

PAC JAMS IN MIAMI
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Third Place, Essay

I'M LAYING IN MY BED, MY SHEETS AND ONE OF MY LEGS hanging off the edge, my eyes half shut, and I can feel the sun beaming through the blinds which is usually a sign to wake up when my mama don't cook breakfast on a hot summer day in Miami, Florida. But, today is different. My best friend, Ninja, knocks on my window, tells me to wake up and come outside. So I do, and the first thing he says is, "are you going to the *Pac Jam* today? You know everybody want to know if you going to be there to play football and basketball."

See, the *Pac Jam* was like an annual picnic in the hood, as we call it, on a street in the middle of four housing projects filled with music, people dancing, street football, basketball, various contests, bounce houses, slip and slides, and, of course, there was soul food. I'm talking about chicken, ribs, baked beans, collard greens, macaroni and cheese, potato salad, peach cobbler, home made sweet potato pie, and the list just goes on and on.

No matter how mad you were or what you were going through at the time, when it was the day of the *Pac Jam*, all those feelings were put off to the side. The most dangerous part of the Miami, Liberty City, comprised of mainly four housing projects—*Da Beans*, *Da Scotts*, *P.S.U* and *Lincoln Field*—it was the most calm, non-violent day of the year, a day to show togetherness and strength in the black community.

I was from *Da Beans*. My boy, Ninja, was from *Lincoln Field*. We would always come early for the battle of the DJ's 'cause we liked the art of music. Where we're from, it wasn't about how good you cut and scratched like up North; it was about how you got the crowd to react and how loud your speakers were. It was a style of music from the south called *Big Booty Bass* just like *Bounce* music in New Orleans, except ours didn't have that jazzy, big band sound. It had a lot of bass in it. Speakers would be stacked from the ground all the way to heaven.

Basketball was a sport we played to have fun. It wasn't something we really took pride in. Football, on the other hand, was more or less a rights of passage. If you didn't play football, you were often viewed as soft or not cool. I guess you can say that football was the main event. The drug dealers or *dope boys* as we call them, from every project would place bets on their team. This is similar to how the higher society of people would place bets on horses. I heard one year there was \$10,000 on a game. I always played in the game; they would put double coverage on me but I would still catch the ball. A lot of people played seriously because of how much money was on the game and they couldn't handle the pressure; but I, on the other hand, always played to have fun. After all, the money wasn't mine and I'd only get \$20 at the most from the thousands that they made.

After that, we'd get a drink and go back to where the DJ's were and dance and do neighborhood dances, all of which were created by DJ Uncle Al and the Sugahill DJ's, who coordinated this whole festival of activities. Local artists from the neighborhood, like 2 Live Crew, Trick Daddy, Trina and other groups would perform songs live which I always liked to see but I never really ever danced. For me, this was the time where all the girls who seen me doing my thing out on the field, would come and try to flirt with me. Little did they know that I would pay less and less attention, as the scent from the food got stronger and stronger.

I would eventually tell them that I would have to talk to them later because I wanted to be one of the first ones in line to eat. Because, the later you got in line, the less variety and quantity of food you had to choose from. For about a good 10 minutes after everybody got their plate it would be dead silent because everybody had their face in their plates getting down on that food. Shortly after that, we would go home and brag about what we did in the football and later get a game of chase until our parents told us to get into the house.

Nevertheless, the good old days are over. Don't get me wrong; we still have fun, but there aren't any more *Pac Jam's*. In 2000, Uncle Al was fatally shot and killed; so in his memory, we hold the *Peace In The Hood Festival*, which tries mimic the *Pac Jam* but will never be a spitting image of what we so dearly miss.

