

# An Interview With Hayward Brown

By Lynda Chabot



Photo chabot/king

**GW:** Hayward, would you give us a little of your background?

I was born in the city of Detroit and raised over on the West side. I started elementary school over at Algiers and then we moved to Martindale, and I started going to school over there. It was so bad when we first moved over on Martindale, that I was going back to the old neighborhood for about six months, like I couldn't get in. After that, I got to know people and got to like the neighborhood. I was doing pretty good in school up to that point, basically A's and B's.

I got introduced to gambling and this was like a whole new thing. Money was taught to be the whole thing — the factor. We didn't have that much money coming in. My father worked at Ford's. I never was dirty; I always had clean clothes; I always kept neat; and I was never hungry. I didn't have to go through that trip. You know it was still there, being around friends who were hungry, who had to gamble and hustle just to survive, trying to keep their thing together with the family.

## Street Gangs, School and Dope

**GW:** Were you in street gangs?

We used to fight in gangs. We just had so much frustration around us and we had to take it out somewhere, so we just took it out on each other.

**GW:** Given your working class background, do you recall when you became aware of dope in your community?

I think I first became aware of drugs when I was about 11. I saw people using heroin. I wasn't hip yet to that problem. I really didn't know what was happening.

**GW:** What did you think of school?

I was still doing fairly good in school but I began to ask myself how school related to what I learned in the streets. The street would be my life in the end anyway. I really couldn't find anything valid other than learning how to count your money so you wouldn't get cheated.

I quit school when I was about fifteen. I came across the 12th Street Academy and started going on a regular basis. We had courses in English and math and also talked about what was happening in the community. I also belonged to the Sons of Malcolm X which was a political organization formed around the liberation of black people through the means of community control.

During that time some good friends began to fall into the dope thing. It was deep — to know what kind of people they were and to see them stoop that low — to a point where they would have to steal from their parents.

**GW:** Dropping out of school, going to the 12th Street Academy and watching friends get strung out — how did all of this affect you?

Seeing my friends dehumanized like that, had a lot to do with my development and understanding of the dope problem. I was at the point where I was wondering what could be done. I like to read and I kept reading, trying to find somewhere to turn.

At a point, I threw up my hands and turned back to the street. I got into a slight heroin thing myself. I had been using heroin for about a month, when I saw a dude

who had an OD and had been thrown out in the alley. That made me sit down and think, "Hey, wow, what you getting into man?" I wrote John Boyd who was in Vietnam. We always had a close thing; we grew up together. I ran on him what the deal was and he told me to hang loose and he would be home soon.

**GW:** What did you decide to do about dope?

I got with some other friends who were thinking the same thing and we decided to try and make some moves on the dope man. We were convincing enough that we had some success. The problem with it was that there was so much fertile territory that as soon as you got rid of one dope house there was another one. We were really bumping our heads against the wall, so to speak.

**GW:** What about police harrassment?

We encountered slight police harrassment in the neighborhoods. Every now and then police would say stuff like, "Your gonna die, nigger, if you keep this shit up."

A couple of months later, I got picked up around the corner from my house, and they took me down to the 2nd Precinct. They first took me down for armed robbery questioning. After that I was told I had snatched a lady's purse that had in it \$7.50. They took me down to the youth home and called my mother. I stayed at the youth home until I went to court.

On the day of court, the lady came whose purse was snatched and she said that I wasn't the one who did it. One witness who worked in the MacDonald's on Grand River and Stansbury said that I was the one and had been in MacDonald's that week. I had been in the Wayne County youth home up until my court date. I had a state-assigned attorney who said that everything would be all right. The judge said, "Mrs. Brown, we want to do you a favor. We are going to commit your son to the Boys Training School for six months." I got out after five and a half months. I had just turned 17. While I was there, I got a GED.

**GW:** After your experience at the Boys Training School, what did you do?

I started getting back to the problem of drugs in our community. John Boyd and I talked about it and had the same idea—if we were going to do anything about it, we had to get to the suppliers and financiers. So we were more or less exchanging ideas with brothers that we knew, among those Mark Bethune, who had the same thing on it that we had.

My thing was I had lost two close friends and understood how dangerous this thing heroin was. It came down to the three of us, myself, John and Mark. We came up with the idea of surveillance and responding to what we found out from our surveillance. The rest came about on Dec. 4th with the shootout.

## The Political Results

**GW:** What do you think are the political results in the community of your trials?

The thing I have seen behind these cases, has been a heightening level of awareness around the question of drugs. I feel that if these people who showed so much concern for me and the problem of drugs in the city, could function in an organized force, and could feel secure, some definite moves could be made to rid our community of these drugs.