

BRADDOCK VOICES

CROSSING FENCES
CONNECTING AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS
THROUGH THE ORAL TRADITION

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Crossing Fences is a project of SLB Radio Productions, Inc.
Braddock Voices is based on interviews collected by students at
Braddock Carnegie Library in partnership with Braddock Youth
Project.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	5
LEE DAVIS <i>Interview by Chris Mullen & Abraham Richardson</i> Track 1	6
GUY COLLINS <i>Interview by Darnell Caldwell, Angelo Burgher & Darwin Spencer</i> Track 2	8
CHEF KEVIN MCGUIRE, SR. <i>Interview by Chris Mullen & Ryan Moriarty</i> Track 3	10
MINISTER JAMES MILTON <i>Interview by Jawuan Betton & Abraham Richardson</i> Track 4	12
COACH ROB WILLIAMS <i>Interview by Darwin Spencer & Andre Avent-Taylor</i> Track 5	14
CLARENCE L. GUNTER, JR. <i>Interview by Andre Avent-Taylor, Angelo Burgher & Ryan Moriarty</i> Track 6	16
ROBERT K. PARKER <i>Interview by Andrew Burgher & DaMon Radwanski</i> Track 7	18
REV. SHELDON STOUDEMIRE <i>Interview by Darwin Spencer & Angelo Burgher</i> Track 8	20
TYRONE SMITH <i>Interview by Andrew Burgher & DaMon Radwanski</i> Track 9	22
RAMON RILEY <i>Interview by Darnell Caldwell, Andrew Burgher & Abraham Richardson</i> Track 10	24
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	26
CD	27

FOREWORD

Crossing Fences is a community program based on a simple, age-old process – people learning from one another through the oral tradition. There are stories, insights, perspectives and facts within all of us. And, all too often, we take little time to share them.

In Summer 2015, SLB Radio Productions, Inc. (SLB), convened a group of students at Braddock Carnegie Library in partnership with Braddock Youth Project. While learning about digital audio recording, the group also spent time discussing attributes of male role models and identifying African American men with a connection to Braddock to be interviewed. With support as needed, students then arranged, conducted and edited the interviews presented in this book and CD. Each student received a netbook computer as a reward for the hard work involved in giving voice to others.

Additional audio and photos are available at: www.neighborhoodvoices.org/crossingfences. Special thanks to Vicki Vargo, Rachel Brehm of the Braddock Carnegie Library, Jessica Gumbert of the Braddock Youth Project, and Dana Gold of The Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pa.

For copies of this book, other neighborhood oral history publications, or information about conducting a project in your own community, contact SLB Radio Productions, Inc. at slb@slbradio.org or 412.586.6300.



LEE DAVIS

Born 1970 — CEO, Lee Davis & Associates Consulting

Interview by Chris Mullen & Abraham Richardson

Excerpts from Track 1

My childhood was decent. Even though there was a lot of craziness going on, everybody still looked out for each other.

We started out with great dreams. Even though we had a lot of good people around us, nobody gave us a road map of how to be successful. You saw guys that may have been successful but they never told

you how they got there. I've had some great mentors and that's why I believe that I'm successful today. I've accomplished almost every goal I set out to accomplish.

I've had struggles. In the '90s, I did a stint in prison. It made me realize some of the stupid things I had gotten into and fueled me to do great things. We all have the ability to be great people.

Find as many good mentors as you can. Ask questions. Get somebody to help you figure things out; as an African American boy these days, it's hard.

I always said I was never going back to prison. But, lo and behold, the prison I was in called me to come back and speak to inspire inmates so that when they come out they can do great things.

Get to know each other, break down barriers. You all will be the ones to stop all the madness. Know your history because that's going to play a big part on how you live your life.

He told me that I only have one life and I should really be careful how I use my time.

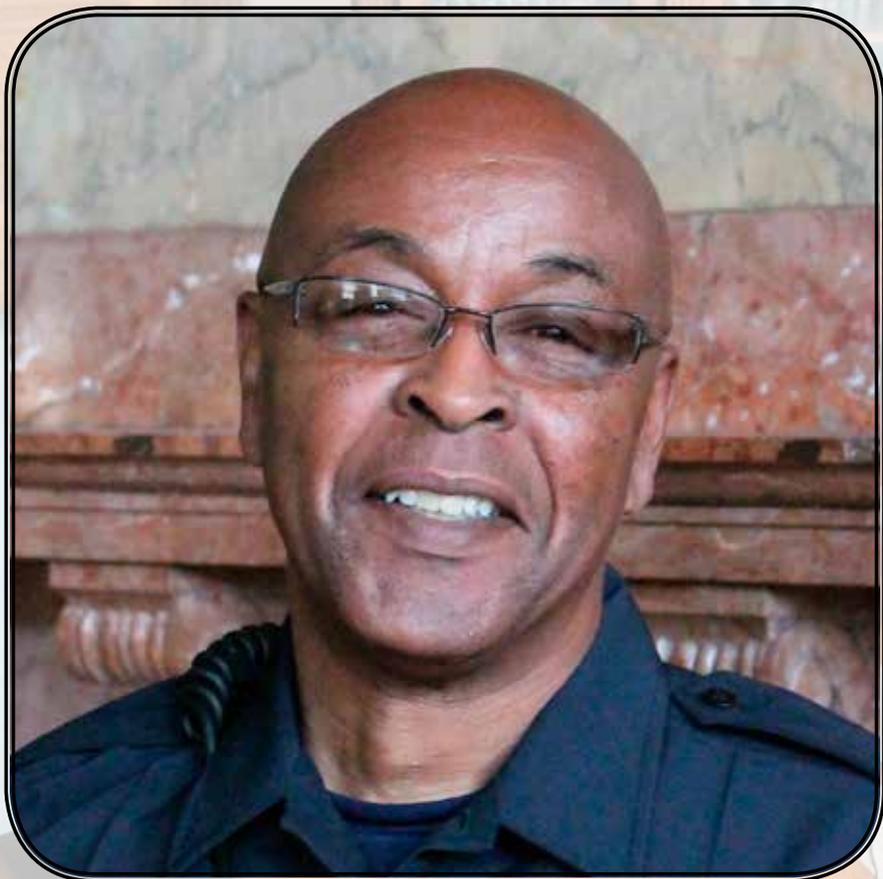
Life is valuable and precious.

- Abraham Richardson, age 16

He owns his own music studio downtown.

He's helping teenage males fulfill their dreams of becoming music artists.

- Chris Mullen, age 17



GUY COLLINS

Born 1960 — Police Officer, Borough of Braddock

Interview by Darnell Caldwell, Angelo Burgher

& Darwin Spencer

Excerpts from Track 2

I grew up in the Point Breeze area. The block I lived on was predominately white. It set a tone for my life as far as being able to relate to people from different ethnic backgrounds. I come from a family of strong, independent black women. I don't believe having a father would have made me

any better; my uncles were very educated. They were my mentors as far as keeping me on the right track.

I'm connected with the community. I know most of these guys out here in the street. I know most of the families. A lot of times when there are issues or problems, they will actually come and ask for me.

Don't eliminate yourself before you get started. Say to yourself each and every day, "I am somebody." Get out there and give whatever it is your best shot. Be determined. Be proud of yourself. Be proud of who you are and what you accomplish.

I'm only a cop when you force me to do my job. Other than that, I'm a child of God first, a grown man second. It's about taking care of each other.

I believe you control your destiny. Not one man, not a race, you. You control your destiny.

He explained how difficult it is to be a cop.

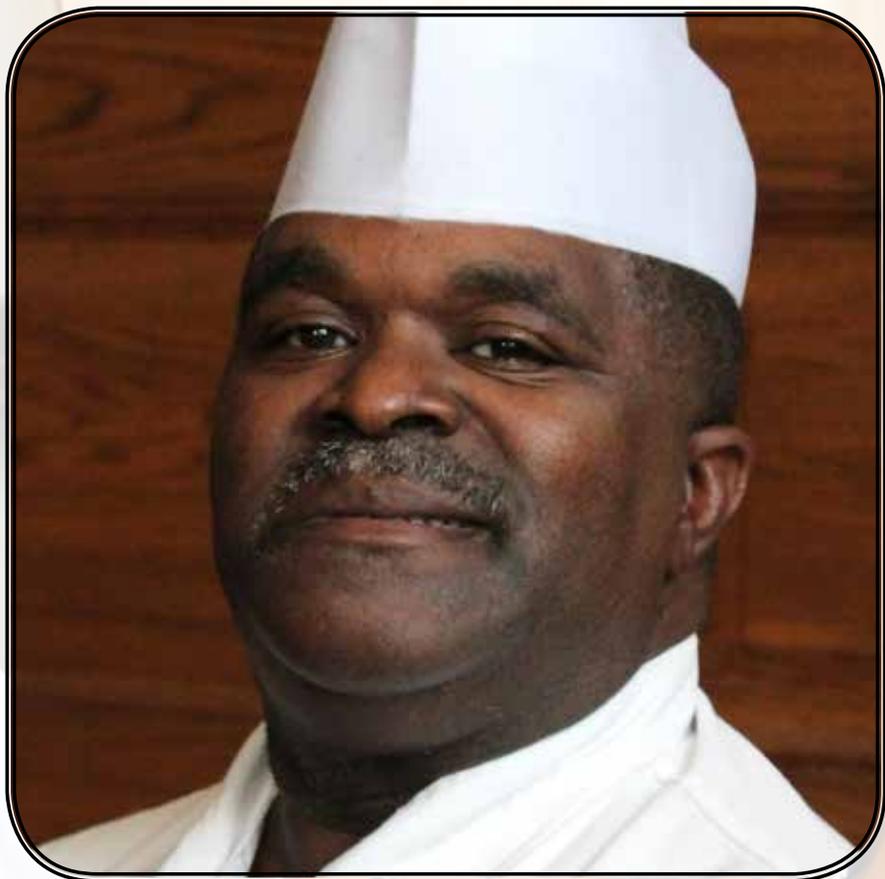
- Darnell Caldwell, age 16

He inspired me to always try, always put forth an effort and never quit.

- Angelo Burgher, age 17

I never thought a cop could be that cool, but you find out new things every day.

- Darwin Spencer, age 15



CHEF KEVIN MCGUIRE, SR.

Born 1960 — Executive Chef, UPMC

Interview by Chris Mullen & Ryan Moriarty

Excerpts from Track 3

I grew up with my grandmother and she was very strict. She is from Virginia, so during my youth I used to travel and work beside my grandmother in the tobacco fields. She'd always tell me "Pick your speed up, baby, pick your speed up."

I relate to the way Kevin talked about his family. I'm very close with my family, too.

- Ryan Moriarty, age 17

I liked that he stated he could do nothing without God and his family.

- Chris Mullen, age 17

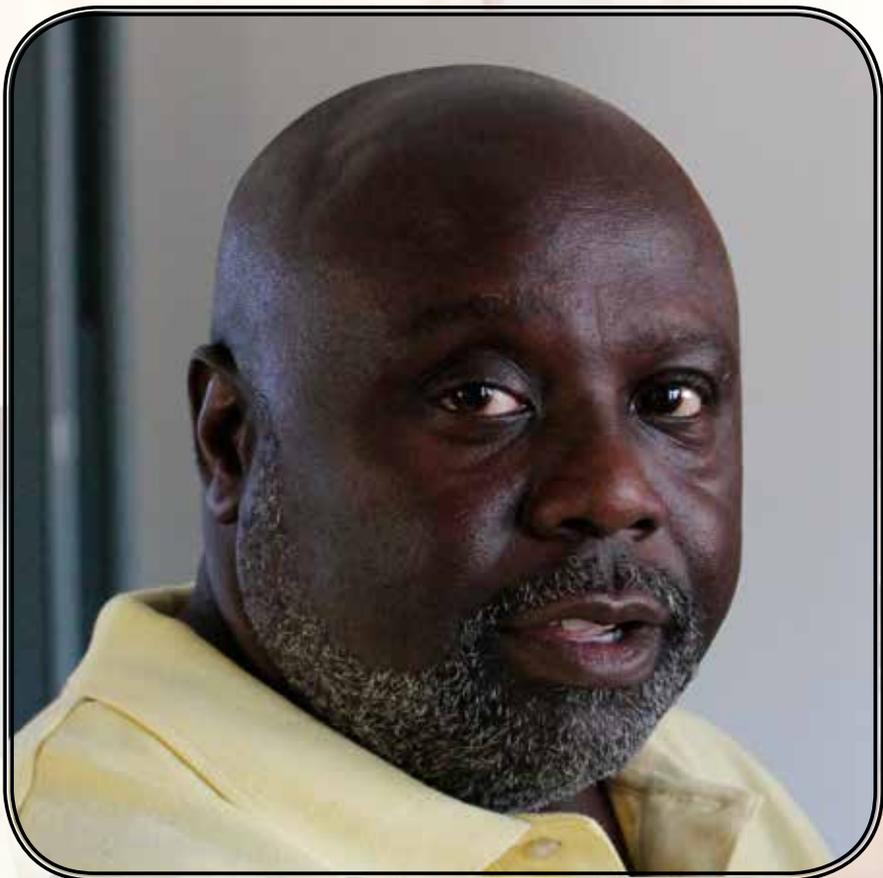
I went to Pennsylvania Culinary College downtown. I was number one in my class. My grandmother taught me how to cook. The school taught me how to break it down. I specialize in southern delights.

I'm writing a cookbook with Bible verses beside the recipe. The book is geared to bring families together – fathers, sons, mothers, daughters. They've got to communicate to make the dish and that might break down a wall for them.

I don't feel successful, I feel blessed. Everything comes from God. I went to Iraq for two years. I felt blessed when the bullets were flying over my head. It wasn't luck.

Life is sometimes like the weather. Some days it's going to rain all day long. But when it rains, you pop up an umbrella. You adapt to it. When it's cold, you put a coat on. When it's hot, you take the coat off. You adapt to life.

Whatever you do, be the best. Surround yourself with good people. Study. Do your work. Do it to the point that nobody can do it better than you.



MINISTER JAMES MILTON

*Born 1960 — President and Hair Designer,
Milton's Top Notch Hair Design, Inc.*

Interview by Jawuan Betton & Abraham Richardson

Excerpts from Track 4

I grew up in Hawkins Village in the projects and it was like a big family. Everybody looked out for everybody. My mother, a single parent, raised us. My older sister was the person that kept us in check. I didn't have a dad so I took things from certain people in the neighborhood and tried to apply them to my life.

***I want to thank him for keeping it real,
because these days people just want to
sugarcoat things.***

- Abraham Richardson, age 16

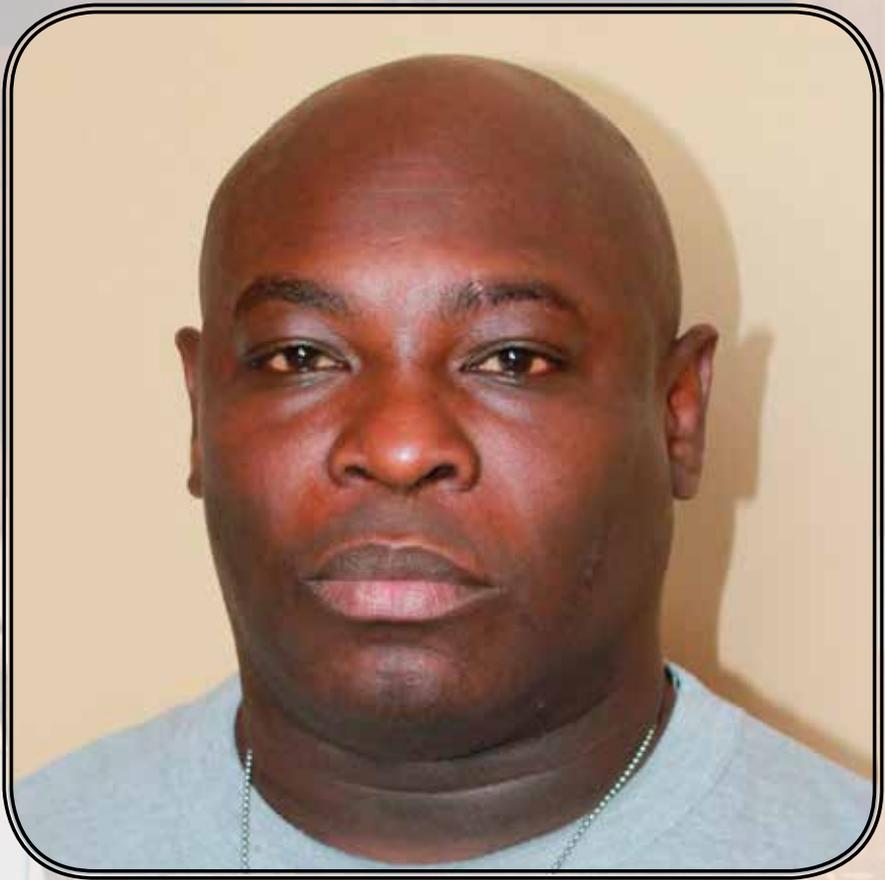
***He inspired me to stay out of the streets
and do more with Braddock Youth Project.***

- Jawuan Betton, age 15

Jesus changed my life totally. It's like riding a bike, you struggle, you fall. When you receive Jesus, you're going to fall and you're going to get scrapes, but He gives you insight. He'll steer me the right way versus walking through life with blindfolds on. I have struggles every day. I don't let them overwhelm me. The Lord that I serve will not give you more than what you can bear.

Where I come from, you're not supposed to make it. They put you in a box as "from the projects" and look at you like you're not going to ever be anything. But the heart of a man is totally different. Don't ever let anybody tell you what you can't do. Get a fire within you. When people say what you can't do, use that as energy to push through all kinds of obstacles.

The only thing you can control is your decisions. When you make good decisions consistently it will take you on a better road for your life.



COACH ROB WILLIAMS

Born 1966 — Retired Military;

Coach/Owner, Mon-Valley Mayhem

Interview by Darwin Spencer & Andre Avent-Taylor

Excerpts from Track 5

Growing up in Braddock was a very rough time. The structure in our family was very disciplined. Before my father passed away, he was my mentor. After he passed, I had church individuals and an older brother. It takes a village to help and raise kids.

In the military, I was one of those guys that had discipline. I got the nickname “Animal” because I was rough and rugged. I was selected to become a Special Forces marine. I did that for two and a half years. I was in Panama trying to get Noriega and in Iraq for Desert Storm. The Marine Corps kept me in line. I could have veered off on a bad path, but the Marine Corps kept me straight.

I own a semi-pro football team. The ages are 18 and older. Once these guys get out of school, they can come to me. I’m trying to get these young guys into college, a job, the NFL or what’s available to them.

It’s all about trying to live the best life you can live and being the best person you can be in your community and with people. Whatever you try to do, try your best, don’t go at it at halfway. Do it in the best way you can, the hardest you can do it.

Never give up on your dream. Whatever you feel in your heart you want to do, go for it. Go for it with all your strength.

He motivated me to respect my elders and to help the community in positive ways when I can.

- Andre Avent-Taylor, age 16

It really touched me when he said he lost his father at a young age because I did, too.

- Darwin Spencer, age 15



CLARENCE L. GUNTER, JR.

Born 1971 — Police Officer, Borough of Braddock

Interview by Andre Avent-Taylor, Angelo Burgher

& Ryan Moriarty

Excerpts from Track 6

My mother raised me as a single parent even though my grandfather and grandmother were involved. We had community centers, and a lot of them were free. Nowadays, you have to pay for everything. A lot of parents can't afford it, and that's what leads young adults to the streets.

You have a lot of peer pressure and you all want to be in that clique. It's about you having your boys, having your people, but when you know it's wrong, just walk away. I knew right from wrong and I knew when to say okay, it's time for me to leave, and I left.

I've been in this field for 17 years. I love it. Each day is a different challenge. The number one thing is communication. You have to be able to converse with somebody, sit down and just get in their head. You don't have to use your gun, you don't have to make that arrest; just teach them.

Borough officers can get more relaxed and on a first name basis with the public. I try to teach the other officers to get to know the community. When people see a familiar face, they calm down. I like to get out of my cruiser and speak with people.

Whatever's on your mind, strive for it. No matter how hard it gets you down, you can always find something to pump you up.

He said that you can always resolve a situation through conversation.

- Ryan Moriarty, age 17

He inspired me to be motivated. If I have a problem, I should fix it.

- Angelo Burgher, age 17

He opened my eyes to see police officers as regular people.

- Andre Avent-Taylor, age 16



ROBERT K. PARKER

Born 1978 — Sales Manager, AutoZone

Interview by Andrew Burgher & DaMon Radwanski

Excerpts from Track 7

I grew up in Wilkinsburg. I lived there until I was twelve, then moved to Homestead. I've been in Braddock since 1993. I graduated from Woodland Hills in 1996. I have nine brothers and three sisters. My mother, my grandmother and some of my siblings guided me to be the person I am today.

He is an inspiration to black youth and myself because he represents what a hard-working African American is.

- Andrew Burgher, age 15

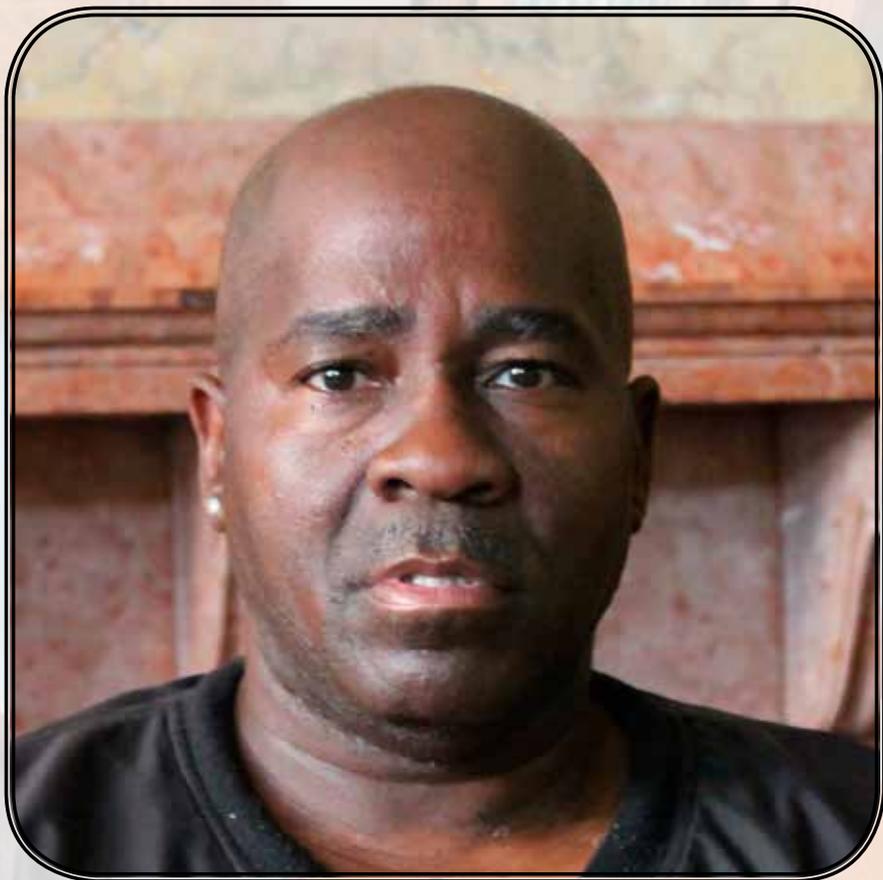
I gathered a lot of tips on how to deal with situations I might face later in life.

- DaMon Radwanski, age 16

I have people that I look up to, but I've learned to be my own person. My one brother was locked up for fifteen years because he ended up being in a gang. That's not where I want to be. I want to make money the legal way. I work for AutoZone. I started out as low man on the totem pole and in less than a year I was a manager. I knew how to treat people, my goals, where I wanted my company to be, where I wanted my store to be.

Because I kept my head in books, I learned to succeed where most people don't. Being in corporate America, the color of your skin is a big part of it. People will tell you, "Oh, racism is out. Nobody is racist anymore." One reason I want to run for state senate is because I want to make an impact. Racism is still here and we need to do something better than to keep being held down.

Stay in school. Listen to your parents. Listen to mentors. Talk to politicians. Talk to your teachers, your peers. Try to stay on the right track.



REV. SHELDON STOUDEMIRE

Born 1962 — Resident Advisor, Mon-Yough Community Services;

Outreach Worker, Excel Community Outreach

Interview by Darwin Spencer & Angelo Burgher

Excerpts from Track 8

I'm from Homewood and grew up in Swissvale. I couldn't have asked for a better family, better friends or better teachers. The thing that I struggled with most in my childhood was that everybody outgrew me. I was picked on constantly and it lasted for about ten years until I started wrestling and boxing. Then it came to a screeching halt.

He told me to never give up, always go that extra mile and take that extra step no matter what you do.

- Angelo Burgher, age 17

He not only brought forth wisdom and knowledge but also the word of God. He inspired me to just keep pushing forward.

- Darwin Spencer, age 15

I always wanted to be a combat soldier because, in the 1972 Olympics, there was a terrorist attack where there were eleven Israelis killed. At the tender age of ten, I wanted to get the bad guys. So I went in the army eight years later. The six years that I did in the U.S. Army, I wouldn't trade for a Ph.D.

I work with people who have mental health issues. Also, as a minister, I have a program called Excel Community Outreach. We do programs from anti-bullying programs to teaching self-defense, Bible studies, and tutoring with a strong emphasis on black history and black culture.

The main goal that I have is to reach out to as many African American males that I can. My latest book is *Ministering to the African-American Male*. I felt driven to write that book because I've lost so many students to gun violence, the judicial system and living reckless lives with no goals.

Focus on education. Have goals. Surround yourself with positive people. Don't settle for mediocrity.



TYRONE SMITH

*Born 1970 — Vice President of Sales and Marketing,
Dynamic Products and Services, LLC.*

*Interview by Andrew Burgher & DaMon Radwanski
Excerpts from Track 9*

My childhood was truly blessed. I'm the youngest out of six kids. My parents were married for 55 years. My mentors were my mother, father, brothers, and sisters.

My father told me, "You're going to make mistakes in life. I just want you to make half the mistakes I did."

When it comes to grownups, he said, "God gave you two ears and one mouth, you need to listen twice as much, especially when you're around somebody older than you." I know for a fact that respecting my elders is one of the things I will continue doing because, if it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be here.

In my junior year of high school, I was getting Division 1 letters from schools all over the country. I played defensive back and was good. I did fine on tests but I didn't do my homework. I only did my homework when it came to sports. But when sports were over, my grades went down.

My goal is to teach kids how to be entrepreneurs, to have them love themselves for who they are. What motivates me is seeing other people succeed. My goal is to help other people get to where they need to. You are going to be told, "no". And the key of life is to look at each "no" as a learning lesson and accepting each "yes" with both hands, grasping on to it and running with it.

He emphasized that you have to believe in yourself and know who you are to succeed.

- DaMon Radwanski, age 16

When I need an inspiration in life, it will be him.

- Andrew Burgher, age 15



RAMON RILEY

*Born 1975 — Artist; Art Teacher, Pine-Richland High School
Interview by Darnell Caldwell, Abraham Richardson
& Andrew Burgher
Excerpts from Track 10*

I'm from Braddock. I grew up in a single mother household in the projects. As a young person, a lot of the influences surrounding me weren't necessarily positive. Growing up in a culture where there's a fear of success was a challenge. If you were the smart one, you were the one that was going to get beat up. You had to almost act dumb. I refused to do that.

Art was my salvation. I had a natural talent for art. The only way I could do art was to get all the other homework done and then I was allowed to go and spend extra time in the art room. I was inspired by Picasso and Matisse. Romare Bearden made the biggest difference in my life. He was an African American artist who spent time in the Pittsburgh area. He has art works that show the steel mill and things that I was familiar with and grew up around.

Education changed my life. I believe it's the equalizer. We don't all come from families of privilege or wealth, but we can all learn.

Most of my mentors were teachers. I can sound confident now, but the reality is, there were a lot of times I wasn't very confident and I doubted what I was doing. I had those great mentors to remind me and to pump me up to stay motivated.

Don't limit yourself to just your own culture. Sample everything and expand what your culture is.

He made a great impact on me because he strives for success and we share an interest in art.

-Darnell Caldwell, age 16

He told me not to be afraid to succeed.

- Andrew Burgher, age 15

Art is very important. I want to thank him for sharing his art with me.

- Abraham Richardson, age 16

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the individuals represented and do not necessarily reflect those of The Heinz Endowments, Braddock Youth Project, Braddock Carnegie Library, or any other collaborating organization.

TRACK LISTING

1. LEE DAVIS
2. GUY COLLINS
3. CHEF KEVIN MCGUIRE, SR.
4. MINISTER JAMES MILTON
5. COACH ROB WILLIAMS
6. CLARENCE L. GUNTER, JR.
7. ROBERT K. PARKER
8. REV. SHELDON STOUDEMIRE
9. TYRONE SMITH
10. RAMON RILEY

YOUTH REFLECTIONS APPEAR ON TRACKS 11-20.



