It was a normal Sunday morning at the Womack house in Cherry Hill, NJ. “We were eating breakfast before going to church and there was a knock at the door,” says Brandon Womack (aka Christawn) who was ten years old at the time. “Two pastors came to pick my dad up. His bags were packed. The pastors said a prayer with my family. It was my mom, my brother and sister and my dad. My dad just said, `I’ve been doing some bad things and I have to go get some help.”

On that summer day in 1988 everything changed for the rapper known as Christawn. His dad was taken to Teen Challenge, a residential treatment facility, for over a year to deal with his drug abuse. “My parents fought all the time,” he recalls. “But they brought us up in church. We went to church every Sunday as a family. The drugs were a weekend thing. As time progressed, it got worse. My dad was on coke and my mom smoked marijuana. He was hooked first and after my parents were divorced, my mom who was looking for love in all the wrong places was introduced to crack by a man who said he loved her. After coming home from Teen Challenge my dad was free of drugs but the addiction lasted a few years longer in my mother’s case.”

The eldest child, Womack became a surrogate parent to his siblings Brooke and Brett. “We are close to this day because of what we went through back then,” he confesses. “When you are that young, you just hurt. It was a scary time. You just never knew what was gonna happen from day to day. There were some good times but most of the time all we saw when we got home from school was yelling and hitting. I mean it was bad.”

The ironic twist to this tale is that the Womacks were a suburban middle-class family. Womack’s father was a white-collar medical industry executive and his mother, a Temple University graduate, was a housewife so that she could take care of her young children. After her husband left the home, she became a fulltime social worker.

With his dad gone and mom working long hours, Womack spent a lot of free time lost in music. He started writing rap lyrics to songs he heard on the radio and during his first year in college at the University of Bridgeport, he laid down some demos for Trat Money Records in 1999. His biggest influence was Nas, a rapper known for his hard hitting but poetic lyrics. “Nas is my favorite artist,” he says. “What attracted me was how creative he was. I like to be creative in my lyrics. I used to listen to him and kind of get drunk in his lyrics and how he would paint a picture.”

After two years, Womack transferred from University of Bridgeport to Stockton College as a business major. Then, he dropped out to pursue rap fulltime in his third year. “I came back home and really focused on my writing, and got a little job.” His first raps had a hardcore edge. “I was into a lot of stuff,” he confides. “I sold crack for about 8 months. I was out there doing some wild things, so I was rapping about what I was doing. I was living it. In all my lyrics I wanted to be real.”

In spite of his parents’ horrific battle with drugs, Womack was soon a drug dealer himself. “I lived in Cherry Hill but my friends were in Camden, NJ,” he says. “So I started hanging with

them in their neighborhood. They told me I could make up to $500 a night so I went out there and started selling."

"My last day on the block, I had a bundle of crack I had stashed in this brick wall," Womack says of that day in 2003. The police stopped Womack and his accomplice. "They threw us up against the car, took our money and put us in the back of the squad car and I'm thinking this is it." One of the cops looked for the crack. "You could actually see where the bag was hanging out of the wall," he explains. "He was putting his hand in holes and feeling around the wall. I just called on the Lord and said, `God if you save me from going to jail, I will leave this life for good.' The cop came back to the car and I'm thinking the worse. He says, `Get out of the car; this is your lucky day. Get out of here.'"

After the cops left, Womack retrieved the stash. "I gave it to Buck. He owned Morse Street at the time. I said, `Man, this is it. I'm leaving.' He tried to talk me out of leaving but I refused to listen. He had some harsh words for me and I left. Two weeks later, Buck was killed and two years later, the whole block was raided. They were all Bloods and now they are all facing 25 to life. So I know the Lord saved me for a reason."

At this point Womack died and Christawn was born. "My secular name was Love and Hate (LOHAVETE) but now I wanted to have a name that when people looked at it, they would see Christ. All it means to me is Christ within me. I went full blast for the Lord because [drug dealing] was the last thing holding me back. I was still dealing with heavy use of alcohol and marijuana use but God delivered me over time. I got a full time job and started making songs." Since then, Christawn has turned his life around and has been a member of Bethany Baptist Church in South Jersey. The church's pastor, Bishop David Evans, mentored him and has now made Christawn's rap dreams a reality.

The thirteen-track CD Life Story is full of reality. It's a reflection of where Christawn has been and where he's headed. It's a Gary Diggs production and was engineered by Craig Bauer, who has engineered Hip Hop CDs by Kanye West and Ludacris. It is his mix of the project that gave Christawn the slick sound that's often missing in Christian Hip Hop music. The first radio single "Save Me" features Micah Stampley's fiery gospel tenor on the rock-edged tune. "It talks about what I was doing at different points of my life in the streets," he explains. "That's the closest song to my heart because it brings me back to where God brought me from… I want people to know this is where I've been. A lot of my life story started right there in the streets. I can't sugar coat it because this is what's going on in the lives of many people today. I saw it in my parents lives and I'm happy to say that presently my mom and dad are both free of drugs and walking strong with the Lord, but this isn't just about smoking crack. People are getting killed every day. I was literally around killing all day long and going home and crying at night praying to God to save me."