

*Caroline Hibbert:* Okay, on behalf of Crossroads to Freedom and the Center for Transforming Communities, we'd like to thank you for sharing your story with us today.

*Darryl McKinney:* No problem.

*Caroline Hibbert:* We're going to start off with some basic background questions to get your memory going. Could you state your name for us?

*Darryl McKinney:* Darryl McKinney.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And where were you born?

*Darryl McKinney:* I was born in Memphis, Tennessee here in the **Binghampton** area. And at the age of eight, my mother and father and my older brother at the time, we moved over to the Highland Heights area.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And what year were you born?

*Darryl McKinney:* 1980.

*Caroline Hibbert:* So you were raised in the Highland Heights area.

*Darryl McKinney:* Yes.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And what is your occupation now?

*Darryl McKinney:* Right now, I'm currently working on my masters at \_\_\_\_\_ University, and at night, I work at Youth Dimensions, which is a juvenile facility that handle kids from the state.

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So it's like a juvenile detention center.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And do you have any brothers or sisters?

*Darryl McKinney:* Yes, I do. I have an older brother and a younger sister.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And what was your home life like growing up in the Highland Heights area?

*Darryl McKinney:* Home life was great. I had both my mother and father, which is very fortunate. Speaking as though a lot of my friends didn't have their mother and father in their household. Most of them were

raised by their mother. I had a great home life. Two very hard working parents that brought us all up.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And what school did you attend?

*Darryl McKinney:* Treadwell High School.

*Caroline Hibbert:* What activities were you involved in while you were there?

*Darryl McKinney:* I played football, I threw discus in track. Believe it or not, I was on the swim team. Ms. Wilson, which was the guidance counselor then, she was also my swim coach, but I – in swimming –

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- I did backstroke, and I was on the four by four relay, freestyle.

*Caroline Hibbert:* How would you compare Treadwell when you were there and Treadwell now?

*Darryl McKinney:* Treadwell then was basically – it was a family, and I say that real broad because everybody knew everybody. We came to school – most of the people that I went to school with I also went to elementary school with. So we all kind of crossed over at the same time. We experienced life together. We went through a lot of things. The Boys and Girls Club was a big part of our lives after school, and so what I would say is that home after home life is where school was just the next thing that we did. It was just one of those things that brought us together.

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What I started to see different is that a lot of gang activity started to take place a little bit after I graduated. And that the family or the closeness kind of left, for lack of a better word. It just kind of left, and when that close-knit family type thing kind of left, it kind of took away from the spirit of the school.

*Caroline Hibbert:* Did religion play any role in your life growing up?

*Darryl McKinney:* Yes. Very much so. My grandfather was a pastor of church. I myself was very involved in church. Even high school, Mr. Isaac Little who ran City Builders was a big part of my life from eighth grade until I graduated. He really came in, and he really disciplined us.

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We would go to Soul Factory, which was given like maybe once a month on Fridays, and it was there that I gave my life to Christ, and it was all because of Mr. Little actually taking time with us and spending time with us to get us to know the Lord. And it plays a big part of my life even now as being a pastor of evangelism at **Two Cornerstone** Church. So I'm actually in ministry, and that's what I'm getting my masters in now, so it had a lot to do being young, you know, getting to know the lord, has a lot to do with me now being in ministry.

*Caroline Hibbert:* I'm just going to backtrack for a minute. I didn't ask what years exactly did you go to Treadwell.

*Darryl McKinney:* I came to Treadwell when I was in the fourth grade. Don't want to play with numbers too much, but I think that was like in I want to say –

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- let's say '91, '90, something like that. I graduated in 2000. I went there from 4th to 12th grade.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And how has religion played a role in how you're interacting with the community now in your occupation?

*Darryl McKinney:* I more interact with the community through outreach. I take – it's the form of taking the ministry beyond the walls and taking it out into the streets, whether it's in the form of me giving of my time or me sharing the gospel with the community. And so from week in and week out, you'll catch me either talking to somebody on the side of the streets or going door-to-door. I do lead outreach teams out, teach people how to share their faith, but I enjoy more when I can go to catch a couple group of youth or –

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A group of people out on the street and share the gospel with them, and to offer my service or offer my help in which God has enabled me to do so.

*Caroline Hibbert:* Could you elaborate a little more on the work that you're doing with youth and the detention center you were mentioning earlier?

*Darryl McKinney:* There I'm a direct counselor where I interact with youth all day long for at least eight hours. My job there is to monitor their behavior, correct them, redirect them, make sure they're headed in the best direction that's going to help them be able to – when they leave the detention center to go out and interact in society and be productive citizens. One of the things we have to do is these kids are coming from various backgrounds, broken homes. Some of them have been in bad situations.

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And it's not our job to come in there and force them, but to redirect them to help them to see and help them think out their – work with their thinking process. One of the big problems is that they're not critical thinkers. And my job is to help them think critical. Put them in the situation, help them to rethink the situation and make the best judgments out of the situations. Because many of them only know one way. If they can't get their way or somebody is bothering them, they ball their fists up. They ready to fight it out. Or many of them come from a gang background, and the first thing they want to do is handle it according to how the gang would actually handle it. My job is to come in and redirect them, give them a better way to go about handling the situation.

*Caroline Hibbert:* So have you seen positive growth in the community as the work that you've been doing?

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*Darryl McKinney:* I have. With the young guys that are leaving the facility, we had two just recently just left the facility, and one of the things I noticed with these two guys when they first got there is that they were big fighters. One would fight at the drop of a dime. You say a couple words to them, and instantly, he's redirecting. As I would sit down with them, night after night, talk with them, share some of my background, some of the issues I had, how I learned to deal with them, and one of the biggest things that I teach them is that, you know, what \_\_\_\_\_, you know, everything doesn't require you to put your hands up and fight. Some things, you just have to let go and live to see another day.

And what I mean by that is that if you learn to let go of things, you're helping yourself to better your future because if you continue to keep putting your hands up or you continue to rely on some of the things that you've been relying on –

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- it's eventually going to land you in two places, either in jail or in the graveyard. And my job is to try to help you defer from going to either one of those places. Teach them that they've got to – life is bigger than what they see right now. In their communities, there's walls. I said it's something beyond those walls in which you live. Don't accept everything as what you see as being life. Because life is bigger than what you see every day. So introducing these things to these guys are helping them not to come back into the detention home. It's helping them to be able to go out here and put it to use when they're on the streets because honestly, I realize one thing is that when they leave the detention home, there is no Mr. McKinney that's standing there to help redirect them, and they have to learn to redirect themselves and make better decisions for themselves while they're here on the street.

*Caroline Hibbert:* So do you use any of the –

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You had mentioned some issues in your background, how to kind of relate to these kids. Could you describe some of those for us?

*Darryl McKinney:* Well, personally myself, I was quick anger. I mean I had an attitude that I would fight at the drop of a dime. I was real argumentative, couldn't get my way, felt like I dealt with a lot of pride. You know, one of the things I would find myself doing, I would get in arguments over simple things. Somebody would come up and say – I been a big guy all my life, "You too fat." "What you mean?" That'll be one of my things that'll make me click. And you know, my grandfather used to tell me, he said, "You're a big guy," and he said, "There are going to be times in life that people are going to look at you twice just because you're a big guy, and you've got an attitude behind that. If you don't learn to fuel that to something or some skill –

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- you're going to, you know, you're going to lose it, and people are going to be afraid of you." But he said yes sir and no sir and yes ma'am and no ma'am would get you a long ways in life. He said, "You pick and choose your battles," and I learned to pick and choose my battles. I learned to – I don't have to use these all the time. I don't have to, you know, say things that don't – that are hurtful to other people. Because two hurts don't make a right.

And so I learned to fuel my energy to other things. I can't go – that can't go without saying that it wasn't until I got in a relationship with Christ that I learned how to fuel a lot of the energy that I was putting towards fighting or trying to be this bad guy or have the bad guy image. It wasn't until I had a relationship with Christ that all these things started to not so much dramatically go away, but over time, being fueled into other things, like sharing the gospel, seeing lives change.

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Helping people to do – not make the same mistakes that I made because it's not good or it doesn't feel good when people can remember you when you went off or when you beat up somebody. I had to learn to fuel that other ways, and I learned that by – I played sports, and I got into football. That helped me out a lot because a lot of anger, I was able to go into the weight room and lift the weights. I was able to go out on the field and let go of the anguish that was build down on the inside.

So I was able to get past all those things, but I also learned that I had a skill, and going out and speaking and talking before people, you know, I had a fear of talking to a lot of people. But I learned that that was one of the gifts I was gifted with is be able to go out and talk with people and be able to redirect them and help them to better themselves.

So I learned to channel the energy that way.

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*Caroline Hibbert:* You had already mentioned your grandfather. Could you maybe describe some of your other role models that have played a large part in your life?

*Darryl McKinney:* Exactly. My father. My dad is a very hard worker. My dad lost his father at a young age and was kind of forced to drop out of high school, but I saw the hand of God as listening to my dad's story. My dad didn't finish high school. His father was murdered. He was sent into the workforce early, and he had three children, stayed with my mother, worked hard, worked sometimes two, maybe three jobs, always instilled inside me that if you want something, you've got to go out and work for it. I knew that from a very young age that I didn't have to go out here and take and steal to make it.

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But if I put my hand to the plow, per se, and began to work, do whatever it is that I need to do to make money, then it'll pay off. And so I learned how I worked for my father, Mr. Little, as I mentioned earlier. Very hard working man, had wife and kids, and I would see him dedicate his time. And so I learned giving back is a big part of it because I seen this man give his last, and he wouldn't let us know that, but he taught us that perseverance to go through, you know, it'll pay off. Last, I would say my pastor. He's very knowledgeable, very heavy on education. He's – he teaches us that you have to go in and do the homework for yourself. He doesn't teach us to be ignorant. He teach us to go into the word of God for ourselves.

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So I credit those men because those men have played a very, very big role in my life.

*Caroline Hibbert:*

What do you see as the direction for the future of this community we're working – you know, largely I'm discovering the history of Highland Heights. What do you feel the direction of the community is right now? How do you feel about the future of it?

*Darryl McKinney:*

I think it can be better than what it is right now. I remember times in time past when incidents have happened in the neighborhood. Prime example, when I was in the eight grade, I lost a classmate, Alex Perry, to gun violence. And I watched the neighborhood pull together because it was the first time we had ever experienced – there was a lot of things going on during that time period that a lot of gang activity – and I watched after that happened how everything in the neighborhood kind of came to an all-time low because we had never experienced anything like that.

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And it brought us closer together. That was kind of the start of being that family at Treadwell, but the neighborhood together pulled together. Over the years, I think it has dispersed, but I think if we pull together, I see it coming together as a family. Not just for the school's sake, but for the neighborhood sake, and began to interact as a family to show the common love or the common bond to one another to know that we all in this thing together. It'll help deplete a lot of the issues that are going on on the streets as far as gang violence, as far as the drugs, as far as the rundown properties that's going on. If the community pulled together and showed that they are concerned, then all these things have to clear up. If we're

all working towards a common goal, there's no reason why we shouldn't be able to conquer that goal.

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But if we can just get the like minded people together, people who want to see better, people who want to see their neighbor be as well off as they are, and not just be concerned about self, then I think we'll have a great community, a community that's driving a school that the neighborhood is behind where the teachers can teach, and everybody is pulling together, and things are thriving in the direction of the goal that's set forth. So I think if we can just do that, we'll be on a great road to becoming a great neighborhood that's also having a great issue – where kids don't have to worry about things happening to them as they go to school and when they come from school.

*Caroline Hibbert:* Are there any other experiences that you may have had growing up at Treadwell that have shaped who you are today and the work that you're doing today?

*Darryl McKinney:* The Boys Club.

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I really enjoyed going to the Boys Club. Like I said, it played in my – I don't want to sound too old, but the things that the Boys Club did, it was part of your life. I had plenty of friends – I met a majority of my friends came from the Boys Club because it was like the home away from home. When you left school, you went to the Boys Club, and it was there that you learned to not so much defend for yourself, but to really start thinking for yourself. You got experiences. You learned how to make friends. You learned how to do certain things you wouldn't normally get to learn how to do at home.

Like I learned how to deal, you know, do carpentry work just by going to the Boys Club, going to the woodshop. I learned how to make things out of wood that now, people come and ask me, "Hey, how do you do this? How do you make a speaker box out of this?"

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And I'm able to understand those things because of the things I learned there. Also at the club, you had – at the Boys Club, you had a lot of people, had counselors there, staff that worked there,

and you end up making friends with these staff members, and there was things that you'd share with them. Most of them was college students, and I learned from there that college was a possibility. It was there that I seen that I can go to college. I was actually not too long ago sitting back, talking with a friend, and I said that it was because of some of the people at the Boys Club that I realized that hey, college was a possibility.

And that's a big thing coming from an African-American high school that college wasn't really spoke highly of. It was one of those things that you could go and do, but –

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- it wasn't one of those things that you thought was achievable. And when I graduated from high school, of course, you know, I had my picks on where I wanted to go, but then I ended up at University of Memphis, and after getting there, I realized that a lot of Treadwell – Treadwell family was there, and people looked at us as, "God, how you all so close?" I said, "This come from back in high school," and we was like a family on campus. I ended up graduating from University of Memphis, and like I said, I'm working on my masters at Union, but I realized that these things are possibilities. And it's all come from that area of perseverance, being able to fight your way through and know that it is a possibility.

It's one of those things it's not so much something that's far away or a magical thing that you can just think about, a hope or dream one day that maybe I can. Yes, you can. It can be done.

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It don't matter where you come from. Just know that you're able to do it. I learned that, of course, from talking to the staff at the Boys and Girls Club, and they let me know that it is a possibility, that you can do it.

*Caroline Hibbert:* And how is your college experience I guess shaped by the fact that you realize kind of later that college is a possibility? You didn't automatically think that that was going to be something you were going to do.

*Darryl McKinney:* When I got there, I didn't know what to expect. So I walked through kind of like, a lack of better words, a dark door. But when I got there, I realized that the things I did in high school helped

prepare me for this moment. The teachers in high school helped me prepare me for that moment, and when I got there, I had hard times. I'm not going to say that it was – man, it was a breeze because it wasn't.

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It was some days where I thought about letting it go. There was some times where it would have been easier to let go. But the people that helped influence my life prepare me for that moment and let me know that giving up is not an option. And I had to adopt that as an attitude and a way of life. And so when I got there, when it did get hard, when I felt like giving up, it wasn't an option. It was more reason to press on, to go through, to see it through. It was many days I hit my knees and pray. It's many days I had talked to God, and he helped every way – in every which way I turned, I always found a door, opportunity opening up for me, even when it got to the end of my college career and I didn't have the money to pay for school. Talked to God, and God worked out with the **Wynn** program who helped me come in and who supplied the money to help me finish my college career.

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So those moments in college that I realize that all the time was helping me from high school, from all my experiences through high school, helped me when I got to college. And those things helped me to bring out the best in me. They showed up when I need for them to show up, when I need for those things to show up, it showed up. And so what helped me to make those – let me know there's a possibility is that the experiences I went through right then when I was in high school helped me to realize that hey, it's a possibility. There are kids out here who are going through some things that it's challenge – found in high school very challenging, but I guarantee them this is that if they put forth the perseverance, if they put forth the hard work and fight through, those things set you up when you get to college. Those things help you when you get to that next point in your life.

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Because if you give up now, you'll give up later. I had a coach, high school football coach, used to say – used to tell me all the time, “You give up now, you'll make it easier for you to give up later. But if you persevere now, it makes it that much more easy for you to persevere later.” It's what you put in now that's what's

going to help you out later. And that's what helped me realize that college was a possibility for a lot of kids that was in the situation that I was in that's coming from the same backgrounds that I'm coming from.

It's a possibility. And so it's what you're determined to do, and that's what it comes down to is what you're determined to do that's going to make the difference in there.

*Caroline Hibbert:* You also had mentioned that your relationship with Christ had changed your life and everything. Was that during college that you really began that kind of dialogue, or was it – did it predate that?

*Darryl McKinney:* It's kind of like I don't want –

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I'm cutting out a little parts that don't – it took me four years to get to college, and I didn't add that between high school and college. It was during that time period that God really refrained – you know, started to break apart a lot of things that had to deal with me going back to me having a lot of pride, me having a lot of issues. I didn't have my – in my own mind, I had all my ducks lined up. And I knew how my life was going. It was kind of like the person that sits there and says, "I'm going to do this, this, this, this, and this. Then I'm going to do that." For some people, that may work out. I'm not knocking that at all if that's how their lifestyle is.

But if they're anything like me, my thing was to go to college, play – and it wasn't to get academics. It was to play football and to be this all star football player and become this great – I always wanted to own my own business, and –

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- I wanted to be this business owner, and you know, make the NFL and make all this money, and you know, that's the successful life for that time. And then somewhere down the line, do the will of God. Where God took me out of four years, it wasn't that I couldn't go right to college, but my mindset at the time wasn't built to go to college. With that mindset of how I had my ducks lined up, God took those four years to really break me down and to help me understand that you've got to put that pride somewhere else. The pride turned to humbleness, and it was humbleness towards God.

I had to reroute this thing. I was doing ministry before I actually got a college education. God led me to my church home, which is Two Cornerstone Church. It was there that I built a foundation where I learned a foundation of principles.

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My Christian experience took place a whole lot there with going out, getting involved with outreach, even though I did some in high school. It got established between that four-year gap between high school and college. I was actually in ministry. That was one of the last things. It was God's things first, and then these other things followed. I learned that through scripture, took you first to kingdom of God and his righteousness and all this other \_\_\_\_\_ added unto you. I learned that scripture, and I applied that scripture to my life, and it helped me to realize that it wasn't anything about me, but it was all about Christ. So when I got ready to – after those four years, God allowed me to go into college.

I went to college with a new perspective. It wasn't with the same perspective of being **multi-rich**, but giving back. It wasn't going there with a whole lot of pride, but humbleness towards God.

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And to my fellow brothers and sisters. To look back at my community and say, "Hey, there's somebody out there. There's another Darryl out there somewhere that's going to school that don't think this is a possibility. There's somebody that's just like me, they got the same experiences I had, or some of the experiences that I've had, and they don't think that it's a possibility for them to get out of their thing. In turn, I now go back to the neighborhood and tell them, "Hey, you can do this. What is it that you want to be? What is it that you want to do?" And I grab those young kids, I grab the young men, I grab those young ladies that don't feel like they can get out of that situation and show them, "You can get out of it, and let me show you how you can get out of it. Let me show you some of my experiences. Let me show you that, hey, getting a bachelors degree is a major possibility."

Getting that higher learning and achieving your dreams is a possibility, and I think that's the biggest thing that really that's helped me to define who I am now, -

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- where am I headed, and where I want to be. And God helped me to establish that through that four-year gap and going on to achieve those dreams.

*Caroline Hibbert:* All right. Thank you so much for participating in our project. You had a very inspiring story. Thank –

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