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PREFACE

# JUST ADD WATER

“Your family is so poor, when I went to your apartment and stepped on a cigarette, your dad shouted out, ‘Hey, who turned off the heater?!’ ” I used to hear jokes like that all the time. I grew up in poverty. In fact, we weren’t POOR, we were PO’! Somebody stoled the last two letters from the word! That’s how grimy my neighborhood was!

My pops worked for \$3.35 an hour to sustain seven of us. The way we eat, I honestly don’t know how he did it! (Three of us needed gastric bypass surgeries!)

We were so poor, we only had white rice to eat at times. No gandules, just arroz! My brother and I would go to Burger King to steal ketchup packets to mix it in the rice. (Some of you guys are smiling right now, cause you still do it!)

When we didn’t have laundry detergent, we would use Joy dish detergent that we bought at the dollar store for ninety-nine cents.

The worst was when it was time to take a bath. My mother always had my sisters go first. Then my brother, the bully/jacker (who once SOLD me his collection of Star Wars action

figures when he outgrew them!), would skip in front of me in the line and leave me for last. So by the time I took a bath, all the shampoo was gone! Between my sisters' Pocahontas hairdos—not to mention the hair on their armpits—(Ha! Just kidding!) and my brother's Steven Seagal mullet, they had enough hair to rival Chewbacca! And at the time, I had an afro! Somebody once called me Fat Albert! “Hey, hey, hey!”

Now what do I do? Ain't no shampoo left! Can't use soap. Last time I did that I got dandruff the size of snowballs. So there I'd be, naked with an empty shampoo bottle, screaming out to my mom for answers. (Spanish mothers are funny. Almost always, they're short little fat ladies who smell like sofrito, but have the wisdom of King Solomon. They have an old school remedy for everything. Usually, it's Ben-Gay!) My moms would tell me, “Take the shampoo bottle, twist off the cap, and add some water to mix it with the little bit of shampoo that's still left. Then close the cap back up and shake it like a Polaroid picture.”

Then magic happens. Now my mom ain't no David Copperfield, but what happens when I add water to the little bit of shampoo that's left can land her a job with Ringling Brothers! I don't know how, but the added water makes the shampoo last for two more whole weeks! Long enough until my dad gets paid and buys another bottle.

Now the shampoo analogy applies to all of us. Some of you are reading this book on empty. You have no relationship with Jesus. You hardly go to church anymore. And you never read the Bible.

## JUST ADD WATER


Well, let me give you a little advice. Why not try adding Water? The Bible describes God as “Living Water.”<sup>1</sup> So if you’re walking around on “E,” invite Jesus back into your life. Add some of that Living Water into your bottle and let Him shake you up. And who knows, after reading this book, you might have put sufficient enough Water to last you until the second coming of Christ!

Water, Water, Pour on me /  
And wash me clean, wash me clean ...  
Water, Water, to my soul /  
don't let me go, don't let me go, without  
... Water.

—Ana Laura (Christian recording artist)

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1. See Jeremiah 2:13.



CHAPTER ONE

# SINERODUCTION

I was there when my homeboy, Roland Martinez, killed a dude named Manny. I could've called the police. I didn't. I could've stopped him. Why didn't I? Maybe it was my loyalty to the mean streets or my fidelity to our street gang. Or maybe it was just my street knowledge kicking in, saying, "See no evil; hear no evil."

I didn't do anything. That Friday, I just froze. Or if I want to be real honest with you, I did do something. Something bad. I watched. I even held him down as Roland (Ro-Dawg) stabbed him four times.

"Yo, what you do?! Man, you killed him! You killed 90210!" I cried. But I was just as guilty.

We killed a rich white kid from the suburbs. He only wanted to be down. His only bad was wanting to hang out with thugs like us. I kinda liked the dude, to be honest, but Ro-Dawg didn't like him at all. He felt that the white boy should stay inside his MTV crib, surrounded by his white picket fence.

"We boyz-n-da hood! We from the PJs! Why he always trying to follow us, anyways? Who invited him?!"

Ro-Dawg was right. This dude was trying to be like us. He was a “wannabe.” (Even though, when I think about it, he never partook in any of our sins. Go figure.) We dressed in Dickies; he had on the Hollister shirts. We wore Chuck Taylors; he wore expensive loafers that made him look like Sonny Crockett from *Miami Vice*. We had the jacked-up cars; he drove his daddy’s BMW. He had it all. Clothes, Movado watches, cars, and a big house! But he still wanted to hang. Pretty soon, he started wearing Dickies and Converse just like us. He even talked street lingo.

One day we were at a house party where some girls were skipping school and everyone got wasted. I never smoked weed, but I was high off the contact. Plus, that day I drank eight, 32-ounce bottles of wine! That’s 256 ounces of alcohol in my system! I was messed up. I couldn’t think right. But we were all having “fun” when 90210 walked in.

“Who the hell invited Manny?” Ro-Dawg demanded angrily. Now Ro-Dawg was a lot more gangsta than me. He was a thug, like 2Pac. I’m the funny one, like the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air. He was drinking and smoking weed. If I was messed up, imagine what kind of shape he was in!

He was really wasted when he sucker-punched 90210.

Manny fell down and Ro-Dawg just kept punching him. That beatdown made UFC fighters look like Girl Scouts. Then some of my other homeboys jumped in as well. Not to defend 90210, but to help Ro-Dawg beat him down! Even the girls were spitting at him and slapping the dude in the face. Peer pressure made me do the same. After I whacked him like five

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times, I grabbed him from behind in a “full nelson” position, made famous by WWE wrestlers.

Then the knife came out. Everything was in slow motion after that.

Six members of our gang (The T.U.F.) got arrested that evening, including me. What did we do? We all looked spaced-out like zombies as they held us in a cell. No one said a word. Everything happened so fast. One of my other home-boys, Krusho, kept throwing up. But that was nothing new. Every Friday and Saturday night, after the clubs, he’d be drunk and would always end up bowing down to the white porcelain god—or as most of us know it, a toilet.

A guard came in to take us before a judge. “Don’t we get one phone call?” I asked. But we didn’t. Shackled together, we shuffled out to a courtroom and appeared before this old-looking dude dressed in a black Darth Vader robe.

This courtroom wasn’t like those big rooms that you see on *Law & Order*. It was a small, cramped-up room that we almost didn’t fit in. The judge shook his head and did something that shocked us all. He said, “You guys are free to go. Guards, unlock their chains. Now get out of here before I change my mind!”

“*Whaaat?* They’re letting us go?” Unbelievable! Apparently, Manny’s father didn’t want to press charges. The state was seeking the death sentence, but the dead boy’s pop said, “No one else has to die.”

Usually, the state presses a murder charge regardless of what the family wants. But for some reason, this time they didn’t. Ro-Dawg ran out that courtroom quicker than O. J.

Simpson after the jury pronounced him “Not guilty.” I looked at Krusho, Rey-Rey, Joselito, and Casper and said, “Man, we need to start going to church.” They all agreed.

As we got outside the courthouse, I saw Manny’s father standing next to his Beemer. It was like he was waiting for me. I remember meeting the man before, even eating at his house. I was embarrassed. I couldn’t look at his face. When he spoke to me, I worked up the nerve to look at him and could see that he was crying. He said, “Now, what are you going to do with the freedom I just gave you?”

Before I could answer him, my brother Papo pulled up to pick us up. We all jumped in the car faster than bank robbers fleeing a crime scene. That weekend, I visited my mom’s church and gave my life to Christ.

Today, I am a youth evangelist. The kids call me “The Ghetto Preacher.” I’ve been everywhere from Portland, Oregon, to Slovakia preaching the Word of God to everyone and anyone who will listen. I preach in churches, but not just there. I spread God’s Word on street corners, in jailhouses, and at homeless shelters. In the words of Martin Luther King Jr., I’m “Free at last . . . Free at last! Thank God Almighty, I’m free at last!”

I still can’t believe God can use a piece of junk like me. Measly ol’ me? Once upon a crime, I was a thief with a gangsta mentality. I was also suicidal and homeless. A born loser.

But “the man behind the 8-ball” now preaches behind a pulpit. I am still a loser, though, to be honest. But I’m a loser of a different type. The Bible says “whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”<sup>1</sup>



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The words of that boy's father still penetrate my ears and heart today. *"What are you going to do with the freedom I just gave you?"*

Me? I'm gonna help to change the world. Just like God changed a murderer like me.

What about you? What are you gonna do with the freedom God has given you? If I look closely at the people who were at that party that Friday, it wasn't just me and my homeboys. You were there also. Yeah, you! So was Billy Graham and Mother Teresa. So was Oprah and Al Pacino and Robert De Niro!

We're all murderers! You see, we're all guilty of killing a "rich boy" named Jesus of Nazareth, also known as Immanuel<sup>2</sup> or "Manny." He, who is a King, left His kingdom—heaven—(90210) to live in the barrio with us. He dressed like us, talked like us, and even became one of us. He just wanted to be loved by us and we killed Him. We stabbed Him three times and once on the side. Ro-Dawg and the Roman soldiers were not the only ones that stabbed Jesus—we stabbed Him too. And we held Him up on a cross. We're all guilty.

So we all deserve capital punishment. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death."<sup>3</sup> But He forgives us. And His Father, who is also the Judge,<sup>4</sup> let us go free. Now I ask you again: What are you gonna do with the freedom God gave you?

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1. Matthew 10:39.

2. Matthew 1:23.

3. Romans 6:23.

4. James 4:12.