

JUST ANOTHER PART OF GROWING UP

By James Mays

Narration: It was mid-spring and I had just gotten home from work. I worked after school and weekends for a construction and maintenance company owned by my best friend's older brother. I was a freshman in high school and though I had my own car, I was only 13 years old. We lived in a small two bedroom: me, my 'lil brother and moms! We didn't have much but we had each other and we always made due. On this particular day, my uncle Junior (my mom's youngest brother and my favorite uncle bar none) was over watching TV and relaxing.

Mother: James, we need food and there is no gas in my car.

James: That's why I gave you a hundred bucks, mom; and by the way, I haven't been driving your car.

Mother: Boy, a hundred dollars ain't gonna feed us no time and don't try to get smart. I know you didn't use my gas but I still need some.

James: Momma, I gave you half of what I got, so make it work. I have things I need to do too!

Mother: You need to give me some more money, cause we need to get groceries to last us. And what do you got to spend money on?

Junior: Love, let that boy have his money.

James: I got stuff to do and things I need!

Narration: As the back and forth continues, my mother is adamant about the needs of the house. I know better and I volunteer to shop for the groceries, which she rejects immediately. My uncle defends me tirelessly and my mother can't explain or itemize the things she needs money for, which is no surprise to me. I go back to my room and prepare to get ready to go out as it's Friday night. A while later, my uncle catches me on the back porch and we talk for a bit.

Junior: Yo mama loves you and she means well, James. She just has her ways, you know!

James: I know, Junior. It's just frustrating when I try so hard to do what I can for us and she still has to have more. Now you know like I know that she doesn't really need more, she just has a desire to shop for stuff.

Junior: She's not used to doing without and you know where she got that.

James: Yeah, but my dad ain't tryin' to give her anything and when I go, it's a hard sell to get any help from him. You know the history!

Junior: I know, but you do great by your mom and she knows it!

James: Yeah, I guess. Aye, my car is running a lot better since we fixed that hose and the carb. Thanks for the help. I got tired of it over-heating all the time.

Junior: That's good. Where you headed tonight?

James: The rink. Then we may go down to the beach for a bonfire party after.

Junior: You be safe and know that you allright, nephew. You do more than most your age and some!

James: Thanks, Junior. I'll see you later!

(Junior exits. Mother enters.)

James: Momma, I'm going to the rink and we are probably going down to the beach after.

Mother: Boy, you be careful. You know you ain't got no license to be driving around late at night.

James: (leans down and kisses her cheek) I know, Moms. I'll be okay and I love you. I'll see you later and don't worry, I got it.

Mother: Be safe and I love you too.

(Music cue. 2 months later.)

Mother: Boy, what is that in your ear?

James: It's a stainless steel safety pin until I can find a proper starter stud to replace it with.

Mother: Boy, if you don't take that thing out of your ear right now, it's gone get infected! Why would you do that?

James: Because I wanted to, mom. I think it's cool!

Mother: Boy, only knuckleheads and gang members wear that stuff. You need to take that out. You are not staying under my roof with that in your ear!

James: Okay, I'm not takin' it out, so I guess I'll be movin'.

Mother: Boy, I'm callin' your father. He can take you cause you are not stayin' here with that.

(She picks up the phone and dials James' father at his office.)

James: Fine!

(Mother gets an answer and after a brief conversation...)

Mother: It's your dad; he wants to talk to you!

James: Hello.

Dad: Hey, what's going on?

James: I got my ear pierced and now mom is going through the roof. She says it's gang related or something and I got to move. I don't know. I'm going to pack now.

Dad: Well, I'll be by in awhile to pick you up.

James: No, I'm good. I'll let you know when I get where I'm going.

Dad: What? Where are you going, boy? You too young to be in the streets on your own!

James: Don't worry. Here's mom.

Mother: I don't know where he thinks he's going. I told him to take it out.

(Music cue.)

Narration: James packs some clothes and stuff to take with him until he figures out his long-term living plans. He has already decided that for now he will go to his partner's house. Ray will let him crash until he can figure out his next move. While packing he goes into his secret spot; under the carpet he has a loose floorboard in the corner that comes out leaving a small space about shoebox size. He pulls out a wad of cash and without counting, he knows exactly how much is there; he's been saving forever. He also pulls out a .22 cal and extra ammo stashing it into his clothes in one of the bags he is taking.

Mother: Your dad said he'll be here and for you to wait for him. (She notices James is packing.) So you're packing. Gonna move back to your father's?

James: No, I'm not; I'm leaving though! I'll take what I need and come back for the rest once I figure out what I'm gonna do.

Mother: Where are you gonna live, James?

James: I'm not exactly sure but don't worry I have places I can stay until I get it all figured out.

Mother: Your father said stay here and wait for him!

James: I heard you the first time, mom; and again, I'm leaving. I told dad on the phone that I was leaving, so...

Mother: Boy, you ain't going nowhere.

James: (whisper) Goodbye, mom.

Narration: James gets into his car and heads to Ray's. Ray lives about three blocks away, so in minutes, James is at the door to the apartment where Ray lives with his mom and sis. James calls Nancy mom, since he is there so much and they are so close. Nancy is Ray and Brenda's mom. Brenda is Ray's sister. Brenda answers the door after only a moment.

Brenda: Hey, Big Bro, what's up? (They hug.)

James: Hey Brenda, where's yo bro?

Brenda: He's in the room; can't you hear the noise? (Heavy Metal music from bedroom.)

James: Yeah, what you up to?

Brenda: Bored as hell, you got some bud?

James: You know it, let's get the head banger!

Ray: What's up, Bro?

James: Thought you were gonna work late on that other job site?

Ray: Bill changed his mind; cheap ass didn't want to have to pay me!

James: Figures. Mom's flipped out so I split; gonna need a place to crash for a few days till I figure out what to do.

Brenda: Got the bong; where's the bud? And you know you can always crash here!

Ray: Like he needed you to tell him that. So what you gonna do and what happened?

James: The ear piercing thing freaked her out. Dude, she called my old man and everything.

Ray: What did he have to say?

James: Said he was gonna come get me. Imagine that? Anyway, I told I was cool and that I was leaving. Here, Bren, load the bowl.

Ray: Hey, where did you get the good shit?

James: Stopped by Ricky's on the way home from work and this is some of his personal; not that swag he's been selling to everyone.

Ray: You see how he hooked up his garage?

James: Yeah, looks cool!

Ray: We need to get our own place.

James: Would be cool to have our own spot. It's not like we can't afford it but who's gonna rent to a couple of kids? Yeah, like who?

Brenda: (coughing, hands James the bong) Here, why don't you guys get that empty apartment downstairs in the back?

James (takes back bong, checks the bowl) That's right. That two bedroom back there is empty; we could do that, bro!

Ray: I'm in; how do we get it? And how much is the move-in?

James: I can cover the move-in if you don't have your half but I got to have mine back. And your mom knows the landlord dude. I'm sure she can get us in, if not I'll get my uncle to sign for me. (takes a long hit from the bong and passes it to Ray)

Ray: Pass it! Yeah, I may need some help with the move-in but I got you.

Brenda: Mom should be back. She went to get some stuff from the store and cigarettes!

James: Man, that would be so cool to actually have our own pad!

(Nancy enters)

Brenda: Mom, where are the smokes?

Nancy: Girl, they are out in the car in the bags which you guys may go and bring in!

James: Hi mom, how are you?

Nancy: Boy, come give me a hug. What's that other son of mine up to, or need I ask? And could y'all please open some windows and air this place out?

James: He's in the room. Let me go help Brenda with the bags but then, mom, we need to talk.

Nancy: Why so serious; that's not like you?

James: There's a lot going on but I think I've got it under control. Just may need a little help and maybe some guidance.

(Ray whispers in Mom's ear)

Nancy: So you left your mother's, huh?

James: Yeah, she didn't like the earring thing a bit and after a few words, it was my only alternative to going back to my dad's.

Nancy: So you and Ray want that unit in the back. That's not going to interfere with school for you, is it?

James: No, I'm already working after school and on weekends, so I think I can make it work.

Nancy: Well, if you guys promise to be responsible, I will do all I can to help you guys get in but all monetary consequences will be yours!

Ray: We know, mom, and we've thought it over and figure we can cover it all with room to spare!

Nancy: Well, I'll talk to the landlord and see what we can do.

Ray & James: Thanks, Mom.

Narration: About ten days later, they are moved in and after acquiring some furniture from here and there and buying a dining room set at a yard sale, along with a sofa, things seem to do better than James could have imagined. A few months later, work with Ray's brother slowed and James lied about his age and took a job as a security guard. One night while on the job, his mom showed up out of the blue with food. James was at the guard desk inside a high rise Union Bank tower.

James: Mom, what are you doing here and how did you find out where I was working?

Mother: Boy, I'm your mother and I have my ways. Your 'lil brother needs your help and when we went by your apartment today, Ray told him where you were working. I brought you some food here!

James: Thanks; how are you?

Mother: I'm fine. I won't even ask how you got this job. (she shakes her head and smiles) You never cease to amaze me. I love you and you be careful, okay. Stop by tomorrow because your 'lil brother really needs your help. And I miss you...

James: I'll be by and I love you too.