

I COULD TELL YOU 'BOUT MY LIFE

2018

25:52 minutes



Mentored by filmmakers Chiemi Karasawa and Hollis Meminger, 19-year-old Michael Martin reflects on his incarceration on Rikers Island and the affect it had on his life.

On April 10th, 2017 New York Governor Andrew Cuomo signed a law inspired by the “Raise the Age” movement and New York is now raising the age of criminal responsibility to 18 years old, no longer prosecuting and incarcerating 16- and 17-year-olds as adults. When Michael Martin got arrested at age 17, this law did not exist. As a result, a judge sentenced him to jail time on Rikers Island.

In crafting *I Could Tell You 'Bout My Life*, Michael recounts events that led to his incarceration. He describes being bored, “hanging with the wrong crowd” and interviews his 64-year-old grandmother about raising five children in a single bedroom, East Harlem apartment.

When Michael asks his grandmother, Cynthia, how she became his guardian, she recalls how his mother “had problems,” and in order to avoid Michael falling into foster care, she “told that social worker I was taking you home with me.” She describes using a monthly \$231 from the Human Resources Administration and wages earned during 12-hour shifts, Cynthia fed and clothed Michael and his siblings.

As Michael narrates his journey, he raps the chorus from a song he wrote: “A couple young’uns always breaking rules, never staying true just the summer time blues ... yea I barley even know my mother, always played the block but those was my brothers, ‘cause where I’m from we don’t switch on each other.” Using a percussion track as a minimalistic score, Michael used his rhymes and a GoPro to document his story.

When Michael asks his parole officer if he can imagine a better alternative to incarceration, he says, “I believe in education over incarceration” and reminds us that a year of incarceration costs the same as a year at an Ivy League university.

Since his release, Michael has taken classes at Friends of Island Academy in order to obtain a GED.

In the film’s final moments, Michael asks his grandmother what she sees in him that he does not see in himself. “I see hope. I see love. I see everything in you. I hope and pray that you can see it in yourself. You’re you. Be you”, she says. As Cynthia’s wisdom echoes, Michael confidently strides down the sidewalk to take his GED exam.

Mike’s mentors were **Chiemi Karasawa** (award-winning documentary filmmaker and founder of Isotope Films) and **Hollis Meminger** (a Presidential Leadership Scholar and prolific cinematographer with television credits including *The Blacklist*, *Narcos* and *Younger*).

By giving kids from diverse backgrounds around the world tools, skills and guidance to make documentary films, this great organization provides an outlet for sharing personal stories, which in turn brings us closer together as an international community rooted in compassion and understanding.

Former NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

It’s important to tell your story because everyone has a different point of view and you never know when your point of view can help the next person. It’s a chance to speak about how you feel... and establish a connection.

Mike Martin

MENTOR’S STATEMENT

By presenting their stories, BYkids give youth an opportunity to be active participants in a global narrative that reaches millions of viewers.

Chiemi Karasawa

ABOUT BYKIDS

BYkids mentors teens to tell their stories through film and share the realities of global inequality and injustice on the world stage. Kids learn citizenry through empathy, using film as a starting point for cross-cultural conversations. **BYkids’** films are viewed and discussed by 248 million teens, educators and their families, creating understanding through storytelling. Join us at [BYkids.org](https://www.bykids.org).