

THESE FOUR WALLS  
By K.D. Hardy



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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-60477-987-5

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## FOREWORD

By Les Brown

*“There are no shortcuts to success.”*

If there is any one lesson that Kerry Hardy has learned, and any one powerful message that he can now preach to “the masses,” it is that ***there are no shortcuts to success***. Zig Ziegler once said, “Success is a journey, not a destination.” And oh, what a journey Kerry took selling and using drugs. From a four-year trek as an astute college student with a bright future, to a six-year stint as a federal penitentiary inmate, Kerry, like so many other young black men, joined the statistical rank touting more African-American men in jail than in college.

Having now transitioned back into the land of freedom, Kerry’s zeal for helping young people make right choices so that they never have to experience what he endured keeps him on the road speaking to individuals and groups across the nation. In doing so, he possesses a certain type of energy that I recognize so well. I know it and appreciate it because it also consumes me in fulfilling my purpose on this earth.

It is the power of Kerry’s passion that moves him to do what he is called upon to do. It is what makes his story come alive as you read and learn from it.

As a brilliant up and coming speaker within my network, it is an honor to mentor Kerry. I am equally honored and even humbled as I watch the efforts of this dynamic young man help impede the deterioration of juvenile delinquency within our communities. I, Les Brown, present to you, on his road to success, Kerry Hardy.

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this book to the late Cora Hall, Rena Buie, Dorothy Shade and Gussie Bluester. These women all told me I could do great things. Remembering their words helped me to excel when several times on this journey I wanted to quit.

Love (Our Greatest Attribute)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who loved and protected me when I lived a life that did not love and honor him.

I want to recognize the following people that have encouraged me and stood by my side through all of my travails: my wife, Tracy; my son, KT; my father and mother, Robert and Patricia Hardy; my sister, Paquita; my nephew, Jay; my grandfather William “Billy” Davis; Pastor Vanable and First Lady Ty Moody; Douglas and Tracy Carter, Paula P., Michael Williams, Erica Williams, Delton Davis, Les Brown, Tasha Williams, Terri Crook, Felicia Hamilton, John and Nyya P. Hudson, Kim Smith, Glenn Smith, Shelley A.W. Roy, Councilman William Bell and Dr. Sharon Bell, Malcolm Thomas, Isabelle, Kim Watts, and all of my aunts and uncles. Much Love to all my in-laws. Lastly, I want to give a special thanks to Zelda Miles for the hard work and time she put in to helping me complete my first book.



## CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Rolling Tears.....	1
Chapter 2: College Boy Grind.....	4
Chapter 3: The Chase .....	9
Chapter 4: Tryin 2 Have It All.....	11
Chapter 5: Rasta Love.....	14
Chapter 6: These Four Walls.....	18
Chapter 7: Mending Broken Hearts.....	20
Chapter 8: New Walk.....	24
Chapter 9: No More Tears.....	28
Chapter 10: Giving Back.....	32

## INTRODUCTION

This book could have been written by so many young men in our society today, but God placed it in my heart to write it for two reasons: first, to awaken America to the epidemic that is destroying a genre of people. Our prisons are full of young men between the ages of nineteen & twenty-five because they lose their way. I was one of these young men, but God delivered me because I realized if you commit then God commits.

The second reason is to give back to the same community which I helped destroy, because I now realize the value of Godly principles, education and family.

K.D. Hardy

Chapter 1  
**ROLLING TEARS**

I'll never forget the day I saw my father cry. He didn't bother to wipe away the tears that rolled down his cheeks like raindrops. He didn't seem embarrassed that the folks around him saw him cry. I guess his crying in public couldn't be any worse than me heading to prison all chained up and escorted into an unmarked van. When I took my seat and looked out the window at my sobbing father, it felt as if someone had reached in and squeezed my heart as hard as they could.

I don't ever remember seeing disappointment and hurt on the faces of those I loved like I saw that day. Their only son was headed to prison for the next eight years. My parents were hurting and it was my fault. I had accepted what was happening to me, but I was convinced I'd done nothing horrible. I simply sold drugs. I never considered my part in destroying people's lives, or causing the demise of families. My values were twisted. I had gotten caught up in self-gratification and nothing or no one had mattered: not my wife; not even my son. So as that van pulled away and I had a last look at my family, all I could think at that moment was, "This isn't fair!"

It all started before I finished high school. I was selling a little marijuana here and there to make cash fast. There were

things I wanted and my parents couldn't afford to give them to me. My dad was a press operator and my mom worked at the University of Alabama at Birmingham as a unit clerk until she hurt herself and became a stay-at-home mom. They worked hard to give my sister and me a good life. We had clothes, food and a roof over our heads. My sister and I even attended private school. I was a good student, pulling A's and B's and an occasional C. I could be anything I wanted to be, but I wanted more than what a college degree had to offer.

My dad kept telling me, "Kerry, get you an education. I have to work hard as hell at the plant. You can make this kind of money and more with a good education." I just didn't believe him. I didn't value education the way he did. It seemed that people with college educations were struggling just to make it. I couldn't see how getting an education was going to help me get what I wanted, when I wanted it. The only people I saw "making it" were the people on television like rappers and athletes and the drug dealers and hustlers on the street.

At eighteen, I adopted the philosophy that I was going to be a "good" drug dealer; a "good" street guy. I wouldn't participate in the violence and gang activities. I was going to treat selling drugs like it was a real business AND I'd enroll in college. When I did enroll at Alabama A&M University, I never declared a major. I figured I didn't need to because I was selling marijuana

and taking money to the bank. I had so much money that I started seriously thinking about dropping out. What did I need with a college degree? I was making more money selling drugs than I'd make with a degree. For awhile I figured I could do both, and for a few years I continued selling drugs and going to school. Then one day I came up with an idea that would change my life forever.

## Chapter 2

### **COLLEGE BOY GRIND**

I know my father was proud of me for attending college. When I told my parents I was heading off to Alabama A&M after graduating from high school, they said, “Great!” However they didn’t have a clue what I was really doing with my life.

I had become more curious about drugs now. I’d discovered that my girl, marijuana, relaxed my nerves, but she wasn’t the thing that I craved the most. My “Jones” was making money, and I was making a lot of it. I never flaunted it. I adopted the same principles as Denzel Washington’s character in the movie “American Gangster.” I was “low key” with it just like Denzel. So, my parents had no idea that I was “balling” or “rolling in the dough”. I did have enough sense to save almost all of it during those years. Money had a way of making me feel important and powerful. It was a feeling I had never experienced while working in high school or for UAB or Blue Cross/Blue Shield after I had dropped out of college.

Those pay checks just didn’t add up to the power selling drugs brought me. Even though I had what looked like legitimate jobs and was able to do things for myself, I never bought my parents gifts because I knew they would question me. However,

the principle of being “low key” didn’t last long after I dropped out of college. I stepped up my game. I thought I was “living the life.” I wore expensive clothes and jewelry. I had several cars and I owned three houses in three different states. I was flying in private jets and it felt good. I had a new supplier and was making money hand over fist.

One day my boy tells me it was time to start pushing cocaine. I had heard that more people were beginning to use “the powder.” I knew people who sold cocaine, but I wasn’t sure if it was for me. I didn’t even know anyone who was using cocaine. My supplier started explaining how cocaine posed less of a risk when it came to transporting the stuff across state lines and there was more money in it than there was in pot. That started me thinking. After awhile I called a few guys to see what they thought. They said, “Get it. We’ll help sell it.” So, I got it and with it came serious heartache.

During that time, a friend of mine was kidnapped. It was by the grace of God that he wasn’t killed; but at the same time, I had to cough up a large sum of money. Not long after that, another associate and his mother were murdered. I never looked at drugs the same way from that point forward. However, I didn’t stop selling.

I began to ask God to get me out of the streets, but my desire to make more money put me deeper in the game; I took the bait and kept selling cocaine. I went to Texas for my first shipment. Since I wasn't too familiar with cocaine, I started small with just three kilos. My supplier was right. The stuff moved fast, and it was so easy to get rid of. Next thing I knew, I was going back and forth between Texas and Birmingham and pushing five kilos a week. I'd sell for about eight months and then lay low. I was making money hand over fist and living well. I started thinking that I needed a more sophisticated way to transport the product so I rigged cars with secret compartments and started moving more and more cocaine. I was up to twenty-five to thirty kilos every two weeks. Things moved along like that for a few years. I'd sell and lay low; sell and lay low. Then in about 1993, my partner was arrested for violating his state probation, so he introduced me to another guy, Pete, who spoke Spanish. Pete became a real asset as he could talk to the Columbians in Texas and near the border. His big flaw however was that he bragged too much. The two of us kept things going for about four months.

I still had the desire to continue my college education. I decided to go ahead and get that degree my dad talked about only because I wanted to start a legitimate business when I graduated. In the meantime, I didn't have any financial worries. I had cars and money. I thought about opening a Baskin Robbins

Ice Cream Parlor because I'd learned the ins and outs from working there during the summer while I was in high school. I had all the money needed to do that, but I never followed through with it. My addiction to making money grew. As I became even greedier, I started having second thoughts about my college education, but I still kept hearing my father's words about the importance of having an education. So I went back to college. Hey, I had become a businessman, but in my heart I wanted to legitimize my business. I no longer wanted to remain on the down low with my power. I wanted to make a positive impact on my community and to impress my parents.

One day my partner got in contact with me and said he wanted me to keep things going with a new contact and to give his share to his girl. At first I told him no. I was back in college and wanted to get my degree, but that wasn't what he wanted to hear and the idea of making more money had me excited and not thinking clearly. I felt things had gone smoothly so far, so I didn't have anything to worry about. However, I should have been worried about Pete, my Spanish speaking broker.

I told Pete he was coming into town too much. By this time Houston was a hotspot and the Feds were all over the place. I kept telling Pete to be careful so he didn't make us hot. He thought he was okay because he was white. He often said police didn't look at white men like they look at black men. I told him

he didn't look like the white boys in Birmingham and he stuck out like a sore thumb, but Pete had a mind of his own. He didn't listen. He was going around bragging about our operation and somehow or another the Feds caught on to Pete. They even put a tracking device under his car to monitor his every move. Yes, they had GPS back then! Pete came to Birmingham with twenty-six kilos and told somebody what he was doing. With the tracking devices and bugs, the Feds heard him. Pete called me and told me he was in route. I told him cool. I told him to chill and that I'd see him the next day. I told him that by the time he got to town, I'd be there. However, I wasn't heading to Birmingham, but to Huntsville. I got a hotel room and ended up staying the night. Little did I know what the morning was going to bring.

Chapter 3  
**THE CHASE**

Pete called me the next morning to say he had made it to town. I told him I was headed down, but had to pay some bills first, then I'd meet up with him. We agreed on sometime between nine-thirty and ten o'clock in the morning. At that time burn-out cell phones were popular; you could use them and then throw them away. Pete also had a beeper and that's how we got in touch with each other. I would call and put in my pager code then Pete would call me back and leave me a number to call.

I didn't hear from him so I went to the golf course with my buddies. While I was out on the course I got a call from my partner's girl telling me Pete had been arrested. He was in the Jefferson County Jail. Her words kept ringing in my ears, "Kerry, they got Pete." So we left the course and headed to a friend's house to watch television. Sure enough there Pete was on TV being chased by the police. The reporters were saying that they had caught him with twenty-six kilos of cocaine. The cameras panned the table behind the officer. There lay all the stuff: cocaine, cell phones and pagers. Then the officer said, "Whoever he was bringing these drugs to won't be getting them." All the while Pete's pager was going off.

I got in my car and went back to Atlanta to a resort on the outskirts of town. I called my partner's wife and a buddy to let them know I was alright. Pete kept sending me messages telling me that it wasn't my fault and that he wouldn't rat me out. I stayed at the resort for two weeks. I sent my partner's girl some money for Pete's fees and other expenses. I found out that the Feds had taken all of Pete's assets. Then I sent her some more money so she could fly to Louisiana.

She told me about her visit with Pete. According to him, the Feds were at the airport waiting for him. He'd lost them at the Galleria Mall where he had climbed into the ceiling of the women's bathroom, but the ceiling caved in and women were screaming loud enough for the police to come and see what was the matter. At this point I was in no hurry to do anything but lay low. I'd missed too much time in school, so going back was not an option. I just stayed near the house. I had money saved and knew I'd be fine.

Pete's girl called a few months later saying Pete was sentenced to twenty-six years in prison. In the back of my mind I knew I was in real trouble. Something inside me told me Pete wasn't going to hold up, even though he kept saying he wasn't going to tell on me. I sent my partner's girl money and paid for everything. It was time for me to move on. What I didn't know was how far I was really going to have to move.

## Chapter 4

### **TRYIN 2 HAVE IT ALL**

With my partners locked up, I went on with my life. During all of this I met the woman who would become my wife. I had known Tracy for years, but I saw her in Atlanta a few times. We started going out and about four months later we were expecting our first child. I was there to hold my son when he was born. It was one of the greatest moments in my life. I loved him when he was in Tracy's womb, but I loved him even more the first time I laid eyes on him. I knew being a father would change my life. In the forefront of my mind was the thought that I didn't ever want my son to know I was dealing drugs. During this time I vacillated between lying low and feeling antsy about not knowing what was going on in the streets.

We'd settled in Atlanta and Tracy had opened a boy's boutique. I started two businesses: racing greyhounds and operating a full service lawn care. I didn't want to get too far out there anymore. I was making stuff happen without doing too much and just dabbling in drugs. I kept telling myself, "You're married and have a son." However, the lure of the streets usually won. My relationship with Tracy started going downhill because I was never home. I had money and that equated to women in several states. I cheated on my wife and son all of the time; right up until I was incarcerated.

When I was indicted, I had just landed in Vegas with some friends. My wife called me and told me the Feds had just left the house. She read the indictment to me. I got sick. Pete had told on me. I knew he wouldn't last and he hadn't. I decided to stay out in Vegas for four days. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I'd never been in trouble with the law. That's what I told my attorney. He told me I might get twenty-five to thirty years because a lot of people were going to testify against me. I argued with him. I'd never killed anyone. I wasn't involved in any violence. I'd never even been in a fight. I wasn't a killer; all I did was sell drugs. That's what I kept telling him because I was still in denial

The Fed's indicted four of my friends and I became even more worried. My attorney kept telling me to plead guilty and take the offer for fourteen years. I asked him if he was crazy. I wasn't going to plead guilty. We went back and forth getting nowhere. Finally, the agents said that it was taking too long. So they told me if I did eight years they would drop the charges against my friends. I took the deal and plead guilty. I was going to jail.

The year was 1999. I had sixty days to handle my affairs before being relocated to my new home in the Jefferson County Jail. I later moved from there to Calhoun County Jail. In my mind, I still kept thinking I hadn't done anything wrong. In the

meantime, Tracy found out about everything I'd been doing and left me. At the end of those sixty days, I was sitting on a bench waiting to be escorted to what would be my home for eight years when I heard someone ask me a question. This question would change my life and the man I thought I was.

## Chapter 5

### **RASTA LOVE**

Near me sat a Jamaican prisoner. I turned to look at him. He told me four things to do while I was locked up. He said I should let nothing stop me from doing these things. There was no where for me to get away from him because we were in a holding cell, so I listened. He said I needed a spiritual foundation and an education; he advised me to stay physically fit and not to worry about what's going on outside the gate; that stuff will take care of itself. I don't remember if I thanked the man.

I felt that I already had a spiritual foundation. After all, my mother and father took us to church, and taught us moral values. Besides, I still believed that I hadn't done anything so awful in my life. I only sold drugs. However, at the time I remember thinking that it couldn't hurt to read about various religions. I had nothing but time on my hands, so I started with the Bible. Then I read the Koran and the Torah. I read each of them cover to cover. It was in prison that I discovered I had been lying to myself. I had been offered a spiritual foundation, but I hadn't accepted it. I realized that I wanted to live my life as a Christian. It wasn't until then that I accepted the fact that because I sold drugs I had had a hand in murders, prostitution, and the demise of families. My parents raised my sister and me in the church, but I had lost my way.

I read other books on principles and religions. I began to understand the importance of listening to the voice of God and being all He wants us to be, to lead the life we were created to live. It was then I discovered the errors of my ways. I'd committed adultery and was an accomplice to other crimes because I had sold drugs. As I took a long, hard look at myself, I came to realize that I hadn't been living a productive, healthy lifestyle in the eyes of God.

Getting to that point took a lot of self-evaluation. I started reading self-improvement books, biographies, business development and mind books as well as taking classes offered in the jail. I felt all of these would be important when I got home from prison. I was on the road to reeducating myself as well. I committed to completing a two-year degree and began independent study classes. I received a degree in Early Childhood Education and became certified in Personal Training and Nutrition. I studied Financial Planning and Real Estate and got a diploma in Financial Management Planning. Inside the prison walls things were going well for me. I realized that the choices I had made in my life had been self-destructive so I began to teach other younger prisoners and talked to them about life choices.

Another lesson I learned during this time was to let go and, “Let God deal with all of that.” So I stopped worrying about what was going on at home. Leaving it up to God was a powerful lesson for me. At least I didn’t have to worry about Pete telling on me, I was already behind bars. I began to take notice of the men in jail with me. I realized a lot of things come into play when it comes to the deterioration of black men, but two things stuck out: we lack a strong spiritual foundation and have an unhealthy attitude towards education. Lacking these two things leads a lot of black men down the wrong road.

It’s hard to tell someone from a spiritual perspective to “love your neighbor as yourself,” if you don’t have a spiritual foundation. When I first came to prison, I didn’t understand that just like most of the guys in there. I believe that a lack of these qualities can cause men to make bad choices. Marian Edelman Wright says, “Poverty of things is no excuse for poverty of will and spirit.” I didn’t understand that, because my life had been so centered on money.

The number of black men without an education that spend a large portion of their lives behind bars is horrible. I was also surprised by the fact that I was one of the oldest guys there. Most of the men doing time when I was there were between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five. That blew me away! Not only that, but these guys had low or no self-esteem. I realized that while I

had the chance, it was up to me to show them what they needed to know to start taking the next step to straightening out their lives, so they didn't end up in this situation again. I started reading more, looking for the knowledge to use for myself and to share with these guys. I needed to understand why these things had happened to me. Why were so many of us putting our lives on the line? Not all of them were from bad situations, but, like me, they were looking for instant gratification instead of disciplining themselves. Being confined to a cell for me was the most degrading thing I could have done to myself. I would often look around the cell and begin to cry because I knew I was where my choices had put me, so I vowed not to put myself there again.

I began to picture myself on an educational and spiritual sabbatical. That is how I approached each day that I sat behind bars, slept on my lumpy bed and did my assigned tasks. I wanted to become closer to God and educate myself daily. I began my new plan for my new life ahead.

## Chapter 6

### **THESE FOUR WALLS**

Time was drawing near. I'd done well from a spiritual standpoint. I'd developed a relationship with God, and was praying and studying my Bible. I'd also done well from an educational standpoint. I'd gotten a degree, was reading more, and my thinking was changing. I wasn't thinking of the streets, but of what new path I would take once I was released.

A friend suggested I watch the movie Malcolm X. The things I learned from that movie showed me that I could make it on the outside and that I could make a difference. This one particular scene will stick with me always. Malcolm is in Muhammad's office and he tells Malcolm that he's proud of him. He tells Malcolm that like Job, God has protected him; the gates have protected him. Muhammad says the real test is how you handle yourself when the whores, drugs and alcohol are there for you. He tells Malcolm that if he can live his life among those things then he has passed the test and will know success. He ends his conversation with Malcolm by saying, "Evaluate yourself every six months to see how you are living. That's when you know you have really changed." For me this scene was profound. What I had to do was allow myself to see what I was doing, and where I fell short. That was information I could take with me and better my life on the outside.

I sat in my cell and thought about all the things I'd learned since I'd been in prison. I thought about all the things I needed to do when I got home. From a spiritual stance I was feeling strong. I thanked God for the changes He allowed to happen in my life. I promised myself that once they let me out, I'd never put my hands on drugs again. The streets were not an option. I'd seen a lot of guys get released and a few months later they were right back in the cell block. Those guys hadn't changed their mind set to do other things. When things didn't go right they went back to the streets. The streets weren't an option for me. I was determined to keep praying and seeking God's face. I'd wait for him to bring in the harvest. There were still some things I needed to get straight in my life.

## Chapter 7

### **MENDING BROKEN HEARTS**

During my incarceration my parents and I had established a great relationship but my wife and I had not. My parents and I wrote each other regularly. At first I complained to my mother about how things were in prison. She wrote back that she understood because she too was in prison on the outside. She told me that she carried me for nine months, birthed me and then had to get a call from me from a jail cell. I'd never thought of it that way before. Her words and my father's tears that day pushed me to get my life right.

Prior to prison, I carried a lot of shame when it came to my relationship with my parents. I constantly lied to them about my lifestyle. I'd stayed away to avoid questions. They didn't have proof of what I was doing, but I realize now that deep down inside they knew. They held on to a small glimmer of hope that I was telling them the truth when they would ask me questions about what I was doing. Because of the way they raised me I was so ashamed.

My relationship with my wife and son were out of order. My wife and I were separated before I went to prison. I didn't know if she and I would get back together. Actually I had no hope. I knew that even if we didn't get back together, I wanted a family.

I realized that I needed the structure of marriage and family. In all the reading I'd done, guys with a family were the most successful. It's the balanced life that married men have that helps make them successful. I started praying that God would send me a woman to help give me the structure I needed. I figured I could excel more if I wasn't running around with a bunch of women. My way of thinking before prison was if I bought Tracy nice things that would be enough to keep her happy. It didn't! Even though I never raised my hand to her, I was disrespectful in so many other ways. We talked periodically while I was in prison for the sake of my son. Nothing had been settled and when I got out we lived separate lives and I found myself falling into old habits.

I was seeing three or four women at a time. Things were getting hard. No, let me rephrase that. It was getting hard trying to meet the needs of that many women and my own needs too. My life wasn't what I'd envisioned it would be when I got out. Then things started to come back to me. I was making bad choices again. I was distracted and off course. I had accomplished so much more when I was locked up. So I had to turn things around. I had to work things out with my wife or move on. I called her and asked her to divorce me so we both could get on with our lives. I actually figured I'd get with this young lady who wrote to me while I was in prison. The only thing was she lived in California, so I figured it wouldn't work

out. I knew I needed to get a divorce because at the time I wasn't "feeling my wife" like I had when we first met. I hadn't felt anything for a long time. I figured she felt the same way. She had left me before I went to prison. To me that was an indication she didn't have feelings for me anymore.

While I had time to think, I put myself in her shoes. I had done a lot of things to hurt her and she'd hurt me back, but all I could think was, "Damn, Kerry, I wouldn't talk to you either." I had to repent for all I'd done to her because that wasn't the relationship that God ordained for a husband and wife. I had it all wrong and on top of that I had committed adultery acting as if nothing was wrong with it. That revelation alone told me I needed to do the right thing and get a divorce. This self-evaluation also showed me how selfish I'd been and all the people I'd hurt back then.

I was floored when my wife said she didn't want a divorce. She wanted to try and work out our problems. Divorce was not God's plan for us. Now that my relationship was better with Him, I could see that if He could forgive me, Tracy could forgive me, and I could forgive her then there was no excuse for us not to try and build a life together. God was restoring my marriage and giving me a new direction, a ministry so to speak. We made plans for her to move from Atlanta to Alabama. I was getting back on track. I wanted my marriage to work. I wanted to be

there for my son who was now almost ten years old. The real question was could we do it?

## Chapter 8

### NEW WALK

God laid it on my heart to share my testimony. I was to tell others of all He had delivered me from. My message was for those in prison and those on the outside. My message was to deter those considering the life I'd led. I started to look for information I could share and that would guide me along this journey. I felt so free when I accepted that this is what I was supposed to be doing. So I started reading at least one book a month. I had to exert the same discipline I used when I was locked up. I excelled behind bars and I needed to do that and more on the outside for myself, my wife and my son.

I began writing a bit and attending seminars and various classes. These helped me get my focus and get back on track. It was what I had to do in order to be an effective speaker. It also helped me further develop my mind. I was so grateful that God transformed my mind. If he hadn't I may have been back on the streets or dead. I'm not perfect, but I want other young men to understand the importance of knowing that you can learn from other people's bad choices.

The most important decision I made for my family was to find a good Bible-based church. The pastor shared scriptural nuggets I could use in my everyday living. It's what I needed to

keep me alert. It's strange how life can come full circle. My parents taught me morals, values, took me to church, read the Bible to me and encouraged education. Now here I was, thirty-six years old, relearning the things they had taught me because I wouldn't listen. I wanted instant gratification. That landed me in jail for eight years. So much for instant gratification!

These are lessons I want my son to learn. I want him to be a critical thinker. When he asks questions, I don't answer them. I ask him what he thinks or feels about it. When he gets too far off base with his answers, I reel him in and then talk to him. I also want him to know what it takes to think your way through a situation. I want him to think if I do this, this can happen and to consider who it will affect and how they may feel. Right now he may think I'm hard as hell on him, but I want to be the person in his life he watches. I want him to watch how I treat his mother, me praying, me attending church, and me doing the right thing. I want him to watch and say, "You know, my dad did this or that and I'm going to do the same." I've learned my lessons the hard way; I don't want him to follow that path.

I also point out interesting articles and books I read. When Lil Romeo, rap artist Master P's son, announced he was going to college, I read the article to my son and let him know that I'm not the only one who thinks getting a good education is important. Romeo is rich from his rapping/movie career and so is

his father, but this young man was quoted as saying that going to college would be one of the most important things he'd do with his life. Even though he's going to college on an athletic scholarship, he said he was putting academics first.

I also try to make my son pay attention to the people he hangs around. There is an old saying that goes something like this, "You are now or soon will be what your friends are." When I got home I didn't go back to the friends I had when I was in the streets. If I saw them on the street I spoke, but I never invited them around my family or asked to hang with them and I've never let them in my inner circle.

The Bible says, "Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it." I strayed from what my parents taught me. It took going to jail to bring me back to it. You do return to what you know. I've turned into what society now calls a nerd by educating myself, reading books, and doing constructive things. I see so many children caught up in the street game. They get tossed into alternative schools, even prisons. There are two things people need to know. One, maximize your potential while you can; and two, live a balanced life.

What we as adults have to do is teach our children to begin with the end in mind. To look at what's the worst thing that could happen from that choice. I never did that. If I had I would

have realized that I would hurt my parents and end up in jail by selling drugs or end up dead. I only thought about what I could have right then. Perhaps if someone had said that to me that way maybe I wouldn't have made the choices I did.

## Chapter 9

### **NO MORE TEARS**

Going to prison saved my life, but that may not be the case for everyone involved in the same kind of unhealthy lifestyle I was living. If I could rewind time, knowing what I know now, I would have paid more attention to the things my mom and dad taught me as a child. I've had to start from scratch rebuilding my life. There are no shortcuts to success. Everything begins and ends with Godly principles. Those same principles were those that I had laid aside for a fast life. I thank God my mind has been renewed.

I read my Bible daily not just because I can, but because it's my roadmap to keeping my life in order. In addition, I read two to three books a month and listen to inspirational and motivational CD's. I don't club, I don't get drunk and I don't use drugs. My daily activities include hanging with my son and nephew, speaking, studying, and doing things with and for my wife and going to church.

Every six months I evaluate myself. I ask myself what improvements have I made and need to make? What do I need to work on? I give myself a grade. If I fail, I work harder and I turn to people who love and support what I'm trying to do with my life.

When I speak to anyone, I always ask God to, “Let people see less of me and more of Thee.” I am truly compassionate about seeing people not make the choices I’ve made. Life is not about spending time in a cell. There is nothing glamorous about going to jail. Life is about being the best person you can be, and when you make mistakes, which we all do, getting up and getting back on track. I know speaking is what I am supposed to be doing. I know because I would do it for free (and I do on occasion). God has blessed me with the acquisition of a lot of knowledge through studying others and my life, so speaking is the way to take care of my family.

At one time I took my family and friends for granted. I didn’t always look at their value. The day I left the streets, I began to realize how important my family and friends are to me. They took care of me when I couldn’t take care of myself and that means the world to me. I am grateful for my wife, my parents, my sister and my best friend, Michael Williams. They are my heroes. They downsized their lives to make sure I was comfortable while I was in prison. Whatever I become I owe a large part of my success to them.

I am also grateful for the time I had with my mother-in-law. I will never forget the conversations I had with her after I was indicted. She too spent a portion of her life in the streets. I found

comfort in talking to her prior to prison because she began to plant the seeds in me to never return to the streets. She told me stories of several individuals and what happens when you continue in the streets. She also shared her story and the one thing she wanted to pass on to me was to live the rest of my life trying to learn from the mistakes of others. She advised me to become wise and learn the value of listening to people that came before me. The last time I saw her I promised her I wouldn't return to the streets. She died while I was locked up. I truly miss her.

My life now is simple, but rewarding. I am an active member of my church, The Worship Center Christian Church in Birmingham, Alabama where Vanable H. Moody II is Pastor. I assist with the church's fitness ministry and I personally train Pastor V and the church Psalmist, Douglas Carter. I am at home a lot now, so I spend valuable time with my wife. We go to the movies, social gatherings, concerts and, on occasion, take trips together when our schedules allow. She enjoys the time we spend together now because my thinking and behavior are so different from before. We share household duties and we cook meals together. I grill the meat and she does the vegetables and cornbread.

I also spend valuable time with my son and my nephew guiding them through life with the things I've learned from the

Bible and my life experiences and those of others. I coached their basketball team last season and we went to the playoffs and lost in the second round. The experience was rewarding. I am truly enjoying my new life.

My prayer is that my message touches the young and old. That it encourages and inspires someone on the wrong path to re-evaluate their life and transform their mind.

## Chapter 10

### **GIVING BACK**

In the fall of 2000 I was transferred to Mecklenburg County, Charlotte, NC to stand trial for additional charges. While there I signed up for a Life Skills course called “Becoming the Person I Really Want to Be: Coming Inside, Thinking Outside; Leaving Outside, Thinking Inside.” \* The class met four hours a day for 20 days and was for those individuals who were committed to looking closely at how they had been living their lives, and to help them take an even closer look at how they wanted to live their lives in the future. Little did I know that this course would not only give me the framework for how I would spend my time in jail, but would lay the foundation for who I wanted to be once I got out.

The course was based on a psychological model of human behavior and motivation called Perceptual Control Theory. This scientific theory states that as living systems our actions are determined by our internal references and their relationship to our perceptions of our ever changing environment. Put simply, we are always trying to get the world to match up to how we believe it should be. We are like Goldilocks always looking for the “just right” state of what we want. Perceptual Control Theory opened my eyes to the concept that I could only control

myself and to do that more effectively I needed to learn how to control my perceptions. I learned that by managing my perceptions I could determine how to look at any given situation including how I perceived myself, others, and all the possibilities that lay before me.

I will never forget the first day in Personal Life Skills. The instructor, Mr. Smith, started the class by stating that he had no answers for us on how we should live our lives. He said that he was working on his own solutions and his job was to help us find our own solutions. He believed those answers would be found inside of us. I heard him say that the number one life skill was self-evaluation and that he was trying to apply it in his own life. He said that most people spend their time evaluating others or worrying about how others evaluate them. This class would offer us the opportunity to create the framework to put the skills of self-evaluation into practice. He ended by saying that if we understood Perceptual Control Theory, we would then understand the importance of clarifying the reference of who we wanted to be.

The course offered us the chance to craft what he called a BE-Print™ which would become our personal yardstick for self-evaluation. Just as an architect needs a blueprint to create a structure, a person needs a BE-Print™ to create their life. The BE-Print™ I drafted became my guide for building my life and

making sure I was living up to my own personal standards. First I established my beliefs; how I viewed the world and myself as part of this world. Using my beliefs as a basis, I created a statement of purpose declaring who I really wanted to be. Next, I identified those principles I wanted to live by day in and day out. I made an agreement with myself that I would live these principles regardless of my circumstances. This was called my personal constitution; an agreement based on principles. My beliefs, principles and constitution were what guided me to set goals in the areas of relationships, health, financial independence, education, and spirituality. From these goals, I developed actions plans to start me on my journey.

Wow! I had a BE-Print™! I had created a personal manual that helped me self-evaluate every thought, action, and perception on my journey to becoming the person that I had agreed with myself to be.

It was during this time that I recognized it was essential to pay attention to my mind, body, and spirit. This course and the work I did on my BE-Print™ were the basis of my daily practices during the 6 ½ years I was housed within these four walls. My BE-Print™ included: strengthening my spirit by study, worship, and prayer; my body through exercise, diet, and routine; and my mind through reading, writing and mentoring.

The Mecklenburg County Jail is unique in its approach to housing inmates. The system focuses on preparing men to return to the world outside of jail by helping them acquire the skills they need to remain free. I could not believe the number of learning opportunities that were offered that I could participate in while I was waiting for sentencing. In addition to the 80 hour Life Skills program, there were courses in Parenting (which I also participated in), Domestic Abuse Awareness and Prevention, Anger Management, and basic courses in Math, Electricity, and Machines. There were also programs for GED Preparation and a 60 day Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program. This was different than any jail I had ever heard of before. There were inmates getting up, attending classes and excited about what they were learning.

One thing I noticed was that there was a huge difference between those individuals that were taking classes and those who were merely sitting idle in the POD. I now know that 75% of all those incarcerated in the U.S. return to be incarcerated again. However, in Mecklenburg County this figure has been reduced by over 25% for those individuals who participated in programs during their tenure in prison.

There is a wise saying that I learned while in jail: “While incarcerated, you can count your time or make your time count”. In his book, *Preventing Violence*, James Gilligan says that

education for prisoners is one of the most powerful tools for acquiring self-esteem and that self-esteem is the most powerful force for preventing violence and crime. I know this first hand. By taking advantage of such opportunities, I prepared myself to never come back inside these four walls again. After my release I have gone back to the Mecklenburg County Jail several times as a motivational speaker. I have spoken in the same class that jump started me to “Become the Person I Knew I Could Be.”

What a great experience it has been for me to spend time with men who, like me, are working on their lives. Mr. Smith is still teaching and has facilitated the creation of over 1,200 individual BE-Prints™. He encourages all of his students to read this book as a reminder that they can create a new life as I have done. Like me, many men continue to leave the Mecklenburg County Jail with a new perception of themselves, their families, and the world in which they live. I will continue to work with these ideas and hopefully help support classes like this one wherever men are detained.

*\*The Life Connection's Personal Life Skills Curriculum* was originally created by Glenn Smith and tested in Mecklenburg County Jail North with the support of the Mecklenburg County Sheriff's Office. The original course curriculum was created to provide research-based solutions to improve recidivism and personal development of individuals who are presently incarcerated. The development of *The Life Connection's Life Skills* journey has involved psychologists, instructional specialists, teachers, administrators, university professors, researchers – all working together – to build an incredibly comprehensive solution to improve the lives of individuals. In 2002 Shelley Roy of Synergy Transition Consulting became a partner in the development of the curricula. The curriculums now include programs for incarcerated men, women and juveniles as well as juvenile offender diversion, addictions, couples, and K-12 school life skills. For further information visit us on the web at [www.lifeconnections.us](http://www.lifeconnections.us) or [www.shelleyawroy.com](http://www.shelleyawroy.com).

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