

THE MISSISSAUGA NEWS

West side story - Second in a three-part series

More than 40 known gangs roam Mississauga's streets

Louie Rosella

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Guled Mohamud was only 5-years-old when his family fled to Canada from their war-torn homeland. A curious and lovable little boy, the future Canadian knew nothing of the dangers he and his large family would face by staying in their native Somalia, a country ravaged by fighting between rival warlords and by famine.

It wasn't until Guled was a teenager that he began to comprehend the differences between the Somali capital of Mogadishu, his birthplace, and his new home in Mississauga.

Guled grew to be an upstanding Canadian who excelled in school. His teachers at Kipling Collegiate Institute raved about his drive to succeed.

In Canada, Guled didn't have to worry about food, shelter or security. His greatest problem, in fact, was fitting a pick-up game of basketball into his busy schedule every week.

By age 16, he felt forever indebted to his parents, Abdi Osman and Amina Hassan, for giving him a better life in Canada. To show his appreciation, Guled promised them he would make something of himself, be a role model for his nine siblings and devote a huge chunk of time to the Muslim faith.

Guled was doing everything right, according to his father.

"He was very future-oriented. He was taking computer courses outside of school to prepare him for the study of medicine," said the 53-year-old Osman. "His goal in life was to become a surgeon. He wanted to help people, to cure them. That was his personality."

But, Guled's promising future came to a tragic halt March 12, 2001, when the slim and cheerful 16-year-old was stabbed to death in an alleged gang-related attack.

The irony, according to family members, was Guled's condemnation of gang life and his ongoing efforts to steer himself, his friends and siblings away from criminality.

The fatal stabbing occurred at Mississauga's Abyss Night Club, a huge establishment at the corner of Burnhamthorpe and Wolfedale Rds. that has since closed.

On that fateful night, Guled grudgingly attended the then-popular club after his friends and brother, 17-year-old Daad Mohamud, begged him to go.

That day was a busy one for Guled, spent volunteering at local mosques, cooking for prayer groups and cleaning windows and floors. By the end of the day, Guled was tired and hadn't seen his parents since the night before.

"Guled's brother told me later that he wanted to come home and see us, but he decided to appease his friends instead," said Osman.



Staff photos by Fred Loek

Guled Mohamud, a 16-year-old with a passion for volunteering and plans to become a doctor, lost his life on the dance floor of a local club in an alleged gang-related murder. The knife that killed him was, "intended for someone else."



Abdi Osman displays a photograph of his once happy family of 12. His son, Guled Mohamud, was stabbed to death at the age of 16 at a Mississauga dance club. The family photograph shows Guled third from the right, in front of his father.

Guled had heard of The Abyss, but avoided it because, according to word on the street, the club was trouble, rumoured to be a hotbed for members of Mississauga's Bloods and Crips gangs.

All was well until about 1:15 a.m., when Guled and company hit the dance floor to "bounce" to one last song before heading home.

According to Superior Court records, a fight erupted on the dance floor and, while young Guled was still trying to figure out what was happening, a knife penetrated his heart, leaving a 10-centimetre deep stab wound that killed him instantly.

Guled was an innocent bystander. He did nothing to provoke the attack, court records later showed.

Mississauga resident Ian Walter Gordon, then 19, was arrested two months after the knifing and charged with second degree murder. He pleaded guilty last February to manslaughter, maintaining he never meant to hurt Guled. The knife was intended for someone else.

Gordon, a convicted criminal whose lengthy record already included robbery, theft and mischief, received a 21-month jail term from Justice Bruce Durno. He'll be out of jail this December.

At the time of the killing, there was a well-known rift between Somalis in the Bloods gang and Jamaicans in the Crips gang. That rivalry, coupled with other information from intelligence gathering, had Peel Regional Police convinced Gordon was a gang member, an allegation never tried in court because the accused avoided a trial by entering a guilty plea.

Even the judge couldn't help but touch upon Guled's righteousness when handing out Gordon's sentence.

"A 16-year-old with great promise goes to a club to have fun and he dies," said Durno.

To this day, Guled's family remains infuriated over what they call a light sentence.

"I ask myself every day, 'Who does this sentence benefit? Does it benefit the victim's family? Does it benefit society to let a killer roam free after less than two years?'" said Osman.

"I don't understand what kind of justice has been served here. My son was an innocent person with so much potential whose life was cut short by a criminal."

Now, more than three years after the killing, Osman and his family have moved to Etobicoke. Osman works with Dixon Community Services to keep the youth in his neighbourhood away from street gangs and violence. He wonders what would entice someone to join a street gang.

"It's like a ticket to evil. I don't get it," said the concerned father.

In an interview with The News, former Mississauga gang member Jake (not his real name) claimed some people, himself included, aren't left with much of a choice: Gang life is their shield from a cruel world.



Police reporter Louie Rosella takes an in-depth look at the escalating problem of street gang activity in Miss-issauga and Peel. Second in a three-part series.

Now a tall and unassuming 22-year-old, he shows no telltale signs of his former life as a gang member -- on the surface. There are no more baggy clothes, the bizarre lingo is gone along with the haughty attitude, and a red bandanna that Jake said he donned to sell his machismo has been donated to the Salvation Army.

He has also shed his gang name.

But, his left shoulder blade still bears the scar of a life once marred by drugs and violence. On it is inscribed a tattoo of a black hawk swooping down on its prey. This was the symbol of the Raging Hawks, a gang that roamed the streets of south Mississauga.

"I guess I never got it removed because there is a bit of gangster still in me," he said. "(Being in a gang) did a lot more bad than good for me, but it did teach me a lot."

Stand up to people when you think they're wrong, wear your heart on your sleeve, and "don't take anybody's s__t," were just a few of the street-smart lessons Jake said he learned during his tenure with the Hawks.

Today though, Jake is fiercely opposed to gangs. He moved to Cambridge with his mother four years ago to get away from a world that turned this once shy little boy into a ruthless punk.

"I could have stayed here with a friend in an apartment, but I had to get away," he said. "The Hawks were getting into too much criminality, and my life was in the toilet. My grades were crap. I was always cutting class to go and smoke a joint. I had no future if I stayed here."

At the age of 16, Jake said, he felt compelled to join a gang because he needed protection. That word, "protection" takes on a surreal definition in Jake's former gang life, where some friends were badly beaten simply because they were late on petty drug payments.

A native of Guyana, Jake immigrated to Mississauga in 1993 with his mother. In high school, he said, students would pick on him because of his colour and lanky figure. One teen who thought Jake was "strange-looking" even threatened to slice his throat. On the way home from school one afternoon in Grade 9, a group of students threw rocks at him.

"I couldn't take it anymore. I needed help," he said.

That's when the Hawks, a relatively small gang of about 40 youths of primarily Guyanese, Chilean and Paraguayan descent, came knocking.

"I liked what they stood for," Jake said. "They were about dignity and respect."

To join, Jake had to go through an initiation. He had two choices -- rob a convenience store or take a beating. Jake chose the latter. He remembers the Oct. 4, 1998 thrashing like it was yesterday.

"(Two members) beat the hell out of me in the back of a warehouse that night," he said. The injuries included a black eye, broken nose and a badly bruised stomach.

"They then bought me dinner and drove me home. They said they went easy on

me because they didn't use weapons or knock out any teeth."

Once Jake became a Hawk, the ridiculing and death threats from other students stopped.

"It was like an unwritten rule not to mess with the Hawks," he said.

The gang was like a family, according to Jake, with "everybody watching everybody's back." He considered himself lucky because he remained a member for two years without committing any major crime.

"I sold some drugs at school and roughed up a few people," he recalled, "But there were some guys carrying guns and robbing gas stations. I didn't do any of that. I just needed some security."

Living in that world was lucrative for Jake, who claims to have collected up to \$200 every time he made a drug sale.

When he was 18, an older gang member offered Jake a 9mm handgun for \$180.

"He told me I should have one just in case, but I declined," he said.

Gang membership had also changed Jake's demeanor. He walked around school with a revolting arrogance, he says, and would get into verbal and physical clashes with his mother at least once a week.

In the summer of 2000, a fellow gang member pulled out a gun and threatened to kill the bartender in a local bar because he didn't agree with the bill. The incident was a wake-up call for Jake.

"It was getting to the point where we were picking fights everywhere we went," recalls Jake. "People feared us, and it was starting to get to our heads. We had become punks, pure bad asses. It was time to move on."

And that's exactly what Jake did. He quit the gang that summer and moved to Cambridge. He is now studying for a social services diploma at Conestoga College in Kitchener.

He promised the Hawks he would never go to authorities. He believes if he breaks the promise, he will die.

"It was hard to leave," Jake said. "I had made some close friends. This gang probably saved my life. Who knows?"

Today, well removed from gang membership, Jake has no doubt he made the right choice.

"Gang life is a life for criminals. I got sucked into it because it made me feel protected and powerful," he said. "But, in hindsight, it nearly ruined me and I've seen it ruin many people."

The Hawks gang collapsed in 2002, according to police.

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