

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 29: Dante's Kids

Welcome to Just Words—the stories of working people in our community.

Our children are meant to be optimistic and full of hope for the future, and when you ask a group of elementary school students what they want to be when they grow up, you expect to get these kind of answers:

A basketball player.

I know who I want to be. I want to be a police, and I want to be, I Want to do, I want to create, I want to make shirts and skirts, and I am going to be a designer and do hair.

I want to be a lawyer because I want to buy my mother her own house and have her own stuff.

Oh I want to be a psychologist to help children and people.

I want to be a doctor!

I want to be a pediatrician.

I want to be a principal!

Typical youthful enthusiasm, right? But these kids aren't suburban children from middle class families. These are inner city kids from the west side of Baltimore. They live in neighborhoods where violence, drugs and crime are part of their everyday life. It's all around them. They are members of a youth empowerment program run by Dante Wilson that is helping them resist the cycle of failure and violence in their neighborhoods—a seductive powerful force when isolated from the rest of the world that few of us can comprehend.

Can you ask us what we would say if Oprah said she would give us whatever we want?

I would want to buy the whole store.

I would want to buy a new life, a new city so it wouldn't be all this drugs and little alcohol people running around, shooting people, bloods and crips and purple city and all that stuff.

I would get some money and give some to my mother because right now she only has two dollars.

I would get a whole bunch of money and I would buy a hotel and my family will live in a hotel.

Should these be the worries of 8 and 9 year old boys and girls? What are the odds of these kids keeping their youthful enthusiasm and hopes for the future in the face of everything they deal with everyday?

Everyone lost to the streets was once innocent and hopeful like these children.

We can do better by them, and our future.

**Music: Talib Kweli, *I Try*
Sweet Honey in the Rock, *On Children***

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

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