

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 43: Omar

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

A few weeks ago we heard from a mother who had lost her son to gang violence.

What is this seductive pull that street corner life has on so many young people?

Omar Stewart knows that pull, that draw to the streets.

I grew up in east Baltimore off Kenwood avenue. I actually grew up all around York road, Monument Street, a lot of places. But I also moved around in west Baltimore too because my grandparents are from this area. If you not doing nothing positive that street life will grab you. It will take you to a different world and it will keep you there for a very long time. I know a lot of guys that started out, good family backgrounds, school everyday, church every Sunday. And as soon as the street life/gang life got a hold of their attention, it took them away from a lot of the things they have been taught, the way they were brought up. It is just erased out of their mind instantly. It's a powerful influence on young blacks where it is cool to be down with everything that is not success or positive. It's just cool not to be positive, especially in schools.

That atmosphere of negativity and indifference helped Omar become a young man who just didn't care about school, work, or success. His ties to street and gang life became stronger. His drug use increased. One night when he was 18, high on ecstasy and trying to get across town, he resorted to a criminal solution. He let the thug life solve his dilemma.

And around that time I walked around with a gun, I don't know why. And I ended up somewhere in Baltimore, and I saw a car, I saw a lady, she was white, and the mind frame that I was in, I was like, I need a ride, I need a car, I need a ride. So the power of the drug, I can't say it actually made me do what I did, but I had that attitude fuck it. So what I did was point it towards, and did the robbery thing. By the time I thought this was wrong the police had surrounded the car and I had two friends in there with me.

Omar was charged with armed car jacking, robbery, first and second degree assault, carrying a gun, and more. Because he was only 18 and this was his first offense, the court dropped almost all of the charges and suspended all but four months of his sentence.

And no matter how many demons was with me. God was on my side, god was like, well, we are going to give him another chance because we know what state of mind he was in. He gave me a second chance in life.

Despite his sense that God was on his side, Omar has found it difficult in the four years since his arrest to resist temptation.

You have demons that fight against good angels. After every one demon angel is five good angels, but the demon angel is greater. It's easy to do bad and its hard to do good or maintain goodness. And I don't know how you can maintain it, I just don't.

Next week we'll hear about what happened on New Years Eve 2006 that inspired Omar to seek a new life.

Music: The ProcuSSIONs, *Little People*

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

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