother, who had moved back to Delaware, took the bus back up to New York to talk to my niece. She offered to take her back to Delaware and watch the child while she went to school and finished. My niece turned her down and I flew off the handle. I couldn't comprehend it; she wanted to stay in the city for what? To hang out in the hallway, to talk about who got shot, who got punched in the face, who got robbed? I told her if she stayed things would be harder, I told her I had seen it all before. A young girl gets pregnant, ends up in the shelter system and on Welfare, gets an apartment through the shelter system, being young and unsupervised with an apartment paid for by the Welfare there's no desire to get more. The boyfriend has a place to come lay-up, have sex, smoke, whatever, the friends get a hang out spot, and you get another baby, and another baby, and then you find yourself trapped. I told her I didn't want that to happen to her, she just told me it wasn't, told me she had friends who would babysit. I asked who, I told her she couldn't just let anybody watch her kids. Her boyfriend road up on his bicycle, I approached him with the intent to slap him but he rode away. Frustrated and angry, I told my niece she was dead to me and that I wanted nothing to do with her. She cried to my mother, I knew I had said the wrong thing but didn't know what else to say or do. She had her father, she had the life she wanted, I pretty much steered clear of it all.

A few weeks ago, I got a call from my mother. She said my niece is pregnant again by her a guy that has just gotten out of jail. She's on Welfare; she has an apartment paid for by Welfare, and she's unemployed. Before she became that girl, she used to write poems warning other girl's to not be that girl, how could she go on to be that girl? I think about it and I feel like I failed her. My dreams were more important, my pride, I gave up on her. I should have fought harder, but I didn't. She had plans to be a lawyer, was going to a high school that focused on law, now her hope is to get hired at Macy's. I shouldn't of let her go.

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