

# INTRODUCTION

Can't stand my reflection in the mirror  
vision for my life is getting dimmer  
Heart is so torn from being bitter  
so frail like grass in the winter  
Just need a blast of some sunshine  
where did I go wrong with this life of mine  
Give anything for some peace of mind  
keep a smile on my face through the hard times  
And the trials that I walk through  
someplace somewhere there's a breakthrough  
Need a refreshing like the morning dew  
New direction with a new view

DEWAYNE SMITHERS

This book, *The You Project*, is a revision of the book I wrote a few years ago, *Flawesome*.“ Why the name change and revision? I have learned a lot more about life since then, and I felt like the first book was incomplete.

I have been thinking about revising this book but had trouble coming up with a better title. Then in the last week of February 2025, the new title, “*The You Project*,” just came to me. The more I thought about it, I was like, “This can work.”

The more you think about it, the more you realize that you are a project and that you have to take time to work on yourself. You are the most important project that you will ever work on until the day you leave the Earth.

Before we go on any further, let’s define the word “Project.”

**Project:** a type of assignment, typically involving research or design, that is carefully planned to achieve a specific objective.

YOU are a lifelong project, and no one ever taught me that growing up. I was taught to accept myself just as I am, with my flaws and all. No one ever showed me how to control my thinking and view of life. I was never taught how to construct my inner world properly. No one ever told me that my life follows the path of my strongest thoughts. These things I learned later in life through trial and error. This is another reason I wrote this book, “*The You Project*.” To help teach others things that I wish someone would have taught me growing up.

My life may appear perfect to some. I wish my life were flawless. I wish I could tell you I haven’t compared myself to anyone else. I wish I could tell you that I have always liked my reflection in the mirror. My life has been composed of so many flaws: physical, mental, and emotional. I’ve learned to accept my imperfections and maintain an optimistic view of life.

No matter how many flaws you have, you are still exceptional. How do I know? Because out of the 8.4 billion people on the planet, there is only one of you. No one is better than you, and you are no better than anyone else. No one can do what you can do. You are unique and one of a kind, so much so that no one has your set of fingerprints.

It took me a long time to learn how to smile without faking it. You heard the saying, “FAKE IT TILL YOU MAKE IT.” Let’s just say I perfected that over the years the WRONG way. I became so good at faking it that I lost track of reality.

There’s a difference between learning to smile through the hard times and fake smiling through hard times. I will let you think about that and explain it more in another chapter.

I’ve witnessed many people, young and old, lose their identity because they didn’t know their life was a project. Because of this, many have turned to bad habits such as drugs, drinking, cutting, pornography, overeating, smoking, and hurting other people. A lack of knowledge can cause low self-esteem, depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, loneliness, and other mental disorders. Don’t become so focused on what you don’t like about yourself that you forget about the beauty of life. There are some things you can change and some you can’t change. Despite what you can or can’t change, learn to make the best of everything. Can I tell you a secret? Life will not always be a walk in the park or a bed of roses. It’s not what happens to you in life but how you respond to it.

If you don’t learn how to master your flaws, you’ll end up hating life and playing the victim role. Victim playing (also known as playing the victim, victim card, or self-victimization) is the fabrication to cope with victimhood for a variety of reasons, such as to justify the abuse of others, to manipulate

others, as a coping strategy, or for attention-seeking.

How do I know? Because I was a master at playing the victim role, especially with girls I met, to make them feel sorry for me. That way, I could get what I wanted from them, whether it was sex or money. I was a slick talker and con artist growing up, a professional wordsmith. I thought sex and money would fill the void and help me conquer my flaws. Not a chance of that. Sex and money just made my life worse. That was nothing more than putting a band-aid on a huge and open wound. You have to work on your life from the inside out, not from the outside in.

It'll be the hardest thing you'll ever have to do. You have to work at it every day, whether you feel like it or not. You have to be consistent, disciplined, and dedicated. I wish I had the information contained in this book or someone like me in my life when I was growing up. If I did, I would be so much further in life.

Disclaimer: I am a Believer, a follower of Christ. The information in this book is based on Biblical principles.

# CHAPTER 1

## Fatherless

## The You Project

HE....He only came to see me one time  
and that was a week after my birth  
four years later, my mom caught wind  
that my father had breathed his last  
and left the Earth  
But the question remains  
what was it about me, what was it about me  
That he was so ashamed of  
because of his decision to abandon me  
I've never had the chance to feel  
the embrace of my father's hug  
Never heard him whisper me goodnight  
never had the chance to look deep into  
his eyes and see my reflection in his sight

Dewayne Smithes || Bleeding Heart

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I was born in Lexington, KY to a single mother. She was 21 years old when I was born. I have two sisters, one three years older and one three years younger. More on that later. As stated in the poetry snippet, my father only came to see me one time, which was a week after my birth. I call him Whodini because after that, he vanished into thin air, never to be seen or heard from again. I often wondered what he thought about the one time he came to see me. Did he look at me with a gleam in his eye? Did he hug and kiss me when he held me? Was he happy that he was holding his infant son? Did he think about our wonderful future together? Did he imagine him and I playing catch together? Did he think about the day he would teach me how to ride a bike? Did he see himself on my wedding day fixing my bow tie while telling me, "Son. You're about to marry an amazing woman." Now go and make me some grandkids?"

What was my mom thinking as she observed him holding me? Did a smile spread across her face like a Chicago skyline? What were her thoughts as he gave me back to her? How did she feel when he left and saw the wooden door close behind him? How did she feel when he didn't show up the next day? How did she feel when he didn't show up three days later? How did she feel every time she heard a knock on the front door of her apartment hoping it was him there to see me, but it wasn't? How did she feel when he didn't show up a week later and that week turned into months and months turned into four years? How did she feel when she received the news of his passing? Did thoughts of raising her only son alone grip her thoughts like a python? Did she look at me when I was four years old and say to herself, "At what age should I tell him about his father's passing? Doesn't it even really matter? How can he miss someone he's never known?"

Growing up, my mom never talked about my father. At all!!! I imagine the disappointment of him vanishing without reason rubbed her the wrong way. My mom was told he passed away in Florida from a drug overdose.



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She didn't tell me about him until I was eight or nine years old, but didn't tell me about his passing until I was twelve or thirteen years old. For the longest, I believed my father passed away from a drug overdose.

Between the age of seven and nine, I knew something was missing from my life. It wasn't until I saw my friends and other kids at school with their fathers, playing catch and going to ball games. I had uncles in my life but not a father. It was then I began to wonder about this mysterious figure. It was then I began to ask myself questions like, "How come I don't have a daddy?" The more I asked myself these questions, a hole in my heart began to swell up.

| A father's love is like ink in a pen  
| that never runs dry  
| Let's just say, it's an endless supply  
| to help sustain the pulse of the kid  
| until the day they die

For the first time in my life, I felt empty. A sense of unworthiness began to flood my thoughts like a tsunami.

| Why did he leave me?  
| Why wasn't I good enough for him?  
| Did he really love me?

I wrestled with these thoughts for a long time, even late into my adulthood. These questions stalked my mind like a crazy ex-girlfriend. I could be walking through the park, see a father playing with his son and a sense of sadness would try to overwhelm me. I would pause, take a deep breath and keep on trucking. I'm just getting to a point in life where it doesn't bother me as much. From time to time, I do wish I could hug my father.

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As stated, I have two sisters, one three years older and one three years younger. Since I was the middle child, the only boy, I got blamed for everything growing up, and I mean everything. I got blamed for passing gas, eating the last piece of cake, not washing the dishes, and so on. You get the picture. Not only was my father not around, but their fathers also weren't there either. Which meant for the most of part of our lives, my mom was on welfare and food stamps. I watched my mom do the best she could with what she had with three kids. How come the fathers of my sisters didn't help my mom out? I have no idea.

Being a single mother back in the 1980s was way harder than it is these days. Back then we didn't have technology or luxuries like Uber. It was either catch a taxi or the city bus. Imagine you're riding down the street and see a mother with her three kids at a bus stop. Just writing this takes me down memory lane. Not once through all of this did my mom ever complain about anything. To this day, I know it was the grace of God that kept my mom.

| Consequently, kids are forced  
| forced to see their fathers as fantasy figures  
| told to them through stories  
| they constantly hear from extended family members  
| and like me, some kids only see the faces  
| of their fathers, through pictures

One thing that left a hole in my heart was not knowing what my father looked like. No one in my family had a picture of him. I grew up all my life without the slightest clue of what he looked like. One of my uncles was friends with him. He was the one who introduced my father to my mom. He would tell me stories about my father. Come to find out, I get most of my traits and mannerisms from my father. One, in particular, believe it or not,

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### The Night That Changed Everything

At one time in my life, I had hair, really long hair. I use to wear my hair in braids and from time to time I would wear it out in a big ole bush. November 22, 2001, I went to a laundromat to wash clothes with my hair out. While there, a man who I didn't know asked me my last name. He then said I looked just like the Wilhites, which was my father's side of the family. He then told me about my aunts, the ones I didn't know I had. I was in total shock. He then asked if I knew any of them? To which I replied, "No." He opened a phone book, skimmed through it and gave me one of my aunt's phone number and told me to call her. I haven't seen that man since. Now that I think about, it had to be an angel in disguise sent by God to help get me closure.

A few days later I did what he told me to do. I picked up the phone and called my aunt. Talk about an awkward conversation. I explained who I was, who she was to me, and how I got her phone number. She didn't know what to say so she told me to call her sister, my other aunt, Shirley. We said our goodbyes and I called aunt Shirley. I told aunt Shirley about everything and to my surprise, she was thrilled. So thrilled that she invited me over to her house for us to get more acquainted with each other. How could I say no that? A few days later I pulled up in her driveway.

Aunt Shirley lived out in the country. Her house sat on a huge piece of land. The walk from my truck to her doorstep was about twenty to thirty feet away. She was standing outside her front door looking at me as I was walking toward her. When I walked up to her, she embraced me with the sweetest hug. She then said, "You look just like him. Thought I saw a ghost." She then invited me into her home.

We went into her living room and sat down on the couch. I believed she

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smiled the whole time I was there. She began telling me funny stories about my father. The man who I deemed mysterious was no longer a mystery. I met my father through her. The feeling was wonderful. She reached on the table, grabbed a photo album, set it between us and opened it. For the first time in my existence, I saw pictures of my father. I understood what David meant in Psalms 23:5 when he said, “My cup runs over.” When I laid eyes on him, it was like looking at my reflection in the mirror, except for his giant afro, plaid shirts, and bell bottoms.



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Tears of joy overwhelmed my face as I looked through the photo album. She then asked me the million-dollar question. “Are you aware that you have an older brother and sister?” My face dropped to the floor. That’s how stunned I was. I replied, “Really?” She picked up the phone and called my sister Lita, to which her husband, Charlie at the time, answered the phone. Shirley, “Hello, may I speak to Lita?” “She’s asleep at the moment,” Charlie responded. Shirley, “Tell her she has a brother she doesn’t know about.” Charlie shakes Lita. “Honey, wake up. You have a brother you don’t know about.” Lita jumps up and grabs the phone. “Hello aunt Shirley. Tell me more about this brother.” Shirley, “Why should I when he is sitting right here beside me?” Shirley then hands me the phone.

We talked on the phone for about ten minutes. I would say this was my lucky day but I don’t believe in luck. This was a divine set up by God Himself. She told me our family was having a birthday party later that day at a restaurant and invited me to come to meet everyone else. We said our goodbyes and hung up the phone. Next, Shirley called my brother Denzel. He and I talked on the phone and agreed to meet at the mall for one hour before the birthday party. I was thrilled to finally meet my siblings. After the phone conversation, I asked aunt Shirley how did my father die? She told me while in California, he was kidnapped and taken to a football field. They tied him to a football goal post and blew his head off with a shotgun.

Before I left aunt Shirley’s house, she gave me a priceless gift. She reached into the photo album and gave me a picture of my father. We hugged as I walked out the door. This was the beginning of something amazing. At least that’s what I thought.

Twenty minutes later, I pulled up to the mall. My brother gave me a description of what he looked like and what he was wearing. I always wanted a big brother and finally, this was about to be my reality. I walked

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through the mall anxiously looking for my brother. I turned the corner and boom, there he was. He had a big gold chain around his neck with some dark black sunglasses on his face. When I called his name, he looked up, and when he saw me, all I saw were tears running down his face from under his glasses. We greeted each other with a hug and talked for a while. Come to find out he was married with two kids, to which I met them as well. I'm thinking to myself, "Could this day get any better?"

I left the mall in pure excitement. Next up was meeting my sister and other family members at the restaurant. I walked into the foyer of the restaurant, looked through the glass and saw a sea of family members whom I never knew existed. My sister saw me peeping through the glass and came out to meet me. Her eyes were flooded with tears. She hugged me so tight for about two minutes, crying on my shoulder. We went into the restaurant and she introduced me to the rest of the family and explained who I was. They extended so much love toward me.

To my surprise, my sister had twin daughters, Sydney and Sarah. They were five or six years old at the time. That following weekend, I drove up to Louisville, KY and spent a few days with my sister, her husband, and twin nieces. I was pumped to have twin nieces. They gave me a nickname, "Uncle Docky." My sister shared with me more stories about my father, herself, our brother, and other family members. If anyone knows me, they know how creative I am with the arts. I enjoy writing poems, rap lyrics, short films, and movies. My mom's side of the family is not creative at all. I always wondered where I got my creative side from. Come to find out, my father's side of the family was filled with poets, singers, artists, and musicians. A well of creativity was instilled in me from my father.

I'll be the first to say the first two weeks of spending time with my new family was like living in paradise, but destruction was soon on the horizon.

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After the news of my arrival hit the grapevine, someone told my brother that his father wasn't my father, but his uncle, our father's oldest brother was my father. One reason behind this theory was that his mother was married to his father when I was born and there is no way his father would have cheated on her with my mom. I went back to tell my mother what they said and she laughed. She replied, "I know who your father is." With this new found information, my brother asked me to take a blood test, to which I said, "I will if you pay for it." He was furious at my reply. Let's just say until this day, I still haven't taken a blood test. Since then, he refuses to claim me as his brother. Not to mention his mother doesn't like me. My sister and I still have a good relationship but my brother wants nothing to do with me. A few years later, I found out my aunt Shirley passed away from cancer. I will never forget her and the sparkle in her eye when she first looked at me.

### Fatherless Children

| Feeling the pain  
| that over 24 Million kids  
| in America feel each and every day  
| The absence of their father's love

Fatherless children are twenty-four million deep in America. That number gets under my skin. What may be even more disheartening is that the 24 million doesn't include the countless children who do live with their fathers, but those fathers are emotionally and relationally distant or absent. If you're a fatherless youth, you're not alone. I travel to churches and schools throughout America speaking to youth and young adults. Whenever I share my poem about growing up without my father in a school or church, I can always tell the ones who are fatherless. How? By the faces that are filled with tears. Just like me, you can't help but blame yourself for why your father left.

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There's a younger girl whom I'm close with in Louisville, KY. Her father was never really a part of her life. He didn't start coming around until she turned eighteen years old. The sad thing, he lived right around the corner from her for most of her life. One night, when she was fourteen, we were sitting in her mom's room on the bed in front of the mirror talking to each other. With tears in her eyes, she asked, "How come my father doesn't love me? How come he doesn't want to be a part of my life? She blamed herself, thought it was something wrong with her. That broke my heart. I had to explain to her why it wasn't her fault and why she is not the blame. If anything, it's his fault and he's missing out on a raising a beautiful daughter.

After that night, I watched over time how her life went downhill because she tried to fill that rejection with sex. I had to sit back and watch her go through many bad and abusive relationships. She was searching for love in all the wrong places because of her father's rejection. Over the years, I've watched how she jumped from relationship to relationship, letting guys use her. She's been on a never-ending emotional roller coaster. The sad thing, there are millions of young women just like her because of absent fathers. Many women who grew up fatherless are attracted to older men as a way to fill the void in their heart from not having a father. Some of them look for daddy in all the wrong men.

Here are a few quotes from some fatherless daughters

***"Being a fatherless daughter has made me very bitter. It's hard for me to trust men because of my father."***

***"It takes a lot for me to trust men and I clearly have daddy issues. Luckily, I found a man I can trust with my life and he is my soon to be husband. It's not impossible to find good men, you just have to search."***



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***“My father didn’t abandon me but he passed away when I eight years old. The pain of not having my father is very heartbreaking. On most nights I cry myself to sleep thinking of him. Sometimes when I see a daughter with her father, it makes me wish my father was still alive.”***

If you’re a fatherless daughter, learn to give yourself closure. Closure is coming to terms with the situation and permitting yourself to move forward. If you don’t give yourself closure you will remain emotionally stuck.

### Fatherless Sons

Boys have a hole in their heart in the shape of their father. If the father is unwilling or unable to fill that hole, it can leave a wound in the boy that is not easily healed. That wound is apart of him from childhood to adulthood. Many get stuck in the anger rather than acknowledge the hurt because that makes them vulnerable. Rejection is a green-eyed monster whose eyes turn red. I know what it’s like carrying the hurt and rejection of not having my father. Sons need their fathers. One day I went to the mall. As I was walking up to the entrance, a young black kid, about five or six years old, looked up, saw me, ran towards me, hugged me, and said, “Daddy.” I hugged him back. His mom ran up and apologized. I explained to her that no apologies were needed. Why? Because at that time, he needed to be embraced by a man.

The benefits of a son who receives love from his father are notably different from those who don’t. If the son is acting up in the home and the mom says, “Wait till your father gets home.” The son straightens up his act. In a well-functioning family, the very presence of a father embodies healthy authority, an authority conveyed through his daily involvement in family life. This kind of fatherly authority is critical to the prevention of juvenile delinquency amongst sons.

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A father's attention to his son has enormous positive effects on a boy's emotional and social development. A son abandoned by his father is deprived of a deep sense of personal security. A close and intense relationship between father and son can prevent hostility and inappropriate aggressiveness. Furthermore, such bad behavior is a barrier to the boy finding a place among his more normal peers. These young men, very sensitive in their demands for respect, display a demeanor which communicates "deterrent aggression." Throw these sons in schools and neighborhoods across America, what do you have? Uncontained chaos.

Without counseling and therapy, what are these sons suppose to do? How are they supposed to act without their father or healthy father figures to help navigate them through life? A small percentage of these sons end up playing sports in school, which teaches them healthy discipline. But for the others, a lot of them end up in a life of crime. Don't believe me. Take a trip to your local prison. 80% of prison inmates come from fatherless homes.

Young boys who are raised without healthy structure and discipline will explore a life of crime in the streets. Crimes and gangs are magnets for angry young boys who don't have a father present. As soon as these young boys can stand up and establish a sense of self, they are mad. Their madness is then released in the form of crime. Ask almost any guy why they joined a gang and they will say, "I needed love. A sense of belonging." Who are the leaders of gangs? Older men, so-called father figures. These fatherless sons look to gangs to find out how to be and what to do. Seeking outside father figures and love is not uncommon among fatherless sons. When you don't love yourself, you tend to look for someone else to validate you.

I lived and experienced everything I mentioned above. I learned to steal at a young age, joined a neighborhood gang when I was a teen, became a drug dealer, robbed people at gunpoint, dropped out of high school, and

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almost went to prison for selling drugs. When I was fifteen years old, I got caught stealing video games from Target and went to juvenile detention for the first time. At twenty-two years old, I was busted for selling drugs and almost went to prison for ten years. It was then the light bulb in my head went off that my way of living had to change. Because I didn't have my father or healthy male role models, I didn't have any man to teach me how to be a man and work with my hands. I had no man to teach me how to properly treat and love a woman. For most of my life, I used women and treated them wrong. Many fatherless sons travel the road I once did. The sad part, most of them never escape that road of gangs and crime. They either spend all of their life in prison or go to their grave at an early age.

If you're a fatherless son and reading this, reach out to me. My information is at the end of the book. You don't have to travel the road I once did. Let me help navigate you throughout life. I have a team of professionals and role models who are here for you.

# CHAPTER 2

## HOW I GOT MY SCARS

## HOW I GOT MY SCARS

Some years later  
my mom's boyfriend moved in  
and for the next five years, he beat the crap out of me  
wore out the skin on my legs with a belt  
In the words of Joker from the Dark Knight  
"You want to know how I got these scars?"  
That's how  
Not only the physical scars  
but the emotional and mental scars as well

DEWAYNE SMITHERS || LIFE

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If you were to see my legs from the knees down, you would see all of my scars. Most of those scars came from the years of abuse I suffered at the hands of my mother's boyfriend.

|The moment I walked through the door after school  
| I knew it was on like a Rocky fight, with me as the underdog  
| with no chance of winning, no one in my corner  
| no one to wipe the sweat from my face, I mean the tears from my eyes  
| because of lashings to my backside  
| instead of boxing gloves, it was a thick leather black belt  
| in the hands of a monster  
| 6 foot 2, dark skin, 220 pounds, with a deep voice  
| like Uncle Phil from the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air  
| versus me, a 10-year-old kid, this fight wasn't fair

I can remember Ken instructing me to go to my room, take off my clothes, get in the bed, and that he'll be back there in a few minutes with his belt. I would stroll to my room and in fear, did what he instructed me to do. I would be in my bed looking at the door, hoping he wouldn't come in. It never failed. Every time the door opened, it would be him with his thick leather black belt. This wasn't David vs. Goliath. It was me about to get demolished by this bully of a monster. He would stand over top of me and swing his belt in anger, smashing it against my frail and defenseless body as I screamed in horror. When the beatings were over, he would leave the room without saying a word. I would lay in my bed, crawled up like a baby, body bleeding, with tears streaming down my face like Niagra Falls. I wouldn't even come out of my room. I would fall asleep, hoping to sleep the pain away. I would wake up the next morning for school still in pain from the night before. On some days, I would limp to the bus stop because of the soreness. On those days, I had a hard time keeping up with the other kids on the playground.

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Who was Ken? Your guess is as good as mine. One moment it was just my mom, two sisters, and me in our three-bedroom apartment. One day without warning, Ken moved in. My sisters and I were in shock. He was a stranger to us and us to him. It wasn't like my mom pulled us to the side to tell us about this new guy moving in. She gave us no warning at all. My mom had no clue about the beatings her young son was about to endure for the next five years.

If you see any signs of abuse in someone you know, or if you are involved in an abusive relationship, get help right away. Call the authorities, tell a teacher, or call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline, a 24-hour hotline with resources to aid in every child abuse situation. All calls are confidential. Call 1-800-422-4453 for help.

For the longest, I was ashamed of my scars, physical, mental, and emotional, I thought something was wrong with me because of my scars.

| Your scars are proof  
| that you have fought  
| and refused to surrender  
| wear your scars proudly  
| they are proof that you're a warrior

My scars are proof that someone or something tried to break me but couldn't. Scars show that we endured discomfort and encountered pain. Some scars go away and some don't. What if your scar or scars are deeper, much deeper? People look at you and you look fine. But really, you're not fine. You're hurt deeply. It happened years ago, but the scar is still there. There is no surgery to make those kinds of scars go away. We all have scars; they may be in different places. We all have them if we've lived life at all. This is why I do my best to be kind and nice to everyone I come across, no

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matter who they are. You may have to live with the scars but you don't have to live with the pain that caused those scars. The scars are a reminder of where you have been and where you are now.

What happened to Ken? After he moved out, he kept in touch from time to time. About two years ago, I found out that Ken has kidney failure. Now. I don't wish anything bad on anyone, but I do believe in what goes around comes around, you reap what you sow. Could it be that his kidney failure is a result of the abuse he took me through? Then again, it may not be. It's just something to think about and chew on.

I'm not down with any child abuse at all. It's not right, and it's not fair. Child abuse is a result of hurting adults who haven't healed from their childhood trauma. Child abuse is when a parent or caregiver, whether through action or failure to act, causes injury, death, emotional harm to a kid. There are many forms of child abuse, such as neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and exploitation.

### Definitions & Stats

Physical abuse is when a parent or caregiver causes any non-accidental physical injury to a child. There are many signs of child abuse, such as bruises, scars, burn marks, and open wounds. 28.3% of adults report being physically abused as a child.

Sexual abuse is when an adult uses a child for sexual purposes or involves a child in sexual acts for excitement or gratification. 20.7% of adults report being sexually abused as a child.

Emotional abuse is when a parent or caregiver harms a child's mental



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and social development or causes severe emotional harm. While a single incident may be abuse, most often, emotional abuse is a pattern of behavior that causes damage over time. 10.6% of adults report being emotionally abused as a child.

Child neglect is when a parent or caregiver doesn't give the care, supervision, affection, and support needed for a child's health, safety, and well-being. Child neglect included: Physical Neglect & Inadequate Supervision || Emotional Neglect || Medical Neglect || Educational Neglect.

| Home is where the heart is, home is where heart is  
| but for some, home is where the hurt is  
| because hurting people hurt other people  
| and some of these people being hurt are kids  
| who are afraid to be at home, because for them  
| home is where the hurt is

I know it's not easy to deal with. I know the mental and emotional pain that comes with being abused. The people hurting you have been hurt by others in the past and they are taking that hurt out on you. I know it's not fair. On the flip side, please don't take your hurt out on other people, especially other kids at school, because you never know what they are going through behind closed doors at home just like the kids at my school didn't know what I was going through at home. Why? Because I was afraid to tell anyone, including my teachers. If you are being abused at home, please tell your teachers or school officials.

Some years ago, I was speaking at Middle School to a class of sixth-graders, mostly girls. As I shared my story of abuse, a girl in the front row raised her hand. I paused my speech for her to talk. With tears in her eyes,

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she began to tell the class and me about the abuse she suffered at home. The class was silent as she was telling her story. The teacher got up and took the girl to the office for them to talk more. When they left, other hands in the class, especially in the front row, went up. One by one, they shared stories of abuse they were suffering at home. I could barely contain myself. I had to hold back the tears because I was having flashbacks of my abuse. By this time, almost the whole class was in tears. A kid who was sitting on my right side raised his hand. He said he doesn't like coming to school because he's tired of being bullied. By this time, the teacher came back in, but the first girl was still in the office. After class ended, the teacher and I talked.

She said this was the first time her students ever opened up to anyone like this. Why is that? Because the kids had someone in front of them who could truly relate to their pain and trauma. They had someone in front of them who wouldn't judge them. They had someone in front of them who they could trust and confide in. What happened to the girl who went to the office? When she got up to the office, she raised up the sleeves on her jacket, and she had cut marks on both arms, from her elbows down to her wrists. She took a razor blade and carved into her arms, "I hate me, I hate me, I hate me." Just as rapping was my way of dealing with my pain, cutting was her way of coping with her pain. Cutting was her destructive habit. Let me ask you a question. What is your destructive habit, the way you deal with your hurt and pain? Is it cutting or punching holes in walls? Is it smoking weed, cigarettes, or vaping? Is it sex? Is it overeating or not eating at all because you're a bulimic? We'll discuss more about destructive habits in another chapter.

Now for the rest of her life, she has to walk around with the scars of cut marks in her arms all because of the hurt she experienced from someone else.

If you're a single mother, be careful about the men you bring around

## HOW I GOT MY SCARS

your kids. A lot of kids experience child abuse at the hands of the mother's boyfriends. Call me old fashion, but I believe a man and woman shouldn't live together until marriage. A mother shouldn't leave her kids alone around men without really knowing who these men are.

Another time I was at a High School speaking to some ninth and tenth graders. After my talk, a fifteen-year-old kid walked up to me with tears in his eyes. He said, "My mom left my dad and me when I was six years old. I haven't seen her since. She won't even really talk to me. Is it my fault?" I explained to him that it wasn't his fault; it's her fault. Things like this happen all the time when I speak to youth in schools and churches. Youth write to me on Facebook, and Instagram thanking me for speaking to them. My talks give them hope and a way out.

Later on, my sisters told me they would stand outside my door crying as I was screaming for my life because there it was nothing they could do. Ladies. Imagine your brother is in his room getting the crap beat out of him, and there's nothing you could do about it? Think about that for a moment. He never beat them. Where was my mom when this took place? She was at work the majority of the time, but she was aware of what was going on.

The sad thing is that even though my grandfather and four uncles knew what was going on, none of them protected me from Ken. None of them stepped in and said, "This is enough." I was left to fend for myself for almost five years. The only thing that kept me sane through all of this was rapping. I learned how to rap when I was ten years old. Rapping for me was my crutch, my way of dealing with pain.

What kind of sick individual can stand over a kid and abuse them in any kind of way? How could Ken hear the screams and pain from my voice and still continue? What type of individual? An individual who is hurt and uses

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their hurt to hurt other people.

### Enough is Enough

Someway, I was going to get some kind of vengeance. One day I was lying on the floor, and he was standing over top of me, so I kicked him as hard as I could in his family jewels. The pain on his face for me was priceless.

As stated, my mom knew about the abuse but didn't really know about the scar imprints my body suffered, especially my legs. One day, Ken beat me so bad that he left a massive open wound right under my private parts. I mustered up the courage to show my mom the collateral damage. When I showed her, she was mad as a harlot. A few days later, Ken moved out.

Even though I was relieved, I still had the scars on my legs with all the emotional and mental damage. Out of all of that, the thing that hurt the most is that she didn't apologize for what she allowed him to take me through. She didn't pull me to the side and say, "Son. Mommy is sorry, and I truly apologize for what happened to you. Let's get you some counseling. Let's get you some therapy. Let mommy fix this." I was just left with scars with no explanation or closure. Someone, especially a kid, just doesn't forget the trauma that happened to them at the expense of other people.

Some of you who are reading this book is going through or have been in similar situations. Trust me; it's not your fault. But what you can't do is take your hurt and hurt other people. You don't like being hurt, so it's not fair for you to hurt other people because you're hurt.

Overcoming and conquering the abuse you are going through or have been through is apart of working on "The You Project."

# CHAPTER 3

## CATALYST

## The You Project

After Ken moved out, I was stuck with scars, physical, emotional, and mental. Here I am, ten-years-old with five years of abuse under my belt. The blame had to go to someone, so I blamed my mom. Because of this, I questioned my her love for me. How could you allow a man to come into your home and abuse your son? Love is supposed to protect people, especially innocent kids. Even though he was gone, the damage was already done. I was determined to make my mom pay for all my scars. From that moment and years to come, I took my mom and sisters through hell. Hurting people hurt other people, and I was one of those people who hurt other people. The thing about it, I didn't care who it was I hurt. Hurting other people was my way of not allowing other people to hurt me. My life was a downward spiral of never-ending trauma.

What could I do with my mind and emotions fully loaded with trauma? It didn't take long to figure out that my bedroom walls would become the first targets of my anger. The more I thought about everything, the angrier I became, and the more upset I became, the stronger I would become like the Incredible Hulk. My bedroom walls were filled with so many holes from my small little fists. My mom would have the walls fixed. I would do it again, and the cycle continued. Not only that, but I would hit myself and bang my head against the wall. My mom would buy me clothes, and I would tear them up when I got angry. She would buy me G. I. Joe action figures; I would throw them against the wall and watch them explode. At times I would curse out my sisters and say things to them that I can't repeat in this book. This is just a condensed list of the things I did. I was so bad that my sisters tried to convince my mom to send me to a boot camp, but she didn't. They wanted to rid the apartment of this in-house terrorist. I didn't have any other way to deal with my trauma and anger. The more I looked at the scars on my legs, the worse things got.

Children respond with anger because they feel helpless, and I felt helpless.

## CATALYST

To understand why you, as a kid or youth, deal with anger the way you do takes time and effort. What triggered the outbursts? Most times, anger is a reaction to frustration. Anger can be triggered by embarrassment, loneliness, isolation, anxiety, and hurt. Youth often respond with anger because they feel helpless to fully understand the situation, and powerless to change the situation.

Can I tell you a secret? It's okay to be angry. It's a normal human emotion. The trick is to learn how to manage anger and channel it toward something productive, not to deny or suppress it. If you suppress it, like a volcano, it'll erupt at the wrong place and time. Setbacks and obstacles can make you stronger in life. It is important to remember that anger is not the same as aggression. Anger is a temporary emotional state caused by frustration, while aggression is a behavior. Anger is okay, but living out anger through aggression is not okay. Aggression is often an attempt to hurt people or destroy property. You can be angry without acting in hurtful or damaging ways. No one taught me how to manage and control my anger.

### How I Dealt With Anger

| Learned how to rap when I was only ten  
| a little kid skillful with a pad and pen  
| Had visions of me big in the industry  
| rap god of Lex, no one could touch me

I learned how to rap when I was ten years old. How? My best friend was this kid by the name of Rashad. I met him at our apartment complex when I was four years old. One day while in the third grade, Rashad walked up to my table with a blue piece of paper in his hand. I'm thinking to myself, "What is this fool up to this time?" He said, "I'm about to do a rap battle against two other kids and want you to be my partner." I responded, "Boy,

I can't rap." He said, "No worries, I have you covered." He handed me a blue piece of paper and walked off. My eyes soon glanced up and down that piece of paper. Rashad done wrote me a rap. Before I knew it, I was in the middle of a rap battle with us being victorious. From that moment, I started writing my own raps and winning many rap battles. I soon discovered that I had a way with words. To sharpen my skills, I went and bought a dictionary. I walked around with that dictionary and read it almost every day.

By the time I was seventeen years old, I mastered the art of freestyle rap. I became so good that no one on the streets of Lexington, KY, could beat me in battle rap. I went undefeated for seven years. After that, I retired from battle rap. How did I become that good at battle rap? I pictured the other rapper as the man who abused me and ripped him apart with words. Worked every time. For the most part, that's how I creatively used my anger. Rapping for me, has been my crutch throughout life since I was ten years old.

Many of you who are reading this book don't know what to do with your anger. I encourage you to talk to your parents, teacher, school counselor, or see a child psychologist. Because you don't know what to do with your anger, you turn to other bad habits such as drugs, drinking, sexual activities, overeating, among other things, **DESTRUCTIVE HABITS** I discussed earlier.

The first thing is to find out why you are angry. What is the root cause of it? Until you discover that, you will only be treating the symptoms. What triggered the outburst? Why did you kick the cat or slap the dog? Why did hit your sibling or yell at your parents? Why do you act out in school? These are the kind of questions you have to ask yourself repeatedly. With every problem, there is always a solution. To find a solution, you have to get to the root of the problem.



Most times, exploring the root of the problem to find a solution can be a long and painful process. Believe me; you want to find the solution as soon as possible. You have to address the root problem of your depression, loneliness, bad habits, addictions, anger, or whatever it is. If not, you'll go through living life miserably on the inside while faking a smile. This is why so many people turn to drugs, sex, alcohol, gambling, overeating, and so on. They are looking to fill some void on the inside. Find creative ways as outlets. Creative outlets are not the end all be all. You have to destroy destructive habits at the root.

No one taught me this growing up. I'm just finding this out. Though I used rap as a way to deal with my issues, it still wasn't enough. Me rocking a crowd was only a temporary fix.

| Lost my virginity when I was fifteen  
| to my girlfriend, became a sex fiend  
| thought sex would soothe and ease the pain  
| but none the less, the pain remained the same

At fifteen, I lost my virginity to my girlfriend. I will talk more about sex in another chapter. Her name was Tamika. We were dating for about three months. It was during the first month of us dating that my virginity went bye-bye. We broke up two months later. After that, I was addicted to sex. Couldn't get enough of it. I thought for sure that sex was the solution to my pain, anger, and depression. I was wrong. It just made things worse. Rapping and sex was only a temporary band-aid for my inner wounds. I'm still cursing out my sisters, talking bad to my mom, punching holes in my bedroom walls, tearing up my clothes and toys.

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| Depression had me slaved, trapped in a barricade  
| felt out of place like an alien  
| I was begging death to take my life away  
| The day I was born they should have taken me to my grave

Living with depression is no joke. One minute you're fine, and the next minute you're mentally unstable. Some people compare depression with being bipolar. Looking back at my life, it was truly by the grace of God that I've made and still making it. I hated life so much. I'm just learning to enjoy life through "The You Project."

What was the root cause of my depression and anger? Three things. 1. Not having my father in my life. 2. The abuse I suffered from Ken. 3. I will talk about it in the Self Esteem chapter.

Whatever you are dealing with, please get some professional help. If not, it'll be hard for you to enjoy life. My life would have been much better if I went through professional counseling as a youngster. Because I didn't, I hurt many people, including myself. I battled suicide for a long time. Everyone thought I had it all together because of my ability to rap. I was a wordsmith, a sweet talker, a con artist if you will

### HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT

| When I was 18, dropped out of High School  
| to make my mom mad, I didn't like her rules  
| To her, I was cruel, full of disrespect  
| But still she loved me, every day she did her best  
| to raise me right, despite all the hell I raised

When I was eighteen, I did the dumbest thing. I dropped out of high

## CATALYST

school, a decision I would regret for a long time. At the school I went to, a student could sign themselves out when they turned eighteen. With my classes, I was only doing half days because I was so caught up on my school work. Across the street from my school was a Long John Silvers. I came up with a plan, a pretty good one at that. I would apply for a job at Long John Silvers. If hired, I would sign myself out of school. One day, I went to the office to sign myself out, to which they denied my request. They said since I still lived with my mom, I would have to get a signed permission slip from her to sign me out. I went home, told my mom the plan, and asked her to sign the permission slip and to my surprise, she refused. I pleaded with her, and she held her ground. I walked away, angered, and furious. To me, it was a win-win proposition. I was determined to make her pay for this. I thought long and hard about how I could get her back. What better way to make her pay than for me to drop out of high school, to which I did.

## Drug Dealer

| I was stacking change, rolling deep in the game  
| in my friend's kitchen cooking cocaine

Now that I'm a free man, high school dropout, I had to find a way, a quick way to make some money. If it was one thing I hated, it was being broke. A few of my friends in the neighborhood were selling drugs. One of them was my other best friend. Mike was five months older than me. He dropped out of high school way before I did. His heart was on boxing while slanging drugs. If he had stuck with boxing, he would have been the champ and still be champ instead of Floyd Mayweather. His net worth would be over \$500 million. He and Mayweather are in the same weight class. Mayweather can't touch Mike in boxing, but we'll never know because Mark gave up on his dream by putting it off.

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I saw how much money Mike was making by selling drugs, so I went to him and asked him to teach me. He said, “Dewayne. Selling drugs is not for you. You’re better than this.” I didn’t know at the time that he was only looking out for my future. I was furious that he told me no. I was determined to find a way to sell drugs.

My older sister was really good friends with a big-time drug dealer who lived in the neighborhood. I went to him and explained what I wanted, and he agreed to teach me. A few days later, I went to his apartment. We sat down in front of a table, and he pulled out this big ball of cocaine. He taught me how to chop it up and measure it. He fronted me some cocaine and boom, I was now in business. I went and showed Mike. He did his best to talk me out of it. I’m now hanging out on the block in the hood slanging cocaine, mostly at night. I had money coming in so fast that it made my head spin.

After a few weeks of selling cocaine, I started selling weed as well. I was like a one-man one-stop-shop. Not only was I selling drugs, but I had a third shift job at UPS loading trucks and cleaning the building. The job was a cover-up for the money I made from selling drugs. I did it so my mom wouldn’t find out about my new found lifestyle.

During this time, life for me was amazing. I was making money, rocking out crowds with rapping, and having sex with different women from Kentucky to Columbus, Ohio. The thought of me going back to school was not even on my radar. All of this was a cover-up for all the hurt brewing on the inside. Four years later, at 22, it all came crumbling down.

## My Unborn Daughter

Out of all the women, there was one woman I admired and cared for. I

know that sounds strange, but it's true. Her name was Kesha. We dated strongly for six months. She had a daughter who was four years old. After six months of dating, she called and said she was pregnant. I was so happy that I was going to be a father. She told me she wanted to have an abortion. That changed the tone of the conversation. She explained that the father of her four-year daughter was in prison, and because of that, she didn't want to take a chance of being a single mother of two kids. My proposition, "Have the baby, and I'll take full custody. No questions asked." To my surprise, she didn't believe me. We finished our talk and hung up the phone. After that, I didn't hear from her for two weeks. She called me one night and said, "I did it." I replied, "You did what?" She said, "I had the abortion." At that moment, my whole world fell apart. I was in total shock. I forgot how the conversation ended but we haven't talked since.

| In the words of Pac, This be the realist that I ever wrote  
 | I liken abortion to slave masters of old  
 | who hung my ancestors with ropes  
 | legs dangling, collapsed lungs, suffocated, can't breathe, neck broke  
 | no joke, blood spilled, there's a reason why God said, "You shall not kill"  
 | Just keeping it real, no stranger to this slaughter  
 | at 22, got my girlfriend pregnant, but she went behind my back  
 | and slaughtered my daughter  
 | turned my world upside down, robbed me of being a father  
 | That's why I come harder and put my heart in my rhymes  
 | so you can see my transparency like the sun when it shines

After everything I've been through up until this point in my life. I now have to deal with this, the slaughter and murder of my unborn daughter. That wrecked me deeply, mentally, and emotionally. I carried this around and didn't talk about it for a long time. After the aftermath of the abortion, I

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developed more of an I don't care attitude. Not only did I question the love of my mom, but this experience also made me lose trust in all women.

After this, I was determined never to let another woman hurt me. The pain of losing my daughter sent me deeper into the street life selling drugs.

### Why I Quit Selling Drugs

I wasn't a big-time drug dealer. I sold just enough to keep money in my pocket. Why? Because all the big-time drug dealers I knew were getting caught and snitched on. The guy who taught me how to sell drugs got caught and sent off to prison.

A few months before my eighteenth birthday, I was hanging out with the wrong crowd. This sixteen-year-old girl had her grandmother's credit card. One night we went to the gas station to buy some food and put gas in the car we were driving. Since I was the oldest in the group, I signed the credit card receipt. A few months after I turned eighteen, the grandmother's credit card statement came in the mail, and she saw my signature on the statement. She asked the granddaughter about it, and sure enough, she told on me. The grandmother pressed charges on me, and I was charged with fraudulent use of a credit card.

One day, I'm chilling at home, and two sheriffs are at the door to arrest me. I had to pay a fine, spend ten days in jail, and was put on probation for one year.

You would have thought that me being arrested and spending time in jail would have stopped me from selling drugs. But it didn't. Here I am four years later, twenty-two years old, still selling drugs. Around this time, I'm going back and forth to Florida with Mike and an older man named

Jake. Mike and I were helping Jake with his small construction business. He landed some jobs in Florida, so we would go with him. I liked Florida so much that I decided to move there. To pull this off, I had to make sure my

car was running right. I found a local mechanic who was going to put a used motor in my vehicle. It was going to take him three or four days to do this. After this was completed, I was moving to Florida with Jake. I was excited about this move. I was looking forward to leaving Kentucky behind.

I went over my mechanic's house on a Sunday night to give him half of the deposit and come back the next day to drop off my car. The following Friday was my scheduled date to move to Florida. Cliff, the mechanic, lived on a one way street in the hood. When I pulled up in front of his house, there were two cop cars parked a few houses behind Cliff's house. My friend Rashad left his weed and weep paper in my car the night before, but it was hidden well. I paid the cops no mind and went inside the garage to talk to Cliff about the details of installing the motor. After the conversation, I walked back to my car. Right before I opened my door, a lady cop yelled and told me to stand still.

She and her partner came up to me and asked what I was doing. I explained to them what I was doing. They said they received a call about drug activity in the area. They asked if I had any drugs on me to which I replied, "No." They asked to see my license and proof of insurance.

While one officer was in her car, checking my stuff, I stepped to the side and had a conversation with Cliff. I said, "If anything happens to me, come bail me out on the third party." What I didn't know is that the other lady cop overheard my conversation. The other lady cop came back, handed me my license and proof of insurance, and told me I was free to go. Right before I opened my car door, she yelled, "Stop, don't get in." She walked

## The You Project

up and said, “I thought you didn’t have any drugs in your car?” I replied, “I don’t.” She said, “Then why did you tell your mechanic if anything happened, to come bail you out?” I replied, “It’s the end of the month, and I know cops have a quota to meet.” That made her mad as a harlot. From that moment, everything went downhill. They called a K9 to sniff my car and found Rashad’s drugs in my car. At that moment, I lost everything.

They put me in handcuffs and took me to jail. This 22-year-old tough guy was now afraid for his life. I had no idea how this was going to turn out. One minute I was in street clothes, and now I’m in an orange jumpsuit in a jail cell filled with other criminals. After telling the other inmates what I was caught with, they explained that I could be facing ten years in prison. When they told me that, my mind went into a deep and hurtful panic.

Imagine you’re 22-years old and hear there’s a chance of you spending the next ten years of your life in prison. I knew I wouldn’t last that long in prison. I’m not a big guy. I have a slim build. In prison, men my size are raped over and over again. All it would have taken was for three or four guys who were built like Thor to surround me. I would have gone from Dewayne to Danisha real quick. My manhood would have gone down the drain. As hard as this was to think about, the hardest thing for me to do was to call my mom to tell her where I’m at and why. Why was this hard? Because she had no clue I was selling drugs. She just thought I was working at UPS.

I picked up the phone and called her. I told her what happened. I could hear the disbelief in her voice. A few days later, I’m walking through the courthouse in my orange jumpsuit chained up to fifteen other men. I looked up and saw my mom staring at me from about ten feet away. The look of shame in her eyes broke my heart. She didn’t have to say a word. The look in her eyes said everything. “What happened to you? I didn’t raise you like



this!” Not only that, but she was the only person that showed up. Rashad didn’t show up. None of my other friends or girlfriends showed up. The only person that showed up was my mom. Not only did she up, but she also bailed me out. To make a long story short. I hired a lawyer who somehow got my charges reduced. I ended up doing forty-five days in jail, a fine, and two years of probation. After my release from jail, I never sold drugs again.

# CHAPTER 4

## CHOICES

## The You Project

The stuff we deal with is so real  
So the world tells us to go and pop pills  
To have sex before you put the ring on  
Deal with your problems, get your drink on  
Indulge in the flesh, keep it satisfied  
It's okay to steal, okay to lie  
Smoke weed bro, nothing wrong with getting high  
Do a little good, it'll get you by  
Keep your eyes full of lust  
You only live once, do what you want  
The world is so corrupt, so vain  
Out of control like a runaway train

DEWAYNE SMITHERS || SO REAL

## CHOICES

That is how my time of selling drugs came to an end. What to do now? My choice of selling drugs and getting caught turned my life upside down. How so? I lost my job at UPS, had to pay my mom back \$1200 to \$1500 for paying for my lawyer. I had a temporary position at a local call center, but it only lasted for about three months. Now I'm regretting my decision to drop out of high school. Now it's hard for this high school dropout to find employment, especially with a drug charge on my record. Honestly, who would hire a high school drop with a drug record? I was still doing construction for Jake, but it wasn't enough because he was still traveling back and forth to Florida.

It was only one thing left for me to do to get money. Date women and use them for cash. I used my skill of words to become a con-artist. I found women who had low esteem, made them feel good to get money from them. I couldn't travel with Jake to Florida. Since I was on probation, I couldn't leave the state of Kentucky. Guess what? The person to blame for this was me. I couldn't blame anyone else. I had to take responsibility for my own choices.

This next statement, if you pay attention and apply it to your life, will cause you to make better choices in your everyday life. It will save you years of regret. There is nothing worse than regretting your past decisions. I wish someone would have taught me this growing up. Instead, I was taught how to lie, steal, cheat, use women, and sell drugs. I know you're curious about this statement. I tell this statement everywhere I speak, in schools, churches, and other events. If you heard me speak in person before, then you've heard this statement. I want you to underline this statement and remember it. What is it? I'm glad you asked.

YOU ARE FREE TO DO WHATEVER YOU WANT TO DO WITH YOUR LIFE, BUT YOU ARE NOT FREE TO CHOOSE THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS.

When I say this statement to youth and young adults, silence hits the room. Let me give you an example of what I mean. Back in 2015, someone blessed me debt-free with a 2005 Ford Mustang. This was my first sports car. I've been watching Fast & Furious way too much. One night, 12:30 am, I'm driving back to Lexington, KY, from Cincinnati, OH. I scanned the highway, and no cops were in sight. I smashed the gas pedal and pushed my car to 120 miles per hour for about two or three minutes. I felt like I was floating. Since I got away with it, I started speeding when I knew no cops were around. I did this for two and a half years. One night in August 2017, I'm driving home. I looked around and scanned the highway. There was only one SUV in front of me. What did I do? Pushed my car up to 83 miles per hour though the speed limit was 55. Next thing I know, I had lights in my mirror. The SUV I passed up was an unmarked cop car.

Let me ask you a question. Whose fault was it that I was pulled over, mine or the cop? I could say it was his fault because he didn't allow me to enjoy my fun for two or three minutes. No one's life was in danger. As much as I would like to blame him, I can't. It was my fault. It took me speeding for two years to get caught one time. For two years, I thought I was getting away with it. I had to go court three or four times, pay a fine of \$194.00, and attend traffic school one night from 6 pm to 10 pm. Guess what I don't really do anymore? Speed. Why? I don't want to pay the court system anymore of my money. I had train myself not to speed anymore. At first, it was hard, but now it's so easy. Now when I drive, I don't go over five miles over the speed limit. The consequences of speeding now outweigh the joy of speeding.

## CHOICES

Humanity was blessed with a fantastic gift called free will. We are not robots controlled by some puppet master high in the sky. You have free will, and what you do with your free will is all up to you. No one can make you do anything. No one can force you to smoke weed, smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, have sex outside of marriage, do drugs, pop pills, these dumb internet challenges, or anything else. You do these things because you want to do them. How do I know? If you were genuinely sorry, you wouldn't have done it in the first place. You knew it was wrong before you decided to do it. Why is it you only apologize to people after you get caught? If you never got caught, you would never apologize. The best apology is changed behavior.

The wrong things you are doing that your parents, guardians, or teachers don't know about, it's only a matter of time before your cover is blown. Just because you're getting away with it right now doesn't mean you'll always get away with it. I thought my mom would never find out about me selling drugs, but she did. It broke my heart after she found out. As long as I was making money and she didn't know, I was cool with it. Our wrong decisions not only affect us in the long run, but it affects the people we love, family, and friends. Let's say that I decided to speed again when no cops were around that I lost control of my car, hit someone head-on, and killed them. What if that person was a wife with three kids. My decision to speed has now caused sorrow and chaos to hit a family. A husband is now without his beautiful wife. Her kids will never see her again. She won't be at their graduation and wedding. No more family photos. Not only that but I would go to prison for murder, which would also negatively affect my family, especially my nieces. These are the kind of things that I now think about before I do something. The choices you make today will be the fruit you'll live by tomorrow. You can't blame anyone else for where you end up in life.

As a youth or young adult, steer clear of peer pressure that pushes you to

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do wrong things. If something bad happens, those same people will let you take the blame and fall for it every time. You're the one that has to deal with the consequences, not them.

Years ago, I had a conversation with a teenage girl who was like a little sister to me. She was upset that her parents never let her go to parties. I did my best to explain how her parents were protecting her from danger unseen, but she wasn't trying to hear that. One weekend her parents went out of town and left her home alone. A guy she met at a youth camp called, told her about a party, and asked if she wanted to come. She was so excited to go. She went to the party with him and his two friends. At the end of the party, they got her drunk and raped her. She lost her virginity to gang rape. Imagine how she felt when she called her parents and told them what happened. They were furious. Because of one bad decision, tragedy hit the family. She was free to disobey her parents, but she wasn't free to choose the outcome. After this, she became addicted to sex and bad relationships. She and her parents had to go through extreme counseling. Seven years later, she is happily married with kids.

Before I go on, let me talk about a rape a little bit more. Not long ago, I was at a high school talking about this. I asked the students, "Whose fault was it that my friend was raped, hers or the guys? Some of the students said the guys and other students said hers. For the students who said it was her fault, I asked them why. They said, "Because she chose to disobey her parents, go to a party with three guys she didn't know. If she had stayed home, the rape would have never taken place." When they said that, two girls in the class started crying, got up and left the class, one never came back. All rape is entirely wrong. I hate it with a passion. What those guys did to my friend was hideous. I know all rape cases are different. All they was saying is that what happened to my friend was a consequence of her choice to disobey her parents. She went somewhere she wasn't supposed to

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be. I genuinely hate what happened to her. Men have no right ever to rape a woman. This is the world we live in. None of us are immune to hard consequences from our wrong choices. Some consequences are more severe than others.

Why did I share this story? Because the moment you say, “It won’t happen to me.” It will. Never in a million years did she think her virginity would be lost to gang rape. Never in a million years did I think I would ever get caught selling drugs. You are free to do whatever you want to do with your life, but you are never free to choose the consequences of your actions. Think about that from now on.

If you decide to smoke cigarettes, you are free to do that, but are you are not free to choose if you end up with lung cancer. If you decide to start drinking, you are free to do that, but you are not free to choose if you end up with liver or kidney failure. If you decide to start doing drugs, you are free to do that, but you are not free to choose if you become addicted and die from an overdose. If you decide to start having sex outside of marriage, you are free to do that, but you are not free to choose if you catch an STD or HIV. Things are all fun and games until you have to deal with the consequences. Time would fail me to share with you the people I know who are addicted to drugs, who has lung cancer, kidney failure, and HIV. People who have died from lung cancer and drug overdose. Let me tell you; funerals are not fun. Back in December 2017, a close friend of mine passed away from lung cancer. He started smoking cigarettes as a teenager. Another friend of mine died of a heroin overdose at the age of 23. Both of them still would be alive if they didn’t do drugs

Let me ask you an honest question out of love. Why do you smoke cigarettes? Why do you smoke weed? Why do you do drugs? Why do you vape? Why do you do meth? Why do you dip? Why do you drink? Why do



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you do these stupid social media challenges? Why do you participate in bad habits that are destructive to your health? We only have one body, and we have to take care of it to the best of our ability. Our body was created to live for eighty to one hundred twenty years. People are dying way too early because they don't take care of their bodies.

Why am I so hard? Because the world is hard. The world will push you around until you learn how to push back. If you want your life to change, you have to make better choices. You have to choose better friends. If you can't change your friends, then change your friends. If your circle of friends are making bad decisions, find a different group. Real friends won't push you into peer pressure, they'll pull you from it.

Remember Mike? He told me not to sell drugs even though he was. He was looking out for my future. If I had listened to him, I wouldn't have sold drugs and if I didn't sell drugs, drugs wouldn't have been in my car; therefore I never would have gotten caught, and this dumb drug charge wouldn't be on my record. Do you see the domino effect? One wrong decision led to another.

For the sake of argument. What would have happened if the guy who taught me how to sell drugs said, "Dewayne. I will teach you how to sell drugs, but four years from now, cops will find drugs in your car, though the drugs are not yours? Because of that, you will spend time in jail, have a drug charge on your record, and it's going to be hard to find employment." If he told me that, I would have worked two or three jobs instead of selling drugs. On the flip side. What if he would have taught me about Real Estate, Entrepreneurship, or how to make money from Rap & Hip-Hop? My life would have taken a different route. I would say a more profitable one.

From the time you wake up in the morning until the time you go to bed

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at night, life is all about choices. You have to make sure you are making the right choices. Think about this. Your choices, good or bad, not only affect you but also the people around you. It's a chain reaction. I urge you to be more aware and conscious of your decisions. If you don't like where you are in life, change it, you're not a tree. Three c's in life: choices, chances, and change. You must make a choice to take a chance or your life will never change.

With these three c's, you can now accelerate your personal growth by examining and developing previously stagnant areas of your life. Your life doesn't have to stay the same. Remember the definition of project? ***A type of assignment, typically involving research or design, that is carefully planned to achieve a specific objective.***

You are your most important assignment that you have to research to design to achieve a specific objective. You have to study yourself to see why you do the things you do and how to stop doing the things you don't like doing. Study your patterns. The ultimate wisdom comes from knowing your why's. Why you feel it. Why you do it. Why you repeat it. Knowing your why's gives you clarity about who you are and when you know who you are, you become powerful.

I want you to take out a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Quietly examine your life. On the left side, write down everything about your life you like. On the right side, write down everything about your life you don't like. This is where the work comes in. Figure out how you can change the things on the right side, the things about your life you don't like. Remember that you are a project and you may work on a few things at a time. What choices do you need to make to improve in those areas? What chances do you need to take to improve those areas? To improve those areas, what changes are needed?

# CHAPTER 5 SELF-ESTEEM

## SELF-ESTEEM

I was he....the guy who was raised with a lazy eye  
Medical term, Strabismus  
a condition in which both the eyes are not properly aligned  
stemming from a lack of coordination between the muscles  
which prevents the bringing of the gaze of each eye  
into the same point in space to achieve Fusion  
So imagine the confusion I went through because of this offset  
the awkward kid who was the target of eye jokes  
who got made fun and laughed at  
with questions like  
Do you see double? Do you need glasses?  
How many fingers am I holding up?  
And my least favorite one  
Which eye do you focus with?  
This caused insecurities and inadequacies to rise from within  
giving birth to depression, consumed with rejection  
looking in the mirror, despising my reflection, tears shedding  
I hated every moment of this horrific nightmare  
For one, it wasn't fair; secondly, it interfered  
with my daily activities  
especially when it came to getting girls

Dewayne Smithers || Cross-Eye

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In chapter three, I talk about the root causes of my depression. Me being cross-eyed growing up was the third cause of my misery. This physical flaw made my life a living disaster. If one eye were straight, the other eye would be looking out far out in the opposite direction. If it was one flaw I despised with a passion, it was this one. The physical abuse I suffered failed in comparison to being cross-eyed. Why? The physical abuse only lasted for five years, but me being cross-eyed would continue until I was twenty-four or twenty-five years old. Everyone made fun of my eyes, and I mean everyone, including family members. I remember how I would stand in the mirror looking at my eyes, and I would cry. This was a massive blow to my self-esteem. I hated looking at people face to face, eye to eye. It was so embarrassing.

Let me ask you a question. On a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest and ten being the highest. How would you rate your self-esteem? Think about that for a moment. For me, it was one. Is your number low? If so, then why. Does your number go up and down? Do you have low self-esteem? If so, then why. What is the root cause of your low self-esteem? We talked about root causes in Chapter 3.

I would stand in the mirror and have these kinds of conversations with my self. “I hate you.” “I hate you too.” This was an ongoing conversation I had with myself through the years. I allowed my physical flaws to get the best of me. I hated myself so much that I contemplated suicide so many times, even in my adult years. Some of you who are reading this book are having these same kinds of conversations with yourself. You don’t like the way you look. “I’m too tall.” “I’m too fat.” “I’m too skinny.” “My ears are too big.” The list goes on and on. Can I tell you a secret? Everyone has something about their looks they don’t like.

Another thing I didn’t like as a kid was having big ears, Not to mention

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that I also had a skinny build. So here I am, this little skinny, cross-eyed, and big-eared kid. The more I grew, the more I despised my self-image. To make matters worse, I stuttered and was also clumsy. It was like, “Why me?” It was like I received all the worst traits from both sides of the family. This is only a small list of things concerning the self-image that I despised. Even today, I have to war with and fight against me, not liking how I look. It’s called body shaming.

With that, I know I’m not the only one. There are millions upon millions of people who feel the same way about how they look. Some of you who are reading this book feel the same way about how you look, even worse. This is why health and wealth is a multi-billion dollar industry. The underlining reason for plastic surgery is that people want to look more like Beauty than the Beast. You should take care of your body as far as eating right, exercising, and getting enough rest. We all have something about our bodies that we don’t like. Some things can be fixed and others can’t. Yes, some of your favorite celebrities have had some cosmetic surgery to nip, lift and tuck. Sometimes I ask myself what did people do in the olden days when cosmetic surgery wasn’t available?

| Enough of this nonsense, so I had surgery to have my vision corrected  
| After three days of being blind, I looked in the mirror at my reflection  
| And for the first time in my life, my eyes were perfectly straight

One day while sitting in one of my college classes, I began to have deep migraine headaches. I left the class and made a trip to the emergency room. After examining me, the doctor said the cause of the migraines were my crossed-eyes. He recommended an eye doctor for me to see. I set up an appointment with an eye surgeon by the name of Doctor Baker. He was in the top ten list of eye surgeons in America. After meeting with me, Doctor Baker suggested surgery over glasses. A few days later, I had outpatient

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surgery that lasted thirty minutes. The only downside is that I was blind for three days because my eyes had to recover. When I looked in the mirror, and saw how straight my eyes were, I was blown away. My confidence shot through the roof. I literally felt brand new. I was riding on cloud nine.

### Mirror Mirrow On The Wall

How do you see yourself when you look in the mirror and see your reflection? What do you actually think about yourself? If I could plug some kind of technology into your head and broadcast your thoughts to the world, what would people think that you really think about yourself? Would you want people to see what you truly think about yourself? If the answer is no. Then why? Earlier, I asked you a question. On a scale of one to ten, how would rate your self-esteem? How do you see yourself? I keep drilling this for a reason. Before we go further, let's define self-esteem.

**SELF-ESTEEM:** Reflects an individual's overall subjective emotional evaluation of his or her worth. It is the decision made by an individual as an attitude towards theirself. It's the belief you have about yourself.

You and I have an image of ourselves. It's how we see ourselves. The reflection we see in the mirror is our physical being. I'm talking about how we see ourselves in our minds based on the information we have about ourselves. Many people have a lot of false information, so they have a false self-image. False important information comes from the lies they believe. The acronym for lie is this. **LIMITED IDEAS ENTERTAINED**. What lies are you entertaining about yourself?

The image we have about ourselves is the driving force behind everything we do. A person has low self-esteem because of the negative information they believe about theirself. What is a belief? A thought repeated until it is believed. This is done over time. No one is born with low self-esteem. It's a

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learned behavior. Let me explain. No one is born with a negative self-image or low esteem. I have a nine year old niece and trust me; she doesn't have a negative self-image or low self-esteem. As her uncle, it's my responsibility to train her as she gets older how not to think negative about herself. To help her overcome any kind of insecurities.

Our mind is a powerful machine, a supercomputer if you will. With our minds, we think in pictures. If I told you to go outside and pick out my car, you couldn't do it. But if I said to you that I have a 2005 silver Ford Mustang with tinted windows and big tires, you could easily pick my car out in a parking lot. Why? You now have a picture of my car inside your mind.

With that said. How do you see yourself inside your mind? What kind of negative pictures of yourself do you have inside your mind? Do you see yourself as a victim? Do you see yourself as a failure? Do you see yourself as being dumb? Do you see yourself as always making bad decisions? Do you see yourself depressed? These are a few negative ways people see themselves. Let me ask you a question? How long have you seen yourself like that? Who taught you to think negative about yourself? Why do you have low self-esteem or a negative self-image? Where did you get that information? Was it a person? The way you were raised? Kids in school? Bad experiences? Bad relationships? How did you develop low self-esteem? Why are you emotionally broken? Why do you deal with rejection? Why do you still carry the trauma of something that happened to you years ago? Why do you feel inferior to other people? These are the deep questions you have to find the answers to as you work on The You Project.

When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. Albert Einstein once observed that the most fundamental and significant decision that you have to make in your life is this. Do you live



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in a friendly or hostile universe? Which is it? Is it a world that is filled with hostility, anger, people wanting to hate each other, kill each other? Because when you see the world that way, that's precisely what you will create for yourself. This is from a great scientific mind. Many of you expect others to change or circumstances to change, something outside of you to get better for you to make your life work. The change is inside you, not outside of you.

What you think you become. Your life travels in the direction of your most dominant thoughts. It all begins with how you choose to think. As you think, so shall you be. These seven words are perhaps the most important things that we can learn and master in our lives. This old proverb notion that you become what you think about all day long. Once you know that what you think about is what expands, you start getting real careful about what you think about. You don't allow your thoughts to be on anything you don't want or that you wouldn't want to manifest or show up in your life.

Your mind is organized to reflect everything you know in your life. It holds a record of everything you faced in the past, of everything you learned and experienced up until this moment. Feelings and emotions are products of our past experiences. We remember experiences better because of how they made us feel. Most people wake up every morning and remember all their problems. Problems are connected to certain people, things, times, and places. The moment you start thinking about your problems, you are thinking in the past. Those problems have emotions associated with it which produce feelings. Thoughts are the language of the mind that affect how your body operates. How you think you and feel creates your state of being. Most people's state of being, when they start their morning, is already in the past. The more you think in the past, the more you will live in the past. How much time do you spend looking at all the negative pictures in your mind? The more you focus on something, the bigger it becomes. The bigger it becomes, the more it'll negatively affect you. Why? You give it power over

you. Without those negative pictures, you wouldn't have low self-esteem or a negative self-image.

### Dealing With Trauma

Some years ago, I spoke at a conference in Louisiana. Afterward, I was approached by an older married couple in their early sixties. They invited me out to dinner. While waiting for our food, the wife asked me, "How do you deal with and overcome trauma?" To my curiosity, I replied, "What kind of trauma are you talking about? Now, remember this woman is about 63 years old. She said, "When I was 15 years old, my father raped me over and over again for a long time, and I still deal with the trauma of it." What she told me blew my mind. I was bamboozled. Was anyone there to help get her through this or was she left to figure this out on her own like I was at the age of 10. Since I could relate to her, I was able to give her some pointers and lead her in the right direction concerning overcoming her trauma.

When I went back to my hotel room, I began to replay the conversation I had with this 63-year-old woman. The more I thought about it, the more confused I became. Let me explain. I don't know which one is worse. Her being raped by her father at the age of 15 or her carrying around the mental torture of it for the last forty eight years. Don't get me wrong. What happened to her was horrific. No woman should ever have to experience that, especially a young girl. For whatever reason, she held on the pain, to all of the negative pictures of what happened to her. Even though she was 63 years old, deep down inside, she still saw herself as the 15-year-old girl who was raped by her father. Forty-eight years is a long time to mentally and emotionally carry around trauma. At one point in her life, does she look in the mirror and say, "I refuse to carry this trauma anymore. I refuse to let this control my life another day?" I believe her the point for her is when she looked me in the eyes and said, "Dewayne. How do you overcome trauma?"

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One day I realized that I had let go of the pain of being abused by Ken. I had to let it go. I had to destroy the replay of the screams in the back of my mind. I had let go of the images of him beating me with his thick black and leather belt. I had to learn how to look at the scars on my legs without tears in my eyes. I had let go of the disappointment of my mom and uncles not standing up to protect me. I didn't want the trauma of the abuse to hold me back mentally and emotionally anymore. I finally had to let it go and move on with my life.

About two years ago, I was sharing my story of abuse and forgiveness with a class of high school students. A student raised her hand and said, "I can't forgive them." After the session was over, she privately pulled me to the side and explained to me who "them" were. Them was her much older brother who was on drugs and alcohol. She told me that when he was high and drunk one night, he raped her. I asked if she told her parents and she said no. She thought her parents wouldn't believe it so kept silent about it. Until that time, I was the only person she shared this with. I encouraged her to talk to a school counselor or seek a professional therapist.

Millions of people are suffering. They are suffering in silence. They are suffering from something that happened forty years ago, thirty years ago, five years ago, and so on. They are suffering in their memories and imaginations, two of the greatest assets a person has. They're holding on to those negative pictures which are negatively affecting their future.

At one point in your life, do ask yourself, "How much longer do I want to carry around the trauma that I've experienced in life?" Just like the 63-year-old woman, the longer you carry it, the harder it'll be to let it go.

Some people rather hold on to guilt, shame, or resentment rather than take a chance of creating a better life and future. Why? Because it gets

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them attention. It makes people feel sorry for them. They've become comfortable holding on to the pain of their past that they're afraid to let it go and live in freedom. They carry the pain around like a baby, feeding it and rocking it to sleep. Their pain and trauma have become their identity.

I have pictures on my iPhone that I can delete at any time. Those negative pictures inside your mind can also be deleted. How so you may be asking? Through a process called self-affirmation and focused meditation. On a piece of paper, write the way or ways you genuinely want to see yourself. Start with one thing if you have to and build from that. Then every day for the next 63 days, 5 to 7 minutes a day, 2-3 times a day, morning, noon, and night. If you can't do it at noon because of school or work, do it morning and night. Get alone in complete silence and mentally rehearse and speak those affirmations over yourself. Even if you don't feel like it, do it anyway. When you don't feel like it, do it more. By doing this for 63 days, you are rewiring your mind, deleting the negative pictures. My advice, don't stop when the 63 days are over with, do this for the rest of your life. This is how you overcome and overthrow a negative self-image and low self-esteem.

There's a quote by Dr. Joe Dispenza that I like. ***“You have a choice, and that is you are either defined by a vision of the future or by the memories and negative pictures of the past.”*** The moment you make a choice to change for the better, get ready to back it up with follow through actions. The hardest part about change is not making the same bad choices you made yesterday. It's going to be hard and may feel uncomfortable for at least the first 21-days.

Speaking of resentment. Do you know that some people spend their time looking for occasions to be offended? They are out there hoping they can find some reason to be offended, and there is no shortage of reasons. The reasons are everywhere. The way this person dressed, what this person said,

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what someone posted on social media, someone used a language you didn't like, and the list goes on and on. If you keep track of today and tomorrow, you will find over one hundred reasons why you can be offended. But a mind that is open to everything and attached to nothing is a mind that says, "I'm never looking for a reason to be offended."

## Mind Detox

As you start the 21-day mind detox, you will hear thoughts like, "You're not good enough. You don't have what it takes. Remember what happened last time?" Ignore those thoughts and voices and press on anyway. If not, those same thoughts will lead you back to making choices and repeat the pain of the past. During this process, you may feel uncertain of your future because you're letting go of what is familiar. Let go anyway. The best way to predict your future is to create it.

During this process, close your eyes and think about your future, the way you want it. As you do so, you are creating creative energy in your mind. When those thoughts in your mind become your experience, you began to feel the emotions of the event before it happens in the physical. You are now giving yourself a sample of your future and creating a new state of being with clear intentions. You are seeing a whole new landscape that you haven't seen before. You are no longer viewing your future through the lens of the past. Most people will wait for things to change on the outside before they want to change on the inside. If you are not creating a new life on the inside, you will never have it on the outside. If you wake up every morning feeling good about life, feeling limitless, feeling empowered, feeling whole, you are on your way to a future full of freedom. The choice is yours. If this was easy, then everyone would be doing it. Don't be the one who doesn't do it. Your future self is depending on The You Project. No real transformation

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can be made if your mind is stuck in old beliefs.

Remember this? List all of the things you don't like about yourself. This can include physical things like weight and appearance, but should also include emotional things like self-confidence and self-love. These areas are places you should make specific affirmations. If you don't have any affirmations to write down, here are a few to help you out. Do these affirmations at least three times a day. Once in the morning when you wake up, once in the afternoon, and once before you go sleep at night. By doing this, you positively change the driving force of your life, which is your subconscious mind. "I Am" are two of the most powerful words. What you put after those two words shapes your reality. Here are some self-affirmations to help you get started.

1. My life is destined for great things.
2. I forgive everyone who has hurt me.
3. I forgive myself.
4. My life is lit with beauty and grace.
5. I have strength in my heart and a clear mind.
6. My body is full of health.
7. I'm a genius.
8. I make prosperous decisions.
9. I'm superior to low self-esteem and negative thoughts.
10. My mind is overflowing with joy and peace.
11. I spend my days in pleasure and prosperity.
12. I'm always in the right place at the right time.
13. People favor me.
14. My relationships are healthy.
15. I'm an excellent communicator.
16. I let go of the worry of past regrets.
17. I eat right and exercise.

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18. I'm a magnet for good opportunities.

19. I am loved.

20. I approve of myself. I love myself in a healthy way, deeply and fully.

The mind is a warzone

so when I walk through the back streets of my mind

I'm strapped up, packing a chrome

Blowing holes through strongholds of bad imagery

plant grenades on vicious thoughts of past misery

detonate memories of childhood tragedies

Liken me to a one-man infantry

the mission: Free the inner-me from dark captivity

to forcefully snatch back the core of my identity

Why? I want to spend the rest of my days

on the earth living in peace

So I'm willing to pay the price to be mentally free

"Warzone" By Dewayne Smithers

# CHAPTER 6 BULLYING



## BULLYING

Let's switch things up. I won't be starting this chapter out with any spoken word or hip-hop lyrics. I was hesitant about doing a chapter on bullying because it's such a sensitive topic. Since I'm a wordsmith, I could go through a classroom full of students, pick out every flaw in every student, talk about any student and make them feel low about themselves in front of all the other students. Just because I can doesn't mean I should. With all my flaws in all, what gives me the right to make fun of anyone else and their flaws? What gives you the right to make of other people's flaws? What gives you the right to bully someone else? We all come from different walks of life in many different shapes and sizes.

Have you ever heard the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me?"

That is an absolutely false statement. I'll be the first one to tell you that words do hurt. Once you go through the process of self-affirmation, words won't hurt as much. Think about how you feel when others make fun of you and talk about bad about you in front of other people. Then why do it to others? I'm a firm believer in that you reap what you sow. In other words, what goes around, comes around. Let me repeat this. You have no right to bully or make fun of other people.

My best friend told me about a girl she went to high school with by the name of Susan. Susan was the prettiest girl in the school and head of the cheerleading squad. Because of her looks, she thought she was better than everyone else. Susan made fun of other girls who weren't as pretty as her. When she entered senior year, her entire face broke out in acne. Now she was the laughing stock of the school. All the people she made fun of were we now making fun of her. Why did I share this story? Because your words and how you treat others will affect your future, good or bad. The words of Susan and how she treated others came back worse on her.

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I was bullied and made fun growing up. Let me tell you, it's no fun. Kids made fun of me because of my big ears and crossed-eyes. Most of those kids didn't know my father was murdered. Most of those kids didn't know about the abuse I went through. Them making fun of me just made my life worse. I hated going to school. You should never make anyone's life worse. That kid you're making fun of or bullying, you don't know what they are going through at home. A year ago, I spoke at a high school in Lexington, KY. A counselor told me about a kid who had a horrible home life. He was poor, and his mother was on drugs. He wore the same clothes over and over, and his body odor wasn't that pleasant. Because of his home life, he was a grade behind. Imagine how he felt when other kids in the school made fun of him?

We've heard the golden rule, "Do unto others as you want others to do to you." Let's go a little bit deeper with this. There is a strong link between bullying and suicide, as suggested by recent bullying-related suicides in the US and other countries. Parents, teachers, and students learn the dangers of bullying and help students who may be at risk of committing suicide. Though too many adults still see bullying as "just part of being a kid," it is a severe problem that leads to many negative effects for victims, including suicide.

There are three types of bullying:

Verbal bullying is saying, or writing mean things. includes:

Teasing

Name-calling

Inappropriate sexual comments

Taunting

Threatening to cause harm

Social bullying, sometimes referred to as relational bullying, involves hurting someone's reputation or relationships. Social bullying includes:

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Leaving someone out on purpose

Telling other children not to be friends with someone

Spreading rumors about someone

Embarrassing someone in public

Physical bullying involves hurting a person's body or possessions.

Physical bullying includes:

Hitting/kicking/pinching

Spitting

Tripping/pushing

Taking or breaking someone's things

Making mean or rude hand gestures

Bullycide is a new term used to identify those children/teens who were victims of bullying and became so emotionally distressed that they committed suicide. Children and adolescents who are repeatedly bullied live in a chronic state of fear and confusion. Attempting suicide due to the suffering caused by bullying leads many children and adolescents to believe that the only way to escape the assaults, rumors, insults, verbal abuse and terror is to take their own life. Multiple reasons ultimately can lead to bullycide including: Exposure to relentless physical and/or emotional bullying by peers. Experiencing continuous resultant pain due to the bullying.

Having to incessantly relive humiliating moments that are repeatedly brought up by peers as a means of torment. Having no other friends to rely on for support or encouragement while being bullied regularly. Being the victim of bullying by an authority figure (parent, teacher, coach, etc).

In 2017, a 13-year-old student by the name of Rosalie Avila committed suicide. She kept a journal, a diary of everyone in the school who hurt her and called her ugly. When the bullying first started, she would sit in her room and cut her wrist. Imagine kids calling you ugly in school five days

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a week. How would that make you feel? Let's switch it up. Imagine if this was your sister this happened to? Imagine you and your family losing your sister to suicide because of bullying? Let's keep digging. Imagine you were one of the people calling her ugly, and you found out your name was written in her diary as a culprit? How would you feel if your words drove her to suicide? Think about the next time you fix your lips to make fun of some other kid in your school. This stuff is all fun and games until tragedy hits.

Don't be a bully. Don't be the one making fun of other people, young or old. We all have flaws. You are no better than anyone, and no one is better than you. Don't spread rumors about anyone. Don't tell lies on anyone. Don't spread negative messages about anyone through social media or text messages. Don't participate in it in any way, shape, or form. You don't want anyone doing those things to you, so you don't do it. School is supposed to be a fun and pleasant experience, not a war zone. I get it, some friends make fun of each other on purpose. It's called roasting. But if a kid doesn't want to participate in it, leave them alone. Let them enjoy their time at school. Let them enjoy their life.

Do you know what a bully is? An insecure person. They don't like their life, so they project their insecurities onto other people. It's their way of not dealing with their flaws. There are four major characteristics of a bully.

1. To control and aggressively assault their victim through repeated verbal abuse.
2. Sabotaging their school work to make them look incompetent.
3. Humiliating their victims in front of other students.
4. Generally, mistreating victims so severely that they lose their dignity,

## BULLYING

confidence, and self-respect.

Are you being bullied? Do you see bullying at your school? There are things you can do to keep yourself and the kids you know safe from bullying. Tell school officials and parents. Look at the kid bullying you and tell him or her to stop in a calm, clear voice. You can also try to laugh it off. This works best if joking is comfortable for you. It could catch the kid bullying you off guard. If speaking up seems too hard or not safe, walk away and stay away. Don't fight back. Find an adult to stop the bullying on the spot. Don't keep your feelings inside. Telling someone can help you feel less alone. They can help you make a plan to stop the bullying. Be kind to the kid being bullied. Show them that you care by trying to include them. Sit with them at lunch or on the bus, talk to them at school, or invite them to do something. Just hanging out with them will help them know they aren't alone.

Just like bullying can lead a student to commit suicide, bullying can lead a student to violent behavior. Some school shootings are the result of that student being bullied or made fun of. The victim at hand now wants some kind of revenge. Why? If you bully someone every day, beat them, humiliate them, they will respond with the only actions that have been used on them: violence.

A school shooting occurred at Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas, United States, in the Houston metropolitan area on May 18, 2018. Ten people - eight students and two teachers - were fatally shot, and thirteen others were wounded. The suspected shooter was taken into custody and later identified by police as Dimitrios Pagourtzis, a 17-year-old student at the school. The shooting is the second deadliest school shooting in the United States in 2018 after the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in February resulted in 17 deaths and 17 injuries. Dimitrios Pagourtzis was the victim of bullying by multiple students and coaches. While speaking

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to reporters, Pagourtzis' father, an immigrant from Greece, said his son's history of being bullied by the students at the school was the reasoning behind the shooting.

We also hear of other kinds of violence that take place in schools, such as stabbings. If you're bullying someone, it's so easy for that person to walk up behind you and stab you with a sharp pencil or knife. Let me give you an example. Back when my mom was in middle school, she was constantly bullied by another male student. One day she got so fed up with it that she jammed a pencil up his nose. After that, he never messed with her again. I can't lie. When kids made fun of me growing up, I wanted to physically hurt them so bad. There was a bully in my apartment complex by the name of Steve. He was three times as big as me and picked on me from time to time. One day he put me in a headlock, so I cracked him in the head with a bag of video games I had in my hand. He didn't mess with me again after that.

I am in no way promoting any kind of violence. I'm sharing with you the reality of life. Remember the quote, "You're free to choose whatever you want to do with your life, but you're never free to choose the consequences of your actions?" Yes. You're free to bully someone and make fun of them, but you're not free to choose how they will respond to it, whether it's them committing suicide, shooting up the school, or any other kind of violence. Really think about that before you choose to bully someone or make fun of them. If you hear a student joking about guns and weapons, tell a teacher or school official.

When you are solely focused on the You Project, you won't have time to bully anyone.

# CHAPTER 7

## PEER PRESSURE

## The You Project

An 18-year-old boy in Georgia drowns after he is tied to a shopping cart and pushed into a lake while horsing around with friends after his high school graduation. A young man, 19, causes a multi-car accident when he faints from holding his breath while driving through a tunnel in Portland, Oregon. Tragic stories like these happen every single day across the world because of peer pressure, doing stupid things at the request of other people.

What is peer pressure? Peers are people who are part of the same social group, so the term “peer pressure” means the influence that peers can have on each other. Although peer pressure does not necessarily have to be negative, the term “pressure” implies that the process influences people to do things that may be resistant to, or might not otherwise choose to do. So usually, the term “peer pressure” is used when people are talking about behaviors that are not considered socially acceptable or desirable, such as experimentation with alcohol, sex, and drug use.

The term “peer pressure” is not usually used to describe socially desirable behaviors, such as obeying rules or academic success.

The truth is, some of us have fallen victim to peer pressure, some more so than others. I’ve done some really dumb and dangerous things in life because of peer pressure. I was a victim of non-stop peer pressure. Why? I wanted to fit in with the so-called cool kids because I had low self-esteem. I wanted to be a people pleaser. Let’s be honest. Who likes to feel left out? Peer pressure will take you places you don’t want to go and keep you longer than you want to stay.

You have to learn the difference between enjoying your youth and destroying your future. It only takes one wrong decision to mess up your life. Some consequences are small, while others can take longer to get over. Some kids are under so much pressure to fit in and keep up that they have



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developed anxiety. It's so bad that some kids are on anxiety medication. They are dealing with stuff they shouldn't be dealing with at this age.

As youth and young adults. These are your wonder years. You can build your life into anything you want. With that said, I know you are surrounded by peer pressure every single day of your life, especially in school. Peer pressure is circulating in every school all across the world. I know that parents send their kids to private schools to lessen the blow of peer pressure, but it doesn't work. Kids will be kids despite what school they attend. Granted, some schools may be better than others far as academics, but nonetheless, the kids still face peer pressure. There is no escape from peer pressure. You overcome it by making healthy choices. Before you do something, take about five to ten seconds to really think about it. At that time, if you feel what you are about to do is stupid or can get you in trouble if you got caught or can hurt someone, including yourself, then don't do it.

Sometimes peer pressure can come from a person you're dating or like. If a person you are dating or like ask you to do something sexually related, run the other way. I heard two heartbreaking stories involving sexting from a High School principal, incidents that took place at his school. What is sexting? Texting someone nude pictures of yourself.

A guy and a girl were dating for about a year. During their relationship, she would text him nude pics of her at his request. Deep into their relationship, she decided she didn't want to be with him anymore, so she broke up with him. He was so heartbroken that he decided to get revenge. One day in school, in between classes, he airdropped her nude pictures to every student who had an iPhone. When she found out that all the students saw her nude photos, she was so embarrassed that she went home and committed suicide later that night. Imagine how her family felt because of this. Imagine how he felt. Imagine how his family felt?

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Incident number two. A male student convinced two girls at the school to send him nude pics so he could sell them to other guys five dollars a person. Both the girls were cool with this new business venture. The guy was making a whole lot of money selling nude pictures of these two girls. This went on for a long before word got back to the Principal of what was going on. He called the three students into his office and made the guy delete all the nude pictures of the girl from his phone. Not only that, but the parents were called in and were shocked and angry to find out what happened. All the students were suspended.

I don't care who you are dating or talking to, never send them nude pictures of yourself. Once you do, it's out of your control. Your nude photos will circulate without your permission, and there is nothing you can do about it. If you're an eighth-grade girl going into ninth-grade, you have to be extremely careful. Some high school male students try really hard to take advantage of freshmen girls and sad to say, it works the majority of the time. Especially on freshmen girls who have low self-esteem and rejection issues. When faced with any kind of sexual requests, including sexting, run the other way and don't look back. Don't even entertain it. Don't let curiosity get the best of you. This is for the guys as well.

I have a best friend by the name of Leah. She has a younger sister by the name of Jade. When Jade was fifteen years old, she started dating a guy at her high school by the name of Carlos. They both were virgins. As news spread throughout the school about their relationship. Knowing they both were virgins, some kids in the school began to suggest that Jade and Carlos should have sex because everyone else is doing it. After a few weeks of this, Jade and Carlos fell victim to peer pressure and started having sex with each other.

One weekend, Leah went to Tennessee to spend time with her mom and

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Jade. Mind you, Leah didn't know that her sister lost her virginity. While observing Jade, Leah noticed that something was off with Jade. Leah asked their mom what was going on, and the mom explained what happened. Shortly after this, Carlos dumped Jade and started having sex with other girls. Because of this, Jade was so damaged that she had to go through some extreme counseling.

When you lose your virginity, you lose a part of your innocence and open doors in your emotions that you're not ready to deal with, especially as a teen.

Let's look at what happened to Jade and Carlos. While Jade became emotionally damaged, Carlos developed an addiction to sex, and sex addiction is tough to break. They lost their virginity to each other, and it affected them differently. I know you can't change the past but just about how healthy and whole their lives could have been if they didn't fall victim to peer pressure. Four years later, Jade is doing a whole lot better and doesn't want to experience sex again until marriage. They had to deal with the consequences of peer pressure.

How many people do you know who are addicted to sex, drugs, or alcohol because of giving in to peer pressure? Peer pressure is a non-stop cycle, and it's your responsibility not to fall victim to it. Despite your flaws, your life is much more valuable than the stupid things your peers want you to do. You have to hold yourself to a higher standard because people will always try to bring you down to their level. It's not that you're better than them. You just value your life and future more than them. As stated earlier, If you can't change your friends, change your friends. See it like this. When you run with fools, you become a fool. Run with the wise, you become wise. Learn to surround yourself with people who are more knowledgeable than you.

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Another form of peer pressure we deal with indirectly is comparing ourselves to other people. Comparison is the thief of all joy. The moment you begin to live in comparison to other people, you rob yourself of pleasure and happiness. You're so focused on people that you can't work on your own flaws to become Flawesome. Comparing yourself to other people will always be a sinking ship. Sooner or later, you will drown in self-pity and self-doubt. You will be so unhappy with your life.

Don't be deceived by looks and the outer appearance. I know people who look like they have it all together, but on the inside, they're dealing with flaws just like the rest of us. No one is better than you, and you are no better than anyone else. I heard a quote about a year ago that has stuck with me, and I quote, "If you throw your problems into a big pile of other people's problems, you would gladly pick yours up and run the other way."

The dangers of comparing yourself to other people can lead to self-sabotage, self-torture. 80% of people are experiencing self-sabotage and self-torture. Comparison is like holding a knife on the sharp end. The more you squeeze the knife, the more it hurts. The more you compare yourself to other people, the more you are hurting yourself.

One way today's youth compare themselves to other people is through social media. The average teenager spends about fourteen hours a day on social media, mostly instagram, Twitter, Snap Chat, Tik Tok, and Youtube. That's close to one hundred hours a week, four hundred hours a month, or close to five thousand hours a year. That's a lot of time wasted with your head buried in your phone all throughout the day. It's called a psychological addiction, which is just as worse than any other addiction. Think about it. Most of you reading this book can't even watch a movie or eat dinner without looking at your phone. More on that later.

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This seventeen-year-old girl had a good life. For this example, let's call her Sophia. Sophia was an only child. She was attractive and had good grades in school. She had struggles like every anyone else, but nothing too bad. Her mom was a successful Child Psychologist. Everything was going good until she began to waste her nights away on social media. Her mom would walk past her bedroom at three am in the morning and noticed that Sophia's face would be buried in her phone. Overtime time, Sophia began to slip into depression because she started to compare herself to people on social media. Her mom knew something was wrong but just passed it off as a lack of sleep and rest. Sophia became so depressed over the months that she committed suicide.

The story of Sophia is just one of many. How many times do you compare yourself to people on social media? What you fail to realize is that they don't have a perfect life. They just make it seem that way on social media. The majority of the stuff you see on social media is fake. It's all smoke and mirrors. It's make-believe. It's pretending. People pretending to be happy. People pretending that they have it all together. People pretending that they are bigger than life. Most of it is make-up, filters, and photoshop. Here you are falling for this fakeness and comparing your life to theirs, being sucked into these fake realities. I can get on social media and make my life seem so perfect, but I don't because people know me in real life. They know my flaws in all.

Look at all the unnecessary damage we bring on ourselves because we're too busy comparing our lives to other people. The people you are comparing yourself to are also comparing their lives to the lives of other people. It's a vicious cycle.

Peer pressure through social media can be deadly. So many teens are falling victim to these social dumb media challenges. Teens are doing these

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challenges for attention, likes, and to gain more followers. Their aim is to go viral. Many teens have gotten in trouble, hurt, and have hurt others by participating in these social media challenges. For the sake of your safety and future, don't let this be you.

### Ways To Overcome Peer Pressure

Say “no” like you mean it. The most basic way to respond to peer pressure is to just say ‘no.’ Standing up to peer pressure will save you the trouble of getting pressured again in the future because it sends a clear message that you’re not interested. Be firm and make eye contact. This shows that you’re not willing to compromise. There are lots of ways to say no. For example, say, “I don’t do that” or, “No thanks, I’ll pass.” You can also say, “I’d rather not. Thanks.” Be careful not to get baited into doing something by being called “scared” or “a chicken.” Stay firm in your own decision.

Change the subject if you’re uncomfortable responding to questions. Avoiding the question might send the message that you’re still interested but don’t want to respond. That may lead to further pressure later on. Changing the subject, however, will at least buy you some time until you feel ready to respond (or not respond at all).

Make an excuse to leave. This is an excellent option if you’re feeling shy or intimidated, or if you don’t want to come off as being rude. Come up with some sort of excuse. Apologize, and get away as soon as you can. For example. You could say, “Oh, I just forgot, I have to study for the math exam,” or “Oh my gosh! I just forgot that I have to meet Sue for that group project!” If the person is persistent, text your friend or your parent to call you. When your phone rings, pick it up, talk for a bit, then say you have to leave.

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This one is for in-person or social media peer pressure. Make your own decisions. Do things that make you happy and make those decisions on your own. While some people might ask you to do something that pushes you outside your comfort zone in the right way, be mindful of any negative consequences that could occur. If you're about to make a decision, ask yourself, "Is this good for me? Is this adding something positive to my life? Am I sure how I feel about it? Don't make decisions based on what other people think is right for you or what they want you to do.

Plan a response. Whether you haven't experienced peer pressure yet or you want to respond better for next time, think of a reply you can use if you're ever asked something you don't want to do. Having a response ready will mean you won't feel under pressure if you're asked, and you'll already know what to say. For example. Think about something to say if someone asks you to cheat, lie, steal, or take drugs. You might use a generic, "Naw. No thanks," or have something different for each situation. Don't get sidetracked by talking others out of the idea. Make "s" statements and stay focused on your own position.

Avoid places and situations that make you uncomfortable. If you suspect that people are meeting up to drink alcohol or do drugs before an event, tell them that you'll meet them at the event itself. Avoiding situations that might tempt you can help you avoid peer pressure altogether. If you're still in school, be weary of going to parties without adult supervision or meeting up with people you know do drugs. Trust your instinct. If something feels "off," don't hesitate to make other plans. If you start to feel uncomfortable during a party, don't be afraid to leave.

Choose positive friends. When dealing with peer pressure, start by choosing friends who won't pressure you to do things. Your friends should accept you for who you are without wanting to change you. If your friends

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don't make bad decisions, you're less likely to make them, too. Choose friends because you like them, not because they're cool or popular. They should like you for you and care about you. Try meeting people who share common interests with you. For example, if you see someone reading a book that you like, strike up a conversation with them about the book and get to know them.

Journal about your feelings. It can be challenging to deal with the emotions that come from peer pressure. You might be good friends with someone, then feel betrayed when they try to pressure you to do something. You might even wonder if the friendship is over or needs to end. Dealing with these emotions can be hard, so use a journal to sort out your feelings and help you cope with the stress. Your journal should be a safe place to write out your thoughts and feelings. Be honest with yourself as you write. You might want to reflect on your journal entries at times to see how you've dealt with things in the past and what was helpful before.

Keep busy with healthy activities. Another way to avoid peer pressure is to spend your time doing activities that you really enjoy. Doing activities can help you meet other people with shared interests and help you spend your time doing what you enjoy. Try different activities until you find one you like. For example, try a sewing or woodworking class, pick up photography, go hiking, or get a bike. See what clubs are available at school, like drama club, math team, and Big Brothers and Big Sisters. You can also join a sport like soccer, track, gymnastics, or volleyball.

Talk to a trusted friend, sibling, or adult. If you're struggling with peer pressure, talk to someone you trust. They might have some advice on how they handle peer pressure that you could use. They can also help support you in handling peer pressure in the future. It's okay to admit you're struggling,



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and they will most likely want to help you.

Tell your parents. Your parents generally want to support you and help you succeed. If you're struggling with peer pressure, turn to them for help. They might have some ideas for how to handle it. If nothing else, ask them to listen and understand your experience. Though it might be awkward or difficult to talk with them, think how much worse it would be to speak to them about how you followed your friends and got into serious trouble.

I highly suggest you take out time to apply some of these methods to The You Project.

# CHAPTER 8 SPEAKING OF SOCIAL MEDIA

## The You Project

Social media could be a dangerous playing field if you handled it wrong. It can work for you or against you. The choice is yours. See it like chocolate cake. Chocolate cake in moderation is good for you, but too much consumption of it will damage you. The sad thing is that so many people, including young people, are consuming so much social media that it's slowly killing them mentally and they don't even know it.

Have you ever heard the analogy of how to boil a frog in a pot without it knowing? You may be laughing at that statement saying, "How can you boil a frog in a pot without it knowing?" The same way social media is boiling you without you even knowing. How do you boil a frog in a pot?? It's actually simple. Not as hard as you think. The boiling frog is a fable describing a frog being slowly boiled alive. The premise is that if a frog is put suddenly into boiling water, it will jump out. But if the frog is put in warm water, which is then brought to a boil slowly, it will not perceive the danger and will be slowly cooked to death.

How does that relate to social media? Social media is mentally boiling some of you. You started off slow on social media, and now it's consuming your life. You can't even think straight without being on social media. As stated in the previous chapter, it's called a Psychological addiction or dependence. Many people's social media use is habitual, and it can start to spill over into other areas of their lives and be problematic and dangerous, such as checking social media while driving. Other behaviors may be annoying rather than dangerous but may be indicative of problematic social media use, such as checking social media while eating out with friends or constantly checking your smartphone while watching a movie at the cinema.

If you want to check whether you may be at risk of developing an addiction to social media, ask yourselves these six simple questions:

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Do you spend a lot of time thinking about social media or planning to use social media?

Do you feel urges to use social media more and more?

Do you use social media to forget about personal problems?

Do you often try to reduce your use of social media without success?

Do you become restless or troubled if you are unable to use social media?

Do you use social media so much that it has harmed your job or studies?

If you answered “yes” to a few of these questions, it is more likely that you are a habitual social media user and that what you should do is engage in ‘digital detox’ strategies that simply allow you to reduce the amount of time spent on social media. This can include simple steps, such as turning off sound notifications and only allowing yourself to check your smartphone every 30 minutes or once an hour. Other simple steps include having periods in the day where there is a self-imposed non-screen time such as during meal times) and leave your smartphone in a separate room from where you sleep just so you don’t get the urge to check social media before bedtime, during the night, and when you wake up.

If the answer to all six of these questions is “yes,” then you may have or be developing an addiction to using social media. We say “may” because the only way this can be confirmed is through a diagnosis from a clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist. Either way, you may have developed a social media addiction. Side note. When I say social media, I’m also talking about video games as well.

In the previous chapter, I stated that a teenager spends an average of fourteen hours a day on social media. That’s fourteen hours of useless scrolling. Each scroll is like a temporary fix, so you have to keep scrolling to keep your social media high going. If that’s not the definition of addiction, then I don’t know what is. I’m not being funny. I’m so serious right now.

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Forgive me for coming off as condescending. It's from a place of love and concern for your overall mental and emotional well being.

How often do you walk around or sit around with your head buried in your phone or computer? The world around you can be on fire, and you wouldn't even notice. Let me ask you a question. What's the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning? Grab your phone, check your text messages and social media. Why? What's the first thing you do before you go to bed at night? Grab your phone, check your text messages and social media. Why? When you wake up in the middle of the night. What's the first thing you do? Grab your phone and check your text messages and social media. Why? I can insert so many different questions about this, but the answer will always be the same. Which is, grab your phone, check your text messages, and social media. Research firm Dscout found that we tap, type, and swipe our smartphones more than 2,600 times a day, on average. The majority of us check in front of our family, friends, during meetings, while we eat, and while we should be sleeping.

This is a severe addiction that few people are talking about, probably because we are almost universally addicted. More than just an intrusion into our lives, our smartphones are actually killing us. Pedestrian deaths have skyrocketed as a result of both pedestrians and drivers looking at their phones. How car accidents have occurred because the drivers were on their cell phones and not paying attention?

Two years ago, I was speaking to a class of high school students. I asked them, "Why are ya'll so addicted to your cell phones?" One student said, "Because we were born into it." Another student said, "My whole life is on my phone."

Not many people are talking about this silent and deadly addictions.

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Maybe because the majority of the countries who have cellphones deal with this on a daily bases. Here's a sad fact. Pedestrian accidents have hit an all-time high since the invention of cell phones and digital devices. How many times have you tripped over something or ran into a person or pole while looking at your phone?

Why can't we stop is the question? Let's get a little scientific for a moment. The answer is in the thing between our two ears, our brain. Do you ever feel anxious, nervous, or uncomfortable when you're away from your phone? Those feelings are real, not imaginary in any kind of way. During a recent 60 Minutes piece, researchers at California State University, Dominguez Hills, connected electrodes to reporter Anderson Cooper's fingers to measure changes in heart rate and perspiration, just as they had done previously with subjects in experiments. Then they sent text messages to his phone but placed it just out of reach. To no surprise, Cooper's breathing changed, his perspiration increased, and his heart rate spiked with each notification. Textbook anxiety.

We get a massive thrill from the things we are attached to. A reward called dopamine. Dopamine is a brain chemical that literally makes us happy. It is released every time we receive something on our phones. It could be a text from a loved one, a like on social media, or a bit of breaking news we find fascinating. Dopamine feels good, so we keep checking our phones, hoping to get a little hit of it. Let's reverse this. How do you feel when you check your phone, and that person hasn't responded to your text? How do you feel when you post a status on social media, and you get little to no likes? Do those things make you feel kind of sad and disappointed? If the answer is yes, it's because we're depended on those things to make us happy, even if it's temporary.

Am I telling you to ditch your phones and social media? Not all. Just to

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limit your consumption of it and to find healthier ways to release dopamine.

For me personally, one of the methods is spending time with my nine-year-old niece. When we're together having fun, so much dopamine is released in my brain. My heart lights up with joy when I'm holding her, playing with her, comforting her, seeing her smile and hearing her laugh. Most of the time, when I'm around her, I put my phone up unless I'm taking pictures or videos of her.

Another thing that makes me happy is talking to and working with youth. Whether it's one on one, a classroom, or a large group when I do school assemblies. My joy meter is off the charts. Other things include hanging out with my friends, driving my 2005 on an open highway on a beautiful day, writing, nature walks, cooking my favorite meals, bowling, working out, and meditating on the big future ahead of me.

Balance is a beautiful thing, but you can't have balance and really focus if your time is heavily consumed with your phone and social media. It's okay to put your phone or electronic device away and go do other things that truly matter. It's not the end of the world if you miss a text message or social media status update. There are times that I purposely turn my phone off for hours at a time or leave it at home when I go somewhere. Other times I totally forget that I have a phone. Imagine that.

How can you truly work on The You Project if you waste that much time on your phone, scrolling through social media? It's impossible. Wasted time is worse than wasted money. I can always get the money back but not the time. Why? Time is non-refundable. Once it's gone, it's gone.

Imagine how much you can accomplish and get done with half the time you waste on social media. What is it that you need to improve and get

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better at? Shift some of that time into those areas for about 21 days and see how much better your life becomes. You have to be proactive in this to walk in and experience real change.

Learn to use social media to your benefit. Use social media to learn how to start a business, make money, write a book, and so on. There is no reason why you can't become good at or passionate about something and learn how to build a business using social media. For these kinds of things, social media, Google, and Youtube can be your best friend. You can learn and do so much. When I spend time on my computer, social media, and my phone, the majority is spent building my business and learning about filmmaking, marketing, mixing, and mastering music, the things I'm passionate about.

Recently I was listening to a Youtube video by Dave Ramsey when I was driving back from an event one night. If you don't know who he is, I encourage you to look him up on Youtube. On this particular show, a sixteen-year-old kid called in to get some financial advice. He was a few months away from turning eighteen. 8 months prior, he found out about this online business venture called dropshipping. He researched it and liked what he found out, so he started his website and online store to do dropshipping. To his surprise, he was making between \$50,000 to \$80,000 a month. Eight months later, he had close to \$400,000.00 saved up from his new venture. The only dilemma was that his mom didn't know, and he was afraid to let her know because she didn't like him being on the internet. Dave Ramsey gave the kid some advice on how to let his mom know.

I was blown away. This kid is that young making that amount of money by doing drop shipping, a business he learned how to do through Youtube and social media. I'm pretty sure he wasn't wasting eight hours a day on social media doing useless scrolling. He took that time and taught himself how to build a successful online business.



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The next example is one of my favorite stories. A twelve-year-old girl was a few months away from turning thirteen years old. She went to her parents and said, “For my 13th birthday, I want ya’ll to remodel the kitchen

for me to start a baking business selling desserts.” They agreed to it. For her birthday, they kept good on their word and remodeled the kitchen. That year she made over \$100,000 selling cookies, cakes, brownies, and pies to neighbors, businesses, and churches in the city she lived in. Guess what she wasn’t doing? You guessed it. I don’t even have to say it. If these two teenagers can do stuff like this, then so can you. What’s stopping you? Imagined if you learned how to start some kind of business at this age where you’re making an extra \$500 or more a month. They both had a vision, a plan what they wanted to do and succeeded.

One time I was speaking to a class of sixth graders about entrepreneurship and told the story about this girl. I asked them, “What are you doing this summer?” One kid yelled out, “Relaxing and playing Fortnite.” Another kid yelled out, “I’m starting a lawn business. I will be cutting grass, making money.” Guess who had a better summer and may have a better life going forward.

One last point on this topic. Be careful of what you post on social media for the sake of your future. What you post on social media will be there forever, even after you delete it. Someone can take a screenshot or video of it and repost it before you have a chance to remove it. There it is, floating around on social media with your name, picture, or video all over it, and there is nothing you can do about it. Remember what I said in a previous chapter? “Know the difference between enjoying your youth and destroying your future.”

Don’t you know that college recruits and employers dig through your

## SOCIAL MEDIA

social? Even the secret accounts you have because you don't want your parents to know about it? Anything on social media that has your name or picture attached to it, they can find it. Talk about technological advancement. Nothing you post on social media is safe from them. While you're posting dumb stuff on social media in the name of fun, you're setting your future up for failure. They look at all your social media profiles like a resume. It's called "Social Media Screening."

You need to fully understand how serious high school college coaches are about each recruit's social media behavior. Many athletic programs actually have someone in charge of reviewing and monitoring the social media accounts of prospective athletes. They're hoping to not find racist, sexist, vulgar, or profane posts. If they do, they will move on to the next recruit on the list. There have been thousands of recruits removed off recruiting lists based on their social media activities.

When a coach investigates the social media accounts of a potential athlete, they are looking for more than just wrong behaviors. They can learn a lot about an athlete based on their behavior online. For example, if a student-athlete has the time to be on social media all day, every day, then coaches might question that recruit's priorities. If gaining followers, comments and likes are important, then those habits might take away from homework, practice, or just being a kid.

Finally, while consistent profanity or vulgar posts are certainly red flags, college coaches also monitor social media for other warning signs. If it's evident from your posts that you don't get along with your coaches or teammates, that you dread practice or hate homework, then your name will most likely be removed for further consideration.

The same process is used by companies or employers that you want to

work for. I know that schools, organizations, churches, and other youth events go through my social media before bringing me in to speak. This is the reason I have to be more careful about what I post because I'm held to a higher standard.

Alternatively, you could go with the J. J. Watt approach. Here's his advice for student-athletes: "Read each tweet about 95 times before you send it. Look at every Instagram post about 95 times before you send it. A reputation takes years and years and years to build, and it takes one press of a button to ruin it."

There is an old saying that carpenters used to avoid making a mistake, "Measure twice, cut once." The same pattern should be used for social media: "Think twice, post once." If you have any doubt whatsoever about something you've just typed on your computer, phone, or electronic device. Delete it before you post it.

# CHAPTER 9

## FAMILY

## The You Project

Years ago. Before some of you were born, Will Smith came out with a song entitled, ***“Parents Just Don’t Understand.”*** The premise of the song was that parents and kids think differently. That’s true to a point. What kids fail to understand is that their parents were once kids. They know what it’s like to be a kid, but the kid doesn’t know what it’s like to be a parent. Parents do understand the mindset of a kid, but a kid doesn’t understand the mentality of a parent. When I was younger, I thought for sure I was smarter than my mom, but that was proved wrong over and over again through the years. Though I’m older now, I’m still don’t know more than my mom. My two sisters, though mothers, always seek advice from our mother. Our parents were once young. Some of them experienced hardships, low self-esteem, insecurities, let downs, bullying, heartbreaks, and setbacks. They are not perfect. Remember that.

With that said. I know there are horrible parents in the world. Some of you have awful parents, which is why you don’t like your home life. You take up extra activities to avoid being at home. I get it. I’ve heard stories of fathers raping their daughters. If that has happened to you or is happening to you, please tell someone. Don’t keep quiet about it. If you are being abused in any way by a parent or guardian, seek out help from social services or law enforcement.

I have a friend who was raised by her aunts because her mother was addicted to cocaine. She didn’t grow up feeling sorry for herself and depressed. She took the same hand that other kids were dealt with and won it. She could have found excuses to do badly in life, but she didn’t. She’s now living a successful life.

If it’s one thing I regret from the past is the way I treated my mom and sisters. I wish I could press the rewind button, take a trip to the past to change that. My mom has every right to turn her back on me, but she hasn’t.

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I told you earlier how I questioned the love of my mom growing up because of the abuse I went through.

Back in 2014, I decided to pack my bags and move to Dallas, TX. While in Dallas, my mom and I began to have intimate phone conversations. For the first time in my life, I asked my mom the million-dollar question. “Mom. Why did you allow Ken to beat me like that? She replied, “You really want to know?” I said, “Yes, because I have these scars on my legs. So yes, I really want to know.” She said, “A few months after you were born, your older sister suffered a tragic event. After that, I began to question my ability to be a mom, so I became a heavy drinker to help cope with the pain of what happened to your sister. By the time you were five-years-old, when Ken had moved in. I was so gone off of alcohol that though I was there physically, I wasn’t there mentally and emotionally. So, that’s why that happened to you.” When she told me that, I was utterly speechless. At that moment, I wish I could have flown back to KY to hug and embrace my mom the way I should have when growing up. I was completely speechless. If I would have known what happened to my mom and sister, then maybe I would have treated them differently when growing up, but I didn’t because I was so selfish. I was solely focused on my pain and scars that I never stopped to be a good son or brother. I treated my friends and girlfriends better than I treated my family.

If you genuinely know what your parents or guardians have been through in life, you would be more compassionate and loving toward them. Some of them are fighting inward battles that you know nothing about. If they told you about the pain of their past and what they’ve been through, it would break your heart. I speak from experience. I had no idea my mom went through that horrible experience. I only added more hurt to her already broken mental and emotional state. I was adding gasoline to a burning fire.

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I know some of your parents are not there, physically, mentally, or emotionally. Some of them are abusing you or have harmed you in some way. I make no excuse for their actions. Some of them have a childhood that they need to heal from as well. Take that into consideration.

With that said, we have to let go of telling people, “That’s still your mom, dad, brother, sister, and so on”. Toxic is toxic. Whether it’s family or not. You’re allowed to walk away from people who continually hurt you. I’m not telling you to be an abusive punching bag. It’s okay to set boundaries, speak up for yourself about the way you want to be treated, and love family members from a distance if they are causing you harm.

Why do we treat the wrong people right and the right people wrong? Because we take for granted the people who love us while trying to gain the acceptance of people who reject us because we don’t like rejection. We think something is wrong with us if people reject us, so we jump through hoops in hopes of gaining their acceptance instead of focusing our attention on the ones who love us and accept us for who we are, our flaws in all.

For this reason, I did horrible things to my mom and sisters growing up. After all the holes I punched in the walls at our apartment. After all the toys and clothes I ripped apart. After all the hateful and curse words I said to them behind closed doors, despite what I’ve done, they still love me unconditionally. It breaks my heart just writing this. If I could rewind the hands of time, I would in a heartbeat, but I can’t. All I can do is now be a better son and brother from this day forward. I’ve decided to become a peacemaker instead of a hell-raiser. Because of that, my relationship with all of them is better and stronger.

This is why I speak to youth all across the world. If there is one thing I want them to learn is this. Treat the people who love you with honor and

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respect. I know some of you may not have a blood family because of certain circumstances like adoption, death, or abuse, but whoever is your guardian or a second family, be kind to them. Be grateful for them. I may not have all the money or success I want, but I have my mom and sisters. If they pass away, I will never get them back. I would give anything to sit down and have a one-hour conversation with my father, but I can't because someone blew his head off with a shotgun.

The stories I hear from some students who have lost a parent or parents pains my heart because I know what it's like. I'm asking you to put your selfishness aside and be kind to your family if they are still alive. Do chores around the house without them having to ask you. Don't raise your voice at them. Don't get mad at them when they tell you no. Don't talk back to them. Speaking of which, What gives you the right to backtalk your parents or guardians? They put clothes on your back, food on the table, money in your pocket, shoes on your feet, and a roof over your head. So again. What gives you the right to talk back to them?

If you truly knew what your parents are going through and have been through, then maybe you'll change your tune toward them. Do you have any idea the pressure your parents have to fight through every day? The hustle and bustle of life from working and managing a household. How do you feel when you have a busy day, and a person yells at you? Imagine how your parents feel when you do that to them? Take it easy on your parents. Show them grace. Do you think it's easy to raise you and your siblings if you have any?

At the time of writing this chapter, I was working as a Substitute Teacher at a local high school. This particular day they didn't have any work to do. With some of this free time, I shared a poem about my father and gave them a brief talk about how to stay encouraged. Afterward, a student was



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standing in the back by my desk. When I went back there, I noticed her eyes were red, and she was shaking. I escorted her outside the classroom to see what was going on with her. When we went outside to the hallway, she busted out in tears. She said her father just went to prison in the summer for something he didn't do. This was the school year that he was going to teach her how to drive. She explained how much she misses him. How it breaks her heart when she sees her friends and classmates take their fathers for granted. Now that her father is gone, her 10-year-old brother is doing crazy stuff out of hurt and disappointment. Her mother is struggling financially and is close to being deported.

A few summers ago, I was doing a youth camp in Lexington, KY. I was sitting on a bench playing with my now nine year old niece. Sitting on the other side was a twelve-year girl. As I was playing with my niece, I noticed the girl was crying. I asked her what was wrong? She replied, "Seeing this makes me miss my father." She thought my niece was my daughter. I asked, "What happened to your father?" She said, "He passed away three years ago from heart failure." I explained to her that I feel her pain because my father passed away when I was four years old. We talked a little bit more after that until we were interrupted by some more kids. She stayed to herself for about two or three more hours after that. I can't say this enough. Quit taking your parents and loved ones for granted!

You should be honest with your parents or guardians. They should always know where you are at all times. Some of you are mad because they don't trust you. I wonder why. Let me say it like this. Would you trust a liar? If you want your parents to trust you, then start being honest with them. About a year ago, I was speaking at a local high school about abstinence. Some days later, one of the students messaged me on Facebook. She explained that she lost her virginity to her boyfriend and that her mom doesn't know. She was afraid to tell her mom. In her mind, she thought that if her mom

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found out, a strict punishment was soon to follow. I heard what she was saying. I've been there before. I encouraged her to be completely honest about everything. She agreed. To her surprise, her mom wasn't mad at all. Their relationship became stronger after that.

The disrespect I see from the youth of this generation turns me sideways. Your mom and dad come to pick you up from school, and the first thing you do when you get inside the car is put on your earphones and listen to your music while ignoring them. If not the headphones, your head is so buried in your phone that you can't hear them talk to you. Do you know how rude and disrespectful that is to them? All they want is to have a simple conversation with you about how your day went. Let me ask you a question. How do you feel when someone ignores you? Then why do it to your parents? Not only that, but you get mad when they tell you no about something.

The reason you throw tantrums when you don't get your way is that you're selfish, and somewhere in that thick skull of yours, you believe the world revolves around you. Can I tell you a secret? The world doesn't revolve around you. You are not the center of the universe. The sooner you figure that out, the sooner you will enjoy life more. Communication is a two-way street. All good relationships are built upon healthy communication and comprehension. Sit down and talk it out with them in a calm and respectful tone of voice. You'll get more respect like that, and they will listen to you more. You want your parents or guardians to trust you and give you more responsibility? Be completely honest with them.

Some years ago, after speaking to some middle school students, the teacher pulled me to the side and told me about one of her students and what happened to his mom the year before. One night, the son was in his room asleep. Someone broke into their home, and he heard his mom get murdered. At the time he was 12-years-old. Because of this, his mom won't be at any

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of his graduations or wedding. No more holidays, no more birthdays, or taking pictures together. All he has now are memories. Twelve years is a short time for a kid to spend with their parent.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that before that night, she came to pick him up from school. When he got in the car, he ignored her because his face was buried in his phone with his headphones on blasting music. They come home and she tries to have a conversation with him, but again, something has his attention. A few hours later, she fixes dinner, but he takes his plate into his room instead of eating at the kitchen table with her. Some more time goes by, she pushes open his bedroom door to spend time with him, but he's playing video games online. She slowly backs away, shuts the door and whispers to herself, "Maybe tomorrow." A few hours go by; he finally decides to go sleep. As he is lying in bed, he hears someone break into their home and hears his mom get murdered in her room. Now imagine how he feels when he sees his friends and other classmates being mean to their mom? Imagine how he feels knowing his mom can no longer pick him up from school. I wonder how many regrets he lives with from being mean to his mom at times. I know this example is over the top, but so many kids take their parents for granted. Don't let that be you.

One day I was at the Apple Store in the mall to get my computer fixed. As I was waiting, two girls were sitting across from me talking. They were sophomores in high school. One girl was like, "We got invited to a party tonight, but my mom doesn't know. When she goes to sleep tonight, we're going to sneak out and go to this party." I was so close to telling the mom when she came back. What if they went out that night and something terrible happened? The other parents would have blamed the girl's mother.

Remember, you are free to do whatever you want to do with your life, but you are never free to choose the consequences of your actions. This is

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why your parents should always know where you are, especially the young ladies who are reading this book. Let your parents ping your phone.

One day a high school girl got an invitation to a secret party through a text message. She showed some of her friends, and they agreed to attend this secret party. While at home, without knowing, her father went through her phone and saw the invitation. To his curiosity, he did some research and found out this secret party was a trap to kidnap girls for sex trafficking. What if he didn't go through her phone? If he didn't, his daughter and her friends would have been abducted and sold into sex trafficking.

Other family members you should be kind to are your siblings, younger or older. My sisters really couldn't stand me growing up. I say that shamefully. Don't be that mean and nasty sibling because things don't go your way. Real love is wanting the best for other people, especially your family. I know I'm talking strangely by saying things like this. What if you were the example of true love in your home. What if you put the needs of your parents and sibling above yours? It's hard to do but not impossible. You have to work at this on a daily bases.

I recently heard a talk from a girl who lost her brother to suicide. Ten years later, she's still taking it hard and grieving. She was 12-years-old when it happened. She had no idea her brother would commit suicide. What if leading up to his death, she was mean to him at times and called him names? Imagine the pain and heartbreak she had to fight through because her older brother committed suicide? Imagine how she feels when she sees her friends being mean to their brothers? Nine years later. The pain is just as deep. She would give anything to have her brother alive.

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Why am I telling you these kind of stories? Because some of you take your family for granted. I'm just as guilty. This is why I've decided to put my selfishness aside and treat my family with the utmost love and respect. I never want to take them for granted anymore. I've decided to be the game-changer in my family. It's incredible how things change once you decide to change for the better. For the most part, once they see the change in you, they'll begin to change. Relationships become healthier, and bonds grow stronger. I'm not talking about perfection. I'm talking about a genuine change from the inside out. Does this happen overnight? Not at all. It happens one moment at a time. The choice is yours. I've decided to live as a peacemaker than a hell-raiser. How about you?

# CHAPTER 10 DREAMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

“I have a DREAM”

Then write it down, make it plain, and you run with it  
keep building your dream even if no one else believes in it  
With every dream, there are critics, backstabbers and traders  
naysayers, player haters, dream stealers, and dream killers  
Who would love to fill you with doubt and disbelief  
quick to say that your dream is nothing and impossible to reach  
Take what they speak as stepping stones to higher heights  
Are you willing to fight for your dream to come true  
because tough times don't last, but tough people do

“I Have A Dream” By Dewayne Smithers

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In Chapter 3, I talked about how I got into rapping. When I was 12-years-old, I had a dream. In this dream I was standing on a stage with a microphone in front of a huge crowd in a huge auditorium. With me just

being a kid, I thought the dream meant that I was going to be this big-time rap star. I woke up from that dream excited. I just knew that my future was set in stone. From that moment, I focused my attention on becoming a better rapper. I told you that I purchased a dictionary to sharpen my vocabulary and rhyme skills. Rapping carried me through all the pain and disappointments.

| Rapping for me is therapeutic  
| to express what I felt and how I feel  
| My medication are notepads, pencils, and pens  
| I decided a long time ago  
| I would never resort to popping pills  
| to deal with the issues of life because life is real  
| filled with ordeals that will  
| leave you mentally and emotionally drained  
| so instead of putting a gun to my head to blow out my brains  
| I find a quiet spot and write poetic masterpieces  
| until the lyrics on the page soothes and eases the pain

Rapping was the only thing I was good at growing up. Circles of people would surround me to hear me rap. In those moments, I felt unstoppable. When I rocked crowds, I felt so alive and on top of the world. If I were smart back then, I would have taken my drug money and the other money I made from other jobs and invested it in my music and studio time. I thought becoming a famous rapper would be a piece of cake for me. After all, I had the dream to back everything up. At least that what I thought anyway. Well, after I went to jail for selling drugs, my aspirations of being a big-time rapper went down the drain.



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I was put on probation for two years, which put restrictions on where I could travel. For that time, rapping took a back seat. I spent more time trying to piece my life back together and find some direction. Here I am, a high-school dropout with no job and no mentors. I felt so lost like Nemo.

Let me ask you a question. What if the same guy who taught me how to sell drugs taught me about how to invest in my dream of becoming a big-time rapper? What if he would have taught me how to invest in real estate? What if he would have taught me how to become an entrepreneur? The list goes on. He couldn't do any of those things because no one taught him how to do those things. He was also a rapper but wasn't doing anything to push his music. No one I knew in my neighborhood had a recording studio. No one I knew had any clue on what would it take to break into the music industry. Back then, we didn't have social media. It's hard to pursue a dream without the proper knowledge and resources.

On the other hand, it's hard to pursue a dream without the proper work ethic and discipline. Some dreams have expiration dates, and some don't. Let me explain. I could still be a famous rapper, but my friend Mike can never be a famous boxer. Why? He's older and past his prime. Unlike me, Mike had everything handed to him, but he blew it. Mike started boxing when he was about 13-years-old. He would go to local boxing gyms and practice with heavyweight boxers. They helped train and make him better. He started doing amateur fights around the city and became well known. Around the age of 17 or 18, he went to Louisville, KY, and won the golden gloves tournament. Shortly after that, his name started to travel across America. Some famous boxing promoters heard about Mike. They got in contact with him and offered to send him to Nashville, TN, and Las Vegas to train, to help take him pro. They offered to pay for an apartment and all of his food. He would go to Nashville for about a week or so and come back to KY. He continued this cycle for about two or two or three years and

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eventually lost the opportunities that were given to him.

When you are surrounded by people who there to help you fulfill your dreams, don't waste their time and resources. Over the years, he tried to get back into boxing, but things never panned out.

I know you're curious about what made Mike miss this fantastic opportunity to become a top-notch boxer. Are you ready for the answer? It was his girlfriend. He would go to Nashville, and after a week there, he would begin to miss her and come back to KY to be with her. As stated in an earlier chapter, if Mike would have stayed with boxing, he would have been champion instead of Floyd Mayweather, and his net worth today would be close to \$500 million.

Let me ask you a question. Did Mike make the right decision to pass up his boxing career for his girlfriend, now his wife? The story of Mike is just one story of many other people I know who are not living their dream.

I grew up with people who should have been in the NBA, NFL, MLB, music industry, or film industry. Others should have been doctors, lawyers, scientists, inventors, engineers, and so on. Just like Mike, there are millions upon millions of people who are not living their dream for whatever reason. Some have valid reasons, and some don't. Again, some dreams have expiration dates, and some don't. If you don't have any responsibilities, fully pursue your dreams. If you have responsibilities, learn to manage your time to make time to pursue your dreams. Don't let anything or anyone stop you.

You are responsible for how your future turns out. How? By the choices you make and what you give your time to. Wasted time is worse than wasted money. You can always get money back, but time is not refundable. Once

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it's gone, it's gone. Whatever you, don't make any excuses. Excuses will suck the life out of your dreams.

Years ago, I heard a statement that has stuck with me since. If someone else has done it or doing it, you can do it too. Does that mean I can be a great basketball player like Michael Jordan? Not by a long shot? Why? Because my dream is not to be a basketball player. I don't have that skill set. I'm a gifted writer, rapper, and speaker. Meaning, since other people have become successful and are successful in those fields, there is also room for me to be just as successful as well. This is why I decided a long time ago that I will never give up on my dream, no matter how long it takes or how hard it gets. I think my biggest struggle is time management and procrastination.

This book should have been finished back in April 2018. Today's date is October 7th, 2019, and now the revision is taking place March 7th, 2025. That's a long gap in time. I could have written two or three other books in that time frame — the same with rapping and spoken word. I should have at least five to eight good CD's out along with plenty of videos. Why the procrastination? I kept saying things like, "I'll work on it later today. "I'll work on it tomorrow," and the cycle continued. But the good thing, I'm finally finishing the book, working on my cd, and planning some video shoots.

I've had plenty of chances to walk away and quit. I've been tempted to quit plenty of times. What keeps me going? The dream I had when I was 12-years-old. I refuse to be like the people who gave up on their dreams. That doesn't sit too well with my conscious. I know that any time any day can be my time to rise. I've been blessed to have a good and positive impact on the lives of thousands of youth and young adults. I can't cheat my future, and I can't cheat this younger generation. If I let my dream die, the impact

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I have on this younger generation will also die. My dream motivates and frightens me at the same time.

My other passion in life besides speaking to youth, writing books, spoken-word, and hip-hop is writing short-films and movies. How in the world did I get into writing movies? I graduated from Eastern Kentucky University

with a B.A in Broadcast & Communication in 2005. During my freshman year in college, my mother's friend suggested that I should start writing novels since I was into writing poetry and rap lyrics. I took out some time to come up with an idea for a book. When I did, I was like, "Hmm, this would be a good movie." But the thing was, I didn't know a thing about writing movies. During this time, Youtube was in it's infant phase. Luckily for me, I found out my department in college offered screenwriting classes. A few semesters later, I enrolled in those classes. By the time I graduated, I had written two full-length screenplays. Sadly for me, I lost one of them but still remember the plot so I may write it over.

A few months ago, I had another dream. In this dream, I was a Billionaire talking to a group of youth. They asked, "How did you become a Billionaire?" My response, "By making movies." This is the first time I've told this dream openly. I've only shared this with two people up until this moment. Will this happen? It will if I put the time and effort into doing my part. Guess what my confession is almost every day? I'm a Billionaire. Never underestimate the power of dreams.

These two dreams are what keeps me going when then things get rough, and I want to quit. Those dreams are intertwined with my purpose in life, which is helping people. I know, without a doubt, my dreams will become my reality.

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As stated, one of my flaws is procrastination. Let me tell you about three significant opportunities I missed out on because of procrastination.

Opportunity number one. In the summer of 2003, I worked a youth camp called Kids Across America in Branson, Missouri. While there, I met LeCrae as he was first starting his Christian rap career. Who is Lecrae? He is the best well-known Christian Rapper/ Hip-Hop Artist. We rapped together a few times for the kids. During his last day there, he was supposed to come to my cabin before he left to get my phone number to keep in contact with him, but for some reason, he forgot. No sweat because his friend, Ben, the guy in charge of all the camp entertainment, was also the founder of Reach Records. Lecrae was the first artist signed to the label. During the seven-week youth camp, Ben and I became close friends. At the end of the camp, Ben gave me a cd full of rap instrumentals along with his email address. He said, “Dewayne, take these beats home, make a demo cd, and email the songs to me when you’re done.”

What did I do when I got home and the months to come? I listened to the cd, freestyled to the beats, but didn’t make a demo cd as Ben had instructed. Why? Because of laziness and procrastination. Overtime Ben and I lost contact because he changed his email. I genuinely believe if I followed through with his instructions that I would have been the second artist signed to his record label next to Lecrae. I could have been traveling the world with Lecrae rocking out huge stadiums and concerts.

Opportunity number two. During my junior year in college, I got a part-time job working at McDonald’s. While working there, I met the second guy in charge. His name was Gary. We became good friends. His stepfather owned ten McDonalds, and he was next in line to take over when his stepfather retired. He wanted to take me under his wing and train me to become a franchise owner after college. For anyone to become a

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franchise owner, they needed two hundred and fifty thousand dollars in a bank account or cash assets. He specifically told me, “Dewayne, I can’t give you the money because I’m helping someone else financially, but I can provide you with all the training and introduce you to all the right people.” After college, it would have taken about eighteen months to complete all the training. At first, I was down for it. I was going to owner meetings with him and talking to headquarters in Chicago about the process.

What happened. As graduation was approaching in 2005, I was looking at my bank account and my student loans, which didn’t equal to two hundred and fifty thousand dollars I needed for my first franchise. The closer I came to graduation, the more I panicked about not having the money. Something on the inside of me was telling me to stay in Richmond, KY, and go through all the training after graduation. But I ignored what I was feeling because of natural circumstances and moved by to Lexington, KY after graduation. I was so focused on finding a job with my degree.

Are you ready for this? Sometime later, I found out that Gary was going to give me the money to get my first franchise after I completed all the training. He just wanted to see if I would go through it without having the money. I was so upset with myself after I found out, but by this time it was too late to backtrack. If I would have stuck with this opportunity, today, I would own between eight to ten McDonald’s restaurants. After paying the franchise fees, employees, and taxes, I would be making one million dollars a year from each restaurant. My net-worth right now would have been at least thirty million dollars.

Opportunity number three. Back in 2009, I was apart of a men’s Bible study group that met every Wednesday morning. Through this group, I met an older guy by the name of John. John was a big-time investor who had a net worth of about ten million dollars. He and I talked over time about him

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investing in my first movie to film and produce it. I wrote a business plan, and after all the calculations, the movie would cost fifty thousand dollars to make. I showed him the business plan, and we talked about it some more. One morning after Bible study as he was leaving, he looked at me and said, “Can you do the movie for twenty thousand dollars?” Without really considering his offer, I replied, “No!!” After that day, John didn’t come to Bible study anymore. If I had said yes to his proposal, he would have written a check for twenty thousand for me to make my first movie. Shortly after that, John moved to Florida.

As I look back at all these missed opportunities, I want to body slam myself at times. I have no one to blame but myself. Procrastination is one of the most significant flaws for me to conquer. I can’t allow it to cheat me out of my dreams and opportunities anymore.

Why am I telling you these things? Because I don’t want you to allow your flaws to cause you to miss out on your dreams and future opportunities. What is it you want to do with your life. What is your passion? What or who inspires you? What change do you want to see in the world? The answers to these questions will help you discover your dream. Some people find out when they’re young like I was, and some find out later in life.

The worse place you can end up in life is working a job you absolutely can’t stand. There are millions of Americans working forty hours a week at a job they don’t like struggling and barely getting by. In Chapter 8, I talked about how you can learn how to build a successful business using Social Media, Google, and Youtube. In life, either you can either have a business that makes you \$50,000 a month or work a job that pays you \$50,000 a year. The choice is yours. I’m not saying that anything is wrong with working a job but aim higher with your life.

Let’s take teachers and nurses, for example. Where I live, the average

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salary for a teacher is about \$35,000 a year; the average salary for a nurse is around \$45,000 a year, and that's before taxes. Some of these teachers and nurses have a side business or businesses, making an extra \$10,000 a month or more.

As you get older in life, you'll learn that your salary is not enough. What happens if you lose your job or the company you work for goes out of business or transfer to a different state? On average, a wealthy person has at least three different streams of income coming in a month. If something happens to one stream of income, they still have money coming in from the other two streams of income. I wish someone would have taught me this stuff when I was a teenager.

Be smart with your money at an early age. Just don't go and waste your money on Jordans, expensive clothing, and fast food. Learn to save your money. When you get money, put some of it up in savings and don't touch it. Practice saving money by starting small. You control your financial future with every dollar you spend. Some of you work so hard for your money. Don't waste it. If I could push the rewind button and go back to the age of 18, I would have learned how to invest in real estate and stock and bonds instead of selling drugs for four years that messed up my life for a long time.

There are so many financial opportunities that are waiting to be discovered by you, even at a young age. Do some research on people who became self-made millionaires and billionaires. Unless you believe that, you won't put in the work to achieve it. Imagine five years from now, you're enjoying financial freedom while other people in your age range are struggling. It starts with your decision today to be financially free.

There's a friend of mine who is like a sister to me. She's a school teacher and lives in this huge house that costs close to \$400,000 that sits on about



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two to three acres of land. If you saw her home, you would say, “How in the world is she affording that house on a teacher’s salary in Kentucky?” When she told me how she got the house, I was blown away.

After she graduated from college and started teaching, she stayed with her parents and saved everything for five years except for basic needs and giving her parents money. Not only that, but she learned how to invest her money. She put down a large down payment, and now in 2019, her house is almost paid off. I hope you’re taking notes.

I have another friend who has a thriving small restaurant. She’s been having it for over ten years. One day! I was talking to the restaurant manager. She told me about the big house the owner has, among some other things. She said, ‘It must be nice to have a house like that. It must be nice to have money like that.’ I replied, “This can be you. You can have your own restaurant like this.” She replied, “Me. Are you serious? This will never happen for me.” You know what? She’s right. Owning a restaurant will never happen for her. She wants the benefits of being rich and having a big house, but she doesn’t want to put in the work to make it happen. She can’t fathom it inside her mind. Sad to say. There are people like her across the world who want the benefits of financial freedom but don’t want to put in the work. They’re stuck in a mental state of failure. They’re afraid to step out because of the fear of failure, so they’d rather stay in their comfort zone. Why? It’s familiar to them, and they don’t have to take any risks. Life is all perception, and your perception shapes your reality.

A person with a poverty mindset can be given a million-dollar opportunity and pass over it because they’re looking for a job. Don’t get me wrong. There is nothing wrong with having a job, but don’t let that be your only source of income. If your job is the single source of your income, then save between twenty to thirty percent of each paycheck for about six months to

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a year. During this period, be thinking about some business you can start. Take the money you have saved up and start your business with it. I take some of the money I make from speaking, book and cd sells and reinvest it back into my business. Turn your profits into more profits.

There's a guy who lives in California by the name of Josh Shipp. He's a youth motivational speaker like me. He makes about \$2 million a year speaking at schools, youth event, and selling books. Is he a better speaker

than me? Why is he making way more money than me doing the same thing? Because for a long time, I didn't know it was possible to make that much money as a youth motivational speaker. I didn't have the business smarts and marketing skills he had. When I found out it could be done; I began to change my perception to put myself on that path. Am I a youth motivational speaker for the money? Not at all. If I were, I would have walked away a long time ago. But now that I know how much money is floating around for youth motivational speakers, I want a piece of it.

I have a friend who is almost a self-made billionaire. He is about seventy years old. He started his business from the ground up when he was twenty-four years old. He was a multi-millionaire by the time he was thirty years old. His business is the number one sales company in the world in the industry he is in. Just by looking at him, the way he dresses, and the kind of car he drives, you would never know. While he was building his business from the ground up at the age of twenty-four, other men his age were wasting time with their life. Besides hard work, I asked him what the secret to his success was? He said, "I married one woman, didn't cheat on her, and stayed away from partying, drugs, and alcohol.

Besides his wife, his sole focus was building his business and still is to this day. Even this day, he works from 7 am to 8 pm almost every day. When

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not working, he and his wife travel the world. They have three kids who work at the family business, and they are set for life.

Imagine how disciplined he had to be with his time and schedule. Imagine how many times he wanted to quit when things got hard and didn't seem as though things would get better. Imagine how many pep talks he had to give himself. Imagine how many of his peers made fun of him because he refused to go to parties, do drugs, and drink alcohol. He chose the high and strict road, and it has paid off for him.

I have so many other stories that I won't go into. I may save them for my Youtube channel to which you subscribe to @ [www.youtube.com/dspoet1](https://www.youtube.com/dspoet1)

I've been made fun of plenty of times by family and friends for pursuing my dreams. I see their side, but they don't see mine. If I allowed their concerns to stop me, I would probably be somewhere working a 9 to 5 job I don't like saving up for retirement. It's nothing wrong for some people to live like that, but not me. I refuse to be limited by the words and opinions of naysayers. I've learned to be a self-motivator. I encourage myself. I speak life into every fiber of my being. They say I dream too big. I say they dream too small.

Be careful who you take advice from. The people who give you the wrong information are the ones who gave up on their hopes and dreams, and now they are trying to project their failures on to you. It's their subconscious bias. It's not that they're bad people. The misery loves company thing is not evil; it's subconscious. For example, if you want to make a career as a Youtuber, social media influencer, go for it. To me, it's more practical right now in 2019-more than most people realize. These people may be smart in baking cookies, engineering, or whatever, but when people speak about opportunities on social media and youtube, they're not experts in that field

of communication.

When I tell you something about motivational speaking, listen to me. But if I tell you how to build a rocket ship, run the other way and close both ears. Why? That's not my field of expertise. Pay close attention whose giving you the advice. More importantly, if you are comfortable taking advice on how you should live your life from people who are not experts in what you want to do, you deserve to lose, you deserve to fail. Those people are not experts in those areas. If you listen to outside voices, you will always regret it in the end. When someone tells you it can't be done. It's more a reflection of their limitations, not yours.

My question is this. Would you rather appease the inconvenience right now in the short term and regret it when you're older or take a leap and follow your hopes and dreams? There is so much abundance in the field you have your eyes on. There are 8.4 billion people on the planet. All you have to do is tap into a small percentage of those people who will support what you do. But you have to start. When? Now!! You only get better by moving forward.

Learn, make mistakes, and learn some more. Sooner than later, the dots will connect, and you will be fully living your dream while those people who told you not to are stuck in a career they don't like making less money than you. You have a fantastic gift in you that the world needs to see, but it's up to you to let them see it.

There's a saying that has stuck with me through the years and something I've learned from him. The quote, "Success is found in your daily habits." I can follow you around for one week and can tell if you will be successful or not based on your daily habits. Another quote to add to that is, "Success leaves clues." It's simple. Find someone who is successful in something you

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want to do and find out how they did it. A lot of successful entrepreneurs have online courses and youtube videos on how they became successful. Go seek out the information and apply it to your life.

Set goals and have a vision for your life, whether it's short term or long term. By doing so, you'll put forth the necessary effort. Goals are achieved by doing small things one day at a time. Make a schedule and stick to it. A schedule is not a prison, but most people don't like to follow a schedule. Set the schedule up so you can have the day you want. Whatever you want your day to look like, schedule it. When you do it like that, you won't be in worst shape like you were at the beginning of the day. That is a stupid day. If you have a bunch of those in a row, you want to bury yourself. That isn't a good strategy for your life.

Maybe twenty percent of your day can go toward your responsibilities, maybe more depending on far behind you are. You have to calculate the right ratio of responsibility for the reward. This is called "Self Negotiation." We negotiate with ourselves all the time. "What are you going to do for me that would make me want to work for you?" You can ask yourself that question. Maybe you'll do an hour of responsibility, and the reward is playing a video game or getting on social media for twenty minutes.

One hour of responsibility beats a zero any day. The next thing you know is that once you do the one hour, it'll feel so good that it'll turn into two hours, five hours, and so on but you have to start somewhere. By doing this, you are setting yourself up for success.

I don't know about, but from this point, I refuse to allow any of my flaws to stop me from missing any more opportunities and setting up my future to be prosperous.

# CHAPTER 11

## Losing A Loved One

What can I do with this broken heart  
the day you dropped, I felt my heart stop  
And since then, I haven't been the same  
the tears that I cry flood my eyes like the rain

"I Miss You Much" By Dewayne Smithers

## LOSING A LOVED ONE

I want you to imagine for a moment the time you received the worst news of your life. What emotions are you feeling right now? For me, that moment was July 15, 2024, at 1:20 PM. I was in my home studio working on a project when my phone rang. She was like, “Dewayne. Have you heard the news?” To my curiosity, I was like, “What news?” She then said, “I’m sorry to inform you that Fr. Norman Fischer passed away this morning in his sleep.”

I got up from my seat and went to my steps to sit down. My response was, “What did you just say to me?” While I was still on the phone with her, another phone call was coming in. I picked up, and he said, “Dewayne. I’m informing you that Fr. Norman passed away this morning.” As I was hanging up with him, another phone call was coming in. I picked up, and he said, “Dewayne. Fr. Norman passed away this morning. I just sat there with a blank look on my face, not wanting to accept the news.

I went back to my computer to look on Facebook and behold, the Diocese of Lexington and Lexington Catholic High School posted the news on their pages.

That day, I experienced grief, pain, and tears in ways that I never knew. So many phones, text messages, and social media message posts came in to encourage me.

Later that night, I couldn’t sleep, pain shooting down my left arm, severe chest pains, and I was so dizzy. People who consoled me when I was upset and needed someone to lean on. I couldn’t lie down. I went to the ER because I thought I was about to have a heart attack. After running some tests and blood work, the doctor told me I was just fine, and that it was just the grief kicking in.



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I've been through a lot in life, but nothing could ever prepare me for this. The murder of my father didn't prepare me for this. The abuse I went through didn't prepare me for this. All the rejection I've been through in life didn't prepare me for this. I've had loved ones and close friends pass away in the past from cancer, but at least I had a chance to prepare for it and say my goodbyes.

This right here, losing my best friend for fourteen years, has been the toughest thing for me to deal with. One day, he and I were talking through Instagram messenger, and the next morning, he was gone. That does something to you mentally and emotionally. A piece of me is forever gone. This was my big brother, my brother from another mother. We traveled the country together doing youth events and conferences. We had holidays and birthdays together. His family was my family. We free-styled and rapped together. We prayed together, cried together, and encouraged each other. We often had movie and game nights, either at the movie theaters or over my house. He shared things with me that no one else knew about and I shared things with him that no one else knew about. Though he was a Catholic Priest and me a protestant, we were two peas in a pod with a tight bond like no other. When he left, a piece of me left too. When he left, a piece of him stayed with me.

Growing up, I always wanted a big brother. Even when I met my big brother on my dad's side, it didn't turn out the way I hoped it would. For reasons I can't explain, my big brother disowned me. Here I am again, without a big brother. Then in April 2010, through a tragic event, I met Fr. Norman Fischer.

Someone who knew me told him about me and told me about him. They gave me his phone number, and we scheduled for me to meet him at Lexington Catholic High School. At this time, I barely knew anything

## LOSING A LOVED ONE

about Catholics, let alone Catholic priests. I walked into his office looking for a white Catholic Priest. Norman was sitting in a chair on my left-hand side. I finally looked at him and said, “I’m looking for Fr. Norman Fischer.” He laughed and said, “I am he.” From that moment we became best friends, brothers from another mother.

After his passing, I cried nonstop for two weeks straight. Three weeks later, we had his wake and funeral services. Seeing your best friend in a casket will mess you up. Carrying the casket of your best friend as a pail bearer will mess you up. Seeing the casket of your best friend lowered six feet deep into the ground will mess you up. I honestly thought the tears would never stop. I thought my life would always be in a dark place without him here.

Here we are, eight months later, at the time of writing this chapter. This feels like a dream. Sometimes, I go back and read through our old text messages and listen to his voicemails. I miss him more and more every day. I miss our phone conversations. I miss his random weeknight visits with candy and popcorn to hang out and watch a movie. On some nights, I gaze up at the stars and wonder what he is doing up in Heaven. At this moment, I don’t believe he would come back if he had the chance to.

I know we all handle and process grief differently, but it hits differently when the person passes away suddenly, without warning. I want to share with you how I’ve gotten through the loss of my best friend. Maybe it can help you on your journey of grief.

A strong support system is a must. From the news of his passing, I surrounded myself with people who I could talk to and get comfort from. Those whom I could call to discuss my feelings. Those who would let me cry on their shoulders when I needed to. Those who would check on me and

not let me stay in isolation.

As a believer in Christ, I have fully leaned on Him and a few Bible Scriptures. Psalm 34:18: The Lord is close to them that are of a broken heart, and save such as be of a contrite spirit.

I spent many days in pain, and in those days, I did my best to hand over the pain to God continually. For a period of a few days, I was suicidal because I was missing my best friend so much. From what I was told, that's a part of the grief process. Though I had a strong support system, they weren't around me all the time. When they weren't around, I would get hit with this powerful sense of loneliness. The loneliness would drive me to prayer and to meditate on the two scriptures I shared above. Even when I didn't feel like it, I kept crying out to God. I never blamed God for the passing of Norman, which gave me more comfort. In your times of grief, never run away from God. He can handle your anger, confusion, disappointments, rage, questions, and you being mad at Him for whatever reason. Remember, the Lord is close to them that are of a broken heart.

The main scripture that comforted me is 1 Thessalonians 4:13: We don't grieve as those without hope.

Grief is the receipt of loving someone well. Tears are the love pouring out through my eyes because I will never see him again on this side. I will never get to watch a movie with him again on this side, but I have hope that I will see him again on the other side. Even through my grief, I still have hope. My hope is in Jesus Christ, who died and rose again. Since I know Norman is in Heaven with Christ, one day we'll be together again. That's what 1 Thessalonians 4:13 means. If I didn't have this hope, I would have handled this differently. I would have gone back to my old way of doing things.

## LOSING A LOVED ONE

I still allow myself to grieve. It's now a part of my life. The sting of it hurts less, but it's still there. I never hold back the tears. If I feel a cry coming on, I let it out.

Dealing with the loss of a loved one is a deeply personal journey, and there's no right or wrong way to grieve. It's important to allow yourself to feel your emotions, seek support from others, and practice self-care while remembering and celebrating the life of your loved one.

Here's a breakdown of helpful strategies:

### 1. Acknowledge and Allow Your Emotions:

Grief is a natural process:

Don't try to suppress your feelings, but allow yourself to feel the sadness, anger, confusion, or any other emotions that arise.

Everyone grieves differently:

There's no timeline or "right" way to grieve. Be patient with yourself and allow your healing to unfold at your own pace.

Accept mood swings:

Grief can be an emotional rollercoaster, with moments of strength and moments of overwhelming sadness. Acknowledge these shifts as normal.

### 2. Seek Support:

Talk to trusted friends and family: Sharing your feelings and memories with loved ones can provide comfort and validation.

Join a support group: Connecting with others who have experienced similar losses can help you feel less alone and find understanding.

Consider professional help: A therapist or counselor specializing in grief can offer guidance and support during this difficult time.

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### 3. Practice Self-Care:

Prioritize your physical health: Eat nutritious meals, get enough sleep, and engage in gentle exercise to support your well-being.

Find healthy coping mechanisms: Engage in activities that bring you comfort and joy, such as reading, listening to music, or spending time in nature.

Avoid unhealthy coping mechanisms:

Limit alcohol and drug use, as these can interfere with the grieving process.

4. Honor Your Loved One's Memory: Remember and celebrate the life of your loved one by sharing stories, photos, and cherished memories with others.

Create a lasting tribute: Consider planting a tree, donating to a cause they cared about, or starting a tradition in their memory.

Don't forget them: Remembering your loved one doesn't mean you can't move forward. It means honoring their life and the impact they had on you.

5. Be Patient and Kind to Yourself: Grief is a journey, not a destination: There will be ups and downs, and it's okay to have good days and bad days.

Forgive yourself: Don't beat yourself up for not "doing it right" or for feeling a certain way. Allow yourself to grieve in your own way.

Remember that healing takes time: Be patient and allow yourself the time and space you need to heal.

Disclaimer. This isn't an end all be all. These are the steps I have taken to help me on my journey of grief.

CHAPTER 12  
I Met A Man

## The You Project

By now, you know about me and what I've been through. Also, I hope you have learned more about yourself and The You Project.

Growing up, I didn't have any mentors, role models, or father figures. I lacked someone in my life to teach me how to be a man, how to work with my hands, and how to treat women properly.

I had no one to teach me the things I've shared with you in this book. Because of that, my view of life was so twisted. Sometimes I didn't know if I was coming or going.

Some years ago, I met a man, and He introduced me to his father. They took me in and taught me things I should have learned growing up. The more we hung out, the more He showed me what true love is. He taught me the meaning of all the pain I went through. He explained to me that I was holding myself back by not forgiving my mom and Ken for the abuse. Because of Him, one of the hardest things became one of the easiest. In my heart and mind, I fully forgave them.

Growing up, I was agnostic. An agnostic is a person who holds the view that human reason is incapable of providing grounds to justify either that God exists or the belief that God doesn't exist.

I met Christ when I was 24 years old. Growing up, I went to church on Christmas and Easter. I was more focused on the pretty girls than hearing the sermon. At one church, I met a girl. I forgot her name. She and I became friends. Often she would talk to me about Christ, but I was trying to get something else from her if you know what I mean. Somehow, she and I lost contact. I believe she prayed for me often.

Shortly after that, I began dating a young lady by the name of Bonnie.

## I MET A MAN

With her, I hit a gold mine, at least I thought I did. Two weeks later, I moved in with her and her three kids. To make a long story short, our relationship only lasted for ten months.

Toward the end of our relationship, we moved into a new apartment. One of our neighbors by the name of Mike invited us to a church service on a Wednesday night. We went, and that was the night I gave my life to Christ.

I know there are many religions and many denominations within the Christian faith. I'm not talking about any of that. I'm talking about an individual personal relationship with Christ. There's a difference.

I wish I could tell you that my relationship with Christ has been perfect over the years. It's because of His grace that I'm still here. He has been so patient with me. There have been some horrible things I've said to Him out of frustration. There have been times I've wanted to bail on Him because I didn't understand His ways.

This is what I've learned. Without an understanding of God's love, God seems wrathful and unapproachable. Without an understanding of His requirement of faith, He seems dark, distant, and capricious. When we don't understand His methods, it affects our understanding of His love. If we don't receive answers to our prayers, we think it's because He doesn't love us. When we don't understand His love, there is no foundation for faith, because faith works by love.

Allowing Christ to love me through my imperfections hasn't been easy, especially when I had a hard time loving myself. If I had applied the teachings of this book to my life before I met Christ, my relationship with Him would be much better. I must mentally overcome many poor decisions I've made in my life.



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Without Christ, I would have put a bullet in my head a long time ago. I can on and on about the benefits of having a personal relationship with Him, to know Him for yourself. How do you get to know Him? The same way you get to know anyone else. You spend time with them. You talk to them and they talk to you. Communication with Christ is a two-way street.

I get invited to speak at so many schools. When I speak at schools, I can't talk about Christ, but I can talk about love, joy, peace, treating people right, and so on. Sometimes, some will ask, "What made you change?" Then I can say, Christ.

Listen. I'm not knocking what or who anyone else believes or believes in. I can only speak for myself.

Despite if you don't believe in Christ, I'm still here for you, to encourage you in any way I can. No matter where you are in life, it's never too late to work on The You Project.

# CHAPTER 13

## Final Thoughts

## FINAL THOUGHTS

This is important because medical science says that 70% of our thoughts are negative. Thoughts, positive or negative, shape our biology. Negative thinking will produce a negative life experience. You have to refrain from saying stuff like, “I’m dumb” “I’m stupid” “Bad things always happen to me.” It’s hard for your life to move forward and be productive if you’re continually speaking those things over your life.

You have to take full responsibility to change the tune of your life. Through fine-tuning your subconscious mind, you can overcome negative thinking and change your genes. I know it sounds hard, but if it were easy, then everyone would be doing it. To change internally is the hardest thing you will ever do with your life. This is how you overcome low self-esteem, self-doubt, negative self-image, and destructive habits.

It doesn’t matter how much anyone believes in you if you don’t believe in yourself. No one can stop you, but you. How bad do you want to become a person by working on The You Project.

My name is Dewayne Smithers, and I approve this message.

If you have been blessed and inspired by this book, and want to order more copies for family, friends, students, schools, or youth or young adults at your church, you can do so by visiting my website; [www.dspoet.com](http://www.dspoet.com). You can also use the contact form on my website to reach me for any questions.