

# 15 PILLARS UPHOLDING A COMMUNITY



Stories, Poems and Reflections from  
U-Turn Permitted



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# ARTRELL JACKSON



**CHANGING MY WAYS** A step I took to move forward was changing my way of thinking, learning how to be respectful of others, having positive views in my life like being responsible, doing the things that a man is supposed to do as far as taking care of my kids and making sure that they're okay before I take care of myself.

Never knew the thing called life could be so hard, but it's hard if you make it. Just me being mindful of others and the people that I love, doors can open up for me. Change is something that is not hard if you believe in it. In order to change things around you for good, you have to change your ways, be a better person, throw out the old ways, and replace them with the new. And those are the steps that I'm going to make to move forward.

**I CAN DO WHATEVER I PUT MY MIND TO** Whatever I put my mind to I can do. It was hard for me to leave the streets because I was so caught up with what was going on. Being young and on my own in the streets, I thought that was all I had, not knowing that I had a lot to offer myself if I changed my ways, and be mindful of the good things that were going on in my life. Like I was a good football player but didn't like school. So if I had loved school like I loved football, maybe I could have been in the NFL. Now I've learned that the mind is the strongest muscle in your body, and if you use it properly you can accomplish anything you want. Another example is this U-Turn program. I thought that I couldn't finish the program, until I put my mind to it.

# JERRICK STARNES

A step I took to move forward was coming to U-Turn. That was a huge step for me because it's something that you would want to do on your own, nobody making you come. Nothing in life comes easy, so I stopped looking for the easy way out and took a giant step to life by coming in to U-Turn. Also I feel that U-Turn has helped me a lot because it has helped me think a whole lot smarter.



# DENNIS SMITH

**SUCCESS IN LIFE** The kind of job I would like to have is a successful one. Throughout my years at work I haven't had the big chance to work at a job and like what I do. I need something that pays well, where I can get along with co-workers and accomplish my goals at hand. A successful job is something I need to get by in life, to be able to take care of myself and my family. The way it is now, if you don't have a job you don't eat. The economy isn't getting any better, so I need something to take me back to the top.



**TRUE LOVE** The person who was a role model for me was my mother. Even though my father wasn't too far away, she was the one who taught me what I know. Watching her raise four kids helped me to take care of my daughter. The love she gave me was what I needed to grow in life and pass the love on to others in the world if they deserved it. Growing up my mother was loving, caring, and firm on some things. She couldn't teach me how to be a man, but I learned so much from her. I am so happy to have her in my life. Any time I needed her she was there.

My mom was the one who kept the family close. I was the oldest so I helped out a lot. She stayed on me growing up, telling me to stay in school. The values she instilled in me will stay with me forever. I can't see anyone taking her place. Any time I needed to be somewhere she got us there. I think she got the love from my grandmother. She was a great woman herself.

# AUDREY GEDDIS

**MY VISION (PART 1)** I would like to have a job similar to my last job, at Cleanslate. There I supervised a crew daily and we got to go around Chicago beautifying the city. After being there a while it became very important and it would make my day. I really got serious about neighborhood beautification. I would even pick up paper on the street when I wasn't at work. I would ask people not to litter. When my crew and I would leave an area or vicinity, I made sure we took before and after pictures. We always got complimented on the hard work and dedication to whatever area we would clean. I feel we made a huge difference in the city.

I would like to be able to form a crew that mostly focused on vacant lots in the city, or have a jump-out crew, so that wherever we see trash we clean it.



**MY VISION (PART 2)** I have a lot of visions, but the one about me having my own crew is something that I really want. I would love to see Chicago areas clean, and be able to look at my work and say, “Wow, that is my crew’s work.”

I wish I knew where to start. I wish I had money, resources, or investors to get started. I know that it's possible. My patience has always been short, but my endurance long. So why can't I just stop and figure out how to go about doing this?

## DASHAWN NEVELS



**CHANGE** the step I took to move forward was to stop dwelling in the past and letting it hold me back from the greater things in life. I always hated and faulted myself for things that occurred around me. Then I started being open-minded and let things go.

I always had a grudge and the emotional stress that it was my fault my brother died. I lived that way until I turned 17. I keep letting good things in my life go away by always taking the fault for everything. My sister always told me, “It wasn’t your fault,” but I would argue with her, telling her it was. I had to sit down with my father and he told me that things happen for a reason. He said that to become a better person we have to learn from our mistakes. So I looked and thought the mistake I was making was dwelling on things I can’t change.

## JEFFREY McCLARKIN

### WORDS OF INSPIRATION (“AND STILL I RISE” — MAYA ANGELOU)

At 52 years of age I have spent at least half of the last 20 years in jail. A year here, two years there, three years somewhere else, and of course never, ever, finishing parole. Usually I had to do all my parole time. Each time there was more and more time taken out of my life.

I finally decided I didn’t want to spend any more time in jail. My worst day free beats my best day in jail, hands down. So . . . came the change in life style, friends, areas I visited, and my thinking process. I have been out 20 months. I haven’t been out this long at one time, since 1998. And it wasn’t hard!!! “Stop doing what you’re doing,” as they say. I’ve had a few jobs here and there, made the best of things, lived within my means. I took classes when I could, some work related training, and step by step I began to turn my life around. I am “the Phoenix” rising up out of the flames and ashes. Reborn . . . a new me . . . . “And still, I rise.”



# LONNIE BELL

**MY INSPIRATION** My inspiration is my baby, six-year-old Lonnell. He inspires me to be a better dad due to the fact that he's very smart for his age. I remember when he was in the womb, I read to him every night. I would ask him to kick twice if he wanted me to keep reading and once if he wanted me to stop. The majority of the time he would kick twice. So I would keep reading until I fell asleep. I want him to grow up and be better than me, so I need to be there to teach him right from wrong and not to make the same mistakes that I've made.

He loves to play on the computer. One time my daughter did something to the computer and it was stuck in the French language. We could not figure out how to get it back to English. Lonnell sat down, punched a few keys, put it back in English, and went to the game he wanted to play. I would like for him to grow up and become a computer programmer or anything in that field.



**A CHANGE IN ME** I can see a change in me that's better, not only for myself, but also for my family and my community. Changing my lifestyle and becoming a productive citizen will give my children and maybe someone in my community a role model to look up to. That would really make me feel good about myself, knowing that I inspired somebody to want to follow in my footsteps.

# DAVID BROWN

**SCHOOL** I've been trying to get to school since I was released from prison on December 3, 2010. It was hard finding the right school that could fit me money wise and had a strong support system if or when I needed some. Sometime in April I came across Westwood College. I met with Roger Goddell and we got started. Half way through the registration process, I missed the math test by three points twice, and could not start in March. In between, I looked for work every day Monday through Friday. Having two to three interviews a month and not getting hired was frustrating. But I never gave up.



Then in September I heard an ad on the radio for Westwood. I went and saw Roger again. I took the test again and passed. I now attend Westwood College for Construction Management. Then I started U-Turn Permitted to figure out where I had messed up on the interviews. That's when I knew I wanted to go to college and get my education, to help those like myself who are ex-offenders get a leg up in life. What drives me is what my grandfather always said: "Nothing beats a failure but a try." Once I'm done with myself then I can help my community.

# LUIS DEJESUS

**THE CHANGE I WOULD LIKE TO SEE** The change I would like to see is within myself, the way I handle situations from my past, holding in anger that come from thoughts, the vision that comes from me watching my mom pass, just being there and not being able to help her. These thoughts make me very emotional. If I can overcome the vision of my mother death, I'll be able to manage my anger. I'll be able to communicate better with others and react better to situations, helping me better myself and maintain a job.

**A PERSON WHO WAS A ROLE MODEL FOR ME** The person who was a role model for me was my mother. The reason I'll say my mother is that she was a strong woman, being able to fill two shoes, taking on the responsibility of a man and woman while giving us tender love and still being able to be as strong as a man. She had to deal with raising three boys on her own, not knowing how a man thinks. Trying to keep up with them and showing them how to become men in today's society.

# JOHN J. LITTLE



**FREE AT LAST** The day I came home was like being reborn. I had been up since four that morning. The C.O.s had come around to do their morning count around 6:45. I felt it (freedom). But I didn't get too excited. I think I was still being a pessimist. Matter of fact, I know I was.

So they finally called me. I was nervous but ready. After almost 15 years it was finally happening. I was leaving hell and returning home. As I exited the gate, I saw my family. One more gate, I thought to myself, and it's over. And so it was. I finally embraced my family and, like the prophet (Lot) when he left Sodom and the Land of Enigma, I never looked back.

Freedom.

## WHAT DEFINES ME

The love and respect that I have for myself.

My making it out of my incarcerated situation after all those years and still having my sanity.

My hunger to keep striving in spite of the odds against me.

# JAMES WILSON

**CHANGE** I've been living life only for myself. I've been selling drugs since I was a young man. I never once thought about how that life style would affect me in years to come. Once I had my first born I kind of got worse with my actions. It became the thing to do to provide myself with money. Plus now that I had a child things got more intense. Now it became, "I have to get money quick," instead of "I want new shoes or clothes or even to get high." Not once did I look for a job. But now that I am older with two more kids I feel they deserve better.



# VERONICA CORONADO



**A STEP I TOOK TO MOVE FORWARD** A step I took to move forward was completing my GED. I knew that if I wanted something better in life I needed education. I knew that if I wanted a better life for my family and me, I would need to go back to school. I've always thought that taking GED classes was a waste of time. (That's my belief.) And I guess I was just too busy to attend day or evening classes

because I would come out of work too tired. So instead of signing up for GED classes I called GED programming and requested an application. I filled it out, sent the money order, and waited on a response.

Two weeks after mailing the application I received a letter with the date, time, and location for first-time testers. My date was only a month away. Like I said earlier, I didn't want to take classes. So I bought a GED prep test book and studied on my own the best that I could. I'm going to be honest. I didn't do that much studying. With work and four small children it was impossible. So I took the risk and took the test and I passed! on my very first time. I was so excited, especially for someone who hasn't been in school for over ten years. It inspired me to go to college and set a good example for my children, that if I could do it they can do it.

# LINARD KIDD

**A ROLE MODEL** Someone who is a role model to me is a new person that I just met today. He inspires me because he is a Princeton graduate. That means he has a good education. His goal, he says, is to change the laws so they could be fair for all cultures. I think I would like to be like him and get an education like he has. Princeton is an excellent school, and you have to be exceptionally smart to go there. So that's why he my role model, because I feel like he'll change the laws to make society a better place.



**THINGS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD TODAY** A lot of things are going on, people getting killed for no reasons. The innocent people usually are the ones who die. A lot of drugs are being sold and the men are trying to lock you up for the littlest thing. This world today is designed for you to fail, so you have to beat the odds!

**JENELLE**



**MOORE**

**COMFORT** When I want comfort in my life and it is not a day when my church is having a service, I call my sisters-in-Christ on my prayer line. When the three of us are all gathered together over the phone, someone asks, “Is there anyone that we would like to bring to the Throne-of-Grace so we can all intercede and pray?” Then each of us will get our Bible and look up a scripture that God puts on our heart to recite. We all recite our Scripture individually and after that each of us prays for each other, family members, our friends, and whoever is placed on our hearts at the time who we want to pray for.

I believe wholeheartedly that prayer changes things. Prayer is my refuge because there is a scripture, Psalms:46, that reads that God is our refuge, a very present help in the time of trouble. I find comfort when my life seems to be in disarray, or when I am feeling discomfort, or when I am just challenged by the trials and struggles of life, knowing that I can always pray with my sisters and brothers in Christ.

It gives me a comfort that surpasses my understanding because I am empowered with the knowledge of knowing beyond the shadow of a doubt that it is the right thing to do. I become inspired to conquer anything in my life that I feel weak about, and my sins are forgiven that are seen and unseen through Christ. I don't know what I would do without prayer and the beauty of knowing that it is freely given to me because the price was paid way back on Calvary. That is what I believe.

# BLACK

## FAREWELL

Goodbye negative behavior  
I'm leaving you behind  
I know you'll always be there  
Because you're hard to find.

It really hurts when you're around  
Because you pull me off my square  
And people tend to dislike me  
Even though I know they care.

It's time for me to be a man  
And stand up for myself  
We've been together for a while  
But I no longer need your help.

So thanks for keeping me company  
When I had nothing else to do  
And now I'm saying goodbye forever  
Because I'm better off without you.

I hope you understand my pain  
I'm trying to change my life  
I know I can't change my past  
But I do know wrong from right.

I know we had a good run  
But it's time to go our separate ways  
Your presence brought me darkness  
Now I'm living in sunny days.

I've learned to soar with eagles  
So now I'm learning how to fly  
This is the end of our relationship  
And now it's time that I say goodbye.

