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OHS senior Marquise “Chicago” Hubbard overcomes adversity, homeless



Senior Marquise "Chicago" Hubbard sits on the front steps of Oxford High School.

[Walker Bailey](#), Sports Writer

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Marquise "Chicago" Hubbard woke up one morning, went out the front door of his friend's house, and walked directly into a shootout happening in the street.

"Walking into that gunfight was one of the most traumatic events of my life," Hubbard said. "I heard all the bullets flying. My cousins yelled at me to move and get back inside but I was just frozen."

At the time, Hubbard was only a sixth-grader living in Calumet City, Ill., 20 miles outside of Chicago, with his mother and siblings. A product of a broken home, his father was only involved for the early years of his life.

"My dad and I were really close until I was four-years-old," Hubbard said. "We were really close, and then one day he just wasn't a piece of my life anymore." Hubbard no longer had a man to look up to in his life. His family was constantly fighting and he was looking for a better environment. He looked for family on the streets, and immediately found himself in a gang, selling drugs at age 10.

"Joining a gang was probably the single biggest mistake of my life," Hubbard said. "Even though now I look at it as a mistake, at the moment it was nice to have a group of guys that always had my back."

In the summers, Hubbard would live with his cousins and sisters in Cabrini-Green, one of the most notorious project complexes in Chicago.

"Because of my circumstances I didn't believe I was going to live past 16. It was bad," Hubbard said. "But I've been a hustler my whole life, not just with drugs. When I was young I used to have these little books, more pictures than words, and I used to go knock on doors and sell them for 50 cents to make money. I was a kid so I would just spend it on candy."

The toughest blow came for Hubbard when he was in seventh grade. At the beginning of the year, he lost his mother. The only immediate family that he had left were his brother and his sisters. However, his brother wasn't around because he had grown up and moved out.

"When my mother passed I never cried," Hubbard said. "I didn't cry because I felt like I had to be the man in my family. I felt like my family needed a man to look to and that I had to be the man without my father around."

Hubbard moved in with his aunt, but the extended family that Hubbard had left had no confidence in him. They told him repeatedly that he was nothing, and he

wouldn't even make it to high school before dropping out. Despite that negativity, Hubbard continued school at Crete-Monee Middle School.

"My family told me that I wasn't going to do anything with my life," Hubbard said. "They told me I was no different than anyone else and they told me I was going to drop out and end up just like everyone else but I didn't believe that was true."

Hubbard set out to prove the members of his family wrong. He passed his eighth grade year to move on to his freshman year at Crete-Monee High School, and then everything at Crete-Monee fell apart.

"I got expelled during my freshman year for fighting," Hubbard said. "I fought way too much and it was always just over small stuff, people were taking me for granted and I would fight about it."

Hubbard enrolled at a new school believing that it was his last chance to prove his family wrong and graduate from high school. He turned to athletics to keep him out of trouble. Hubbard began playing football and basketball his sophomore year and heavily relied on those sports to pass the time.

"Friends would ask me to do bad things and I would have to say no," Hubbard said. "I didn't want to do anything that would look bad for the football coaches and also having so much practice I never really had time."

Hubbard's aunt passed away during the time he was living with her, so he moved in with his brother. The situation was not ideal, with frequent bickering between Hubbard and his brother and the lack of food in the home.

"I ate school food. My brother barely got food," Hubbard said. "He told me I'd get used to it."

Even though Hubbard was making better choices, his life became more difficult. At the end of his junior year, Hubbard and his brother got into a fight and his brother kicked him out.

"I was homeless for almost four months," Hubbard said. "Some nights I slept outside and some nights I couch hopped with friends. I stayed anywhere. If I found an apartment building and I would see one of the bottom doors open I would go in and sleep on the stairs. But I went to school every day. I had to because I didn't want to become a statistic."

Finally, Hubbard called his father, who he had barely seen or spoken to in years, and asked if he could stay with him. His father told him to call his grandmother in Oxford.

"I called my grandmother and she gave me a place to stay," Hubbard said. "She sent me a bus ticket and I got on the bus and rode for eight hours to get down here [Oxford], and now I'm finishing and getting my high school diploma here for my mom."

Even after moving in with his grandmother, Hubbard didn't really feel a sense of family surrounding him. Hubbard finally found a group he could call family when he joined the Oxford High School football team, even earning himself the nickname "Chicago" from his teammates.

“Coach [Cutcliffe] and those players are my brothers, every single one of them,” Hubbard said. “They’ve embraced me from the time I got here and I’m extremely grateful to them for everything that they’ve done.”

Hubbard is a senior and will attempt to become the first member of his family to graduate and receive a high school diploma.

“I’m going to finish here and get my diploma,” Hubbard said. “I’m going to get it for my mother, she’s what drives me and anytime I think about stopping, I think about what it would mean to her for me to finish.”