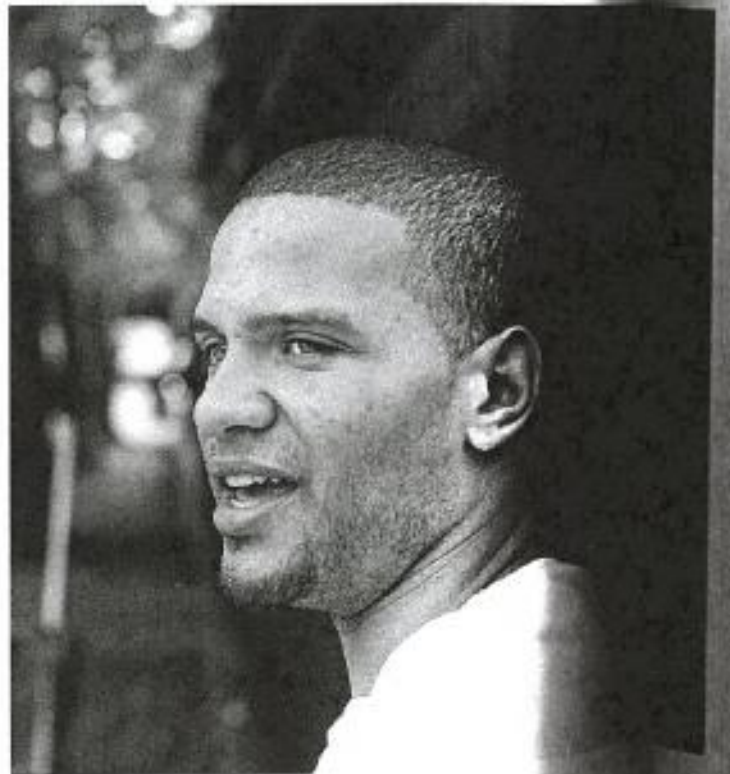


“It’s not even about making money for me, it’s about gaining respect. Seems that for kids around here, all the respect goes to the drug dealers, because they’re the ones with money. But you know what saved me? Family. Instead of hanging out with friends after school, I’d take the bus from the Bronx to work with my dad in the recycling yard. He’d drive me around in his truck while he was doing pickups, and he’d tell me stories. And every one of his stories started the same way. He’d say: ‘I wish that when I was your age, I knew the things that I know now.’ And he’d also ask me questions. He’d say: ‘When you get a car, are you going to lease it or buy it?’ He’d say: ‘What stocks do you think we should buy with the money we make today?’ He’d say: ‘Where do you think is the best place to buy a piece of property?’”

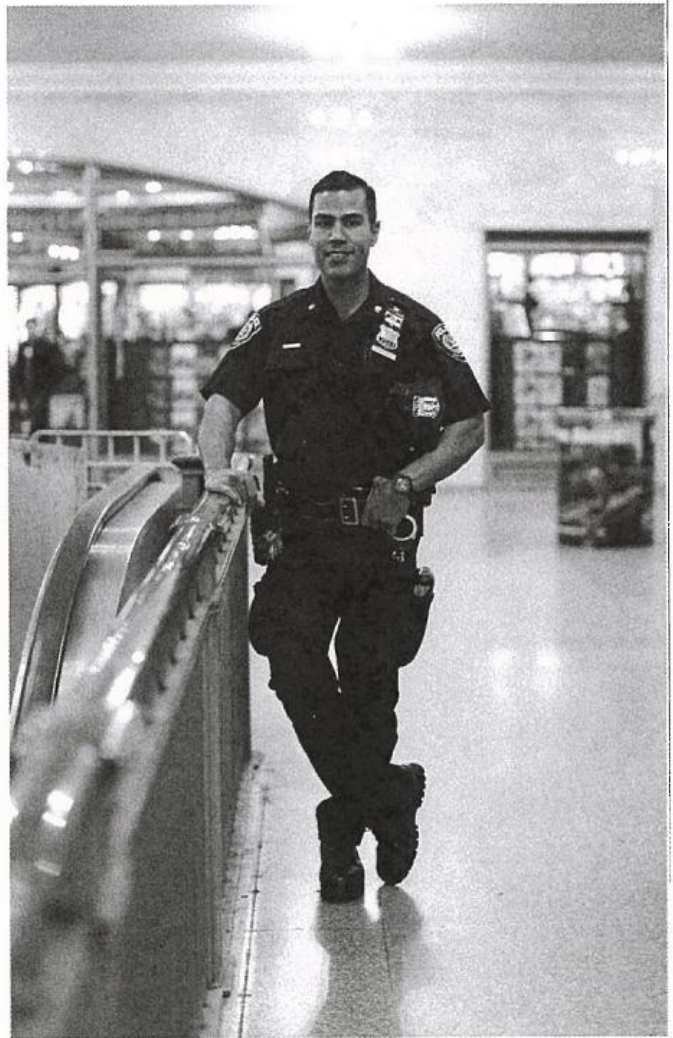
“I wanted to be a defense lawyer because I wanted to come back and protect my community. I wanted to protect my people from the police. People around here grow up hating the police. But you know what they’ve done? The police have recruited our people. They’ve made it more complicated. They’ve got Dominicans and Puerto Ricans doing their work for them. Because they know it’s hard to hate your people. But as soon as that badge goes on, it changes you. Once that badge goes on, your people are the ‘boys in blue.’”





“I had a child when I was sixteen. I got kicked out of high school because of all the absences. My family and community pretty much wrote me off. But right away I got a job at a sporting goods store. Soon I was able to get a job as a receptionist at a tax company, and they gave me enough responsibilities that I learned how to do taxes. Eventually I learned enough to become an associate. Then I got offered a job at a smaller company, and even though it was a pay cut, they offered me responsibility over all the books—accounts payable, accounts receivable, everything. It was less money but I wanted that experience so I took the risk. And I’m so glad I did, because six months later, the controller of that company left and I was given that position. They told me they couldn’t officially call me the controller because I didn’t have a college degree. So I finished my degree five months ago—just to make it official! So after having a child at sixteen, I made it all the way to controller of a company, without even having a college degree. Can you believe that? Honestly, I’ve been waiting to tell that story so long that I told it to a customer service representative on the phone last week. She was nice about it and pretended to care.”

“When I came home from Iraq, I was really depressed. I remembered how much I used to love performing in high school, and thought I’d pursue it. I’ve been to hundreds of auditions over the last eight years. I did some Off Broadway. Some Off-Off-Broadway. I got a lot of ‘under five’ roles—that’s what they call roles that have less than five lines. But then recently I auditioned for a recurring role as Detective Alvarez on the show *Gotham*. I was in Puerto Rico, celebrating my thirty-ninth birthday, when I got a call from my manager. She said: ‘I need you to sit down.’ I said: ‘What’s going on?’ She said: ‘Are you ready for this, Detective Alvarez?’ I said: ‘What are you talking about?’ She said: ‘You’re Detective fucking Alvarez!’ I just started crying and hugging my kids and thanking my wife for never giving up on me. With this role, I might not have to be a cop much longer.”





“Who has influenced you the most in your life?”

“My mother. She had me when she was eighteen years old, and my father left when I was one year old, so I never really knew him. Like a lot of single moms, she had to struggle to work, and eventually she also struggled to go to school. And she’s really the person who instilled in me a sense of confidence and a sense that I could do anything. She eventually went on to get her PhD. It took her ten years, but she did it, and I watched her grind through it. And as I got older, like everyone else, I realized that my mother wasn’t all that different than me. She had her own doubts, and fears, and she wasn’t always sure of the right way of doing things. So to see her overcome tough times was very inspiring. Because that meant I could overcome tough times too.”



"I didn't see my son for the first five years of his life. I supported him financially, and his mother sent me pictures, but I never met him. My relationship with his mother was very strained, and I was always afraid that she would use him to control me. So I stayed away. Then one morning I woke up with nine missed calls on my phone, and I found out that his mother had died."



"What do you tell him about those five years?"

"We don't really talk about them. But I thought it would be best for him if I was not in his life, and with how well he turned out, I think it was the right decision."

"Do you think that's true or do you think it's a rationalization?"

"I don't know. It may just be a rationalization. It was a tough call for a twenty-year-old. I was young and I was scared. And I missed a lot of important moments like the first time he walked, and his first words. But I took him to his first day of kindergarten. I taught him to ride a bike, I taught him to read, and I taught him to play sports. And he turned out great. He's a great kid and an honor-roll student."



Brandon,

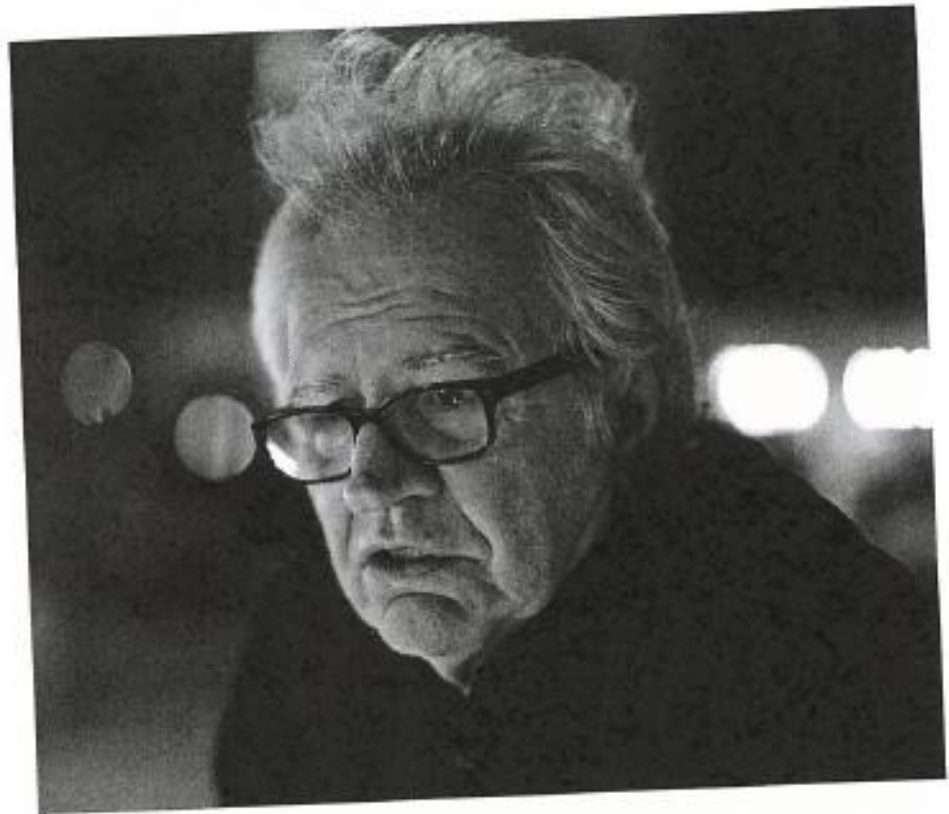
I'm the teenage girl you met earlier today when I was walking with my dad and we talked for a little while about my eating disorder, but I realized that I didn't quite give the answers I felt were completely honest or were what I wanted to say. Thinking about it, what I really should have and wanted to say was that this whole experience of having an eating disorder has been complete shit, and it's the hardest thing I have ever and probably will ever do. There's no specific moment that has been particularly hard that my dad has helped me through, because the entire time it has just been an ongoing nightmare.

If this is what you want for the caption, I could keep going into great depth about what it's like having an eating disorder, portraying it in a multitude of metaphors and descriptions that would give people something meaningful to respond or react to. But even still, this probably wouldn't come close to giving people an idea of how difficult, confusing, draining, and indescribable this disease is.

However, since this was originally about my dad and I, I wanted to say that another reason I can't think of a specific time he's helped is because he has been here for me through all of it. The entire time, he has been trying his hardest to help me beat this, which I realize has been incredibly hard on him, too, and I'm very appreciative and grateful for that. By the way, would it be okay if you used the picture of our hands and left out my name?

Thank you.

"I've been a deep believer my whole life. Eighteen years as a Southern Baptist. More than forty years as a mainline Protestant. I'm an ordained pastor. But it's just stopped making sense to me. You see people doing terrible things in the name of religion, and you think: 'Those people believe just as strongly as I do. They're just as convinced as I am.' And it just doesn't make sense anymore. It doesn't make sense to believe in a God that dabbles in people's lives. If a plane crashes and one person survives, everyone thanks God. They say: 'God had a purpose for that person. God saved her for a reason!' Do we not realize how cruel that is? Do we not realize how cruel it is to say that if God had a purpose for that person, he also had a purpose in killing everyone else on that plane? And a purpose in starving millions of children? A purpose in slavery and genocide? For every time you say that there's a purpose behind one person's success, you invalidate billions of people. You say there is a purpose to their suffering. And that's just cruel."



BRANDON STANTON 26



"I want to make life easier for people in China who have disabilities. I know what it's like, because I lived in a Chinese orphanage until the age of ten, and I wasn't able to go to school because I couldn't walk. But that's just a small part of who I am. I want to be a diplomat, and travel, and do all sorts of things that have nothing to do with being disabled. I don't want people to pity me. I don't want to be another 'poor her.' I don't want to inspire people. 'Inspiration' is a word that disabled people hear a lot. And it's a positive word to you. But to us, it's patronizing. I'm not living a wonderful life for a disabled person. I'm living a wonderful life, period. This morning I got accepted into the London School of Economics. Now hold on, let me put on some lip gloss before you take the photo."