March 2002

Snip, Snip

Lynn Laws
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2002/iss3/6

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Publications at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Ethos by an authorized editor of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.
Marquis Everett was born and raised in Alt Geld Gardens, a housing project on Chicago's south side notorious for violence, gang activity, drug use and despair.

"If you were born there, you stayed there," he says. Everett was born there. But he didn't stay there.

Everett, 28, is the owner and only barber at Quis' Cuts. He opened shop in September 2000, three days after graduating from American College of Hairstyling in Des Moines.

Because it doesn't have a street-side storefront and is tucked behind other buildings, many Ames residents may not know it exists. Brian Kenney, freshman in graphic design, discovered the shop when he and a friend were exploring Campus town.

"Cut it all off. Use a No. 2 maybe?" Kenney says to Everett's reflection in the large mirror covering most of the shop's east wall.

"So you want it pretty much buzzed?" Everett asks.

"Yeah."

Ninety percent of Everett's customers are African-American, between the ages of 18 and 24, and learn about his shop by word of mouth.

Everett says his father was "pretty much never there." His mother and "aunties" raised him and his younger brother and sister.

Aunties include his mother's three sisters and several of her friends. His favorite memories include listening to his aunties talk and break dancing, things that bring a smile to his face now.

"It could happen at any moment," Everett says of break dancing. "As long as somebody had a radio and a piece of cardboard, it was bound to happen."

Violent things could happen at any moment, too. "You're around violence all day," he says. "You're around drugs all day. It's the norm."

"Nowadays I look back at it and think I should've been scared," he says. "As a young person, I didn't know anything different, so it was just normal. I didn't know there were better things."

Everett enjoyed learning and was a good student. "I got sent to so-called better schools to be tested. There they assumed because I was from the projects I was just some little hood. And then I'd take their tests and blow 'em out of the water."

Everett says he's in no hurry to visit the old neighborhood. "It's depressing. A lot of my close friends aren't around anymore, one way or another: They're in jail, dead or disappeared."

Next in the chair is Jake Williams, an undeclared freshman. "No. 2 on the side and longer on the top, so it still goes forward," Williams tells Everett.

"My mom now lives in Minneapolis with my baby brother, Tony," Everett says. "My little brother and sister live in Minneapolis also. Our whole family is real, real tight. My mom, all my mom's sisters, all my aunts are so tight. That's why when one of them moved to Minneapolis, all of them moved to Minneapolis."

When Everett graduated from high school in 1991, he made plans to stay home, work and help his mother. "She had wanted me to stay home, too. But she said, 'I think it would be best if you went on ahead and went to school because then you could get a nicer job and help out a lot more.'"

School started the following Monday. Everett made some calls, had his transcript faxed to ISU and arranged to take the entrance exam. "And I was in school," he says.

Everett worked, established residency in Ames and attended ISU part-time. He also married and had a child.

"When I got here, I cut my friends and my hair and that was it," he says. "Then I realized that there was a heavy market for it because there wasn't an African-American barber here."

A network of friends helped start his new business. A friend applied new Formica to the 1940s-style barber mirrors and shelves. Everett salvaged. Friend Daron Richardson painted a mural with an African theme on the shop's east wall.

Friends and family also offered business advice and loans. Thomas Hill, ISU vice president of student affairs, and George Jackson, assistant dean of the graduate college, gave personal loans. Hill and Jackson are both members of the NAACP and were impressed with Everett's business proposal. Most of the money came from Everett's personal savings.

Everett plans to finish his degree at ISU in the next two years. He has a year of classes until graduation. Today he makes enough to pay the bills and is certain business will increase. Everett says life in Ames is all right because it's "plain."

"I'm just a plain 'ol guy just wanting to be a barber. Plain is good. Being just ordinary is good."

"When I was a teen-ager in the projects I didn't think, 'When I'm 28 I'll be married, have a child, live in Ames, Iowa, be a barber.' I mean, if it can get any plainer than this, just let me know please."

Lynn Laws is a senior in journalism and mass communication.