

Life on Life Mentoring: Our community is filled with unmined acres of diamonds

Written by Chris Brooks

Wednesday, 12 September 2012 18:16



I grew up on the south side of Minneapolis.

My parents were both good, church-going folks. My two sisters and I were raised with solid values; held accountable for our grades and our behavior, and we did a pretty good job of towing the line.

Pictured: Chris Brooks

When I entered Sanford Junior High School, I began dabbling with trouble. I was being recruited into the gang culture, and I was beginning to break the rules that were strictly enforced in our house. At one point, my parents were at their limits with me, and they kicked me out of the house. My youth minister, Marque Jensen took me in. He set me up with a room in his attic, and worked with my parents and me to reconcile the relationship that I had broken through my poor choices.

When I hit my high school years, I found myself spending most of my free time in some of the

Life on Life Mentoring: Our community is filled with unmined acres of diamonds

Written by Chris Brooks

Wednesday, 12 September 2012 18:16

tougher parts of the Twin Cities. There were house parties off of Lake Street and 4th Avenue. There were planned fights in Frogtown. There was even pick-up basketball at the Northside YMCA, followed by serious shenanigans. I loved my violent “friends,” I embraced my wild life and I was on a quick path to disaster. At the apex of my temporary insanity, I was involved in a crime – a very serious crime. As I sat in the Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center facing adult prison time, Jensen again stepped up to the plate. He visited me. He brought me communion. He challenged me to take responsibility for my actions. He never gave up on me.

Just over four years later, after graduating from college with my Bachelor of Arts degree, Jensen performed the wedding ceremony for my wife and me. My wife and I have been married for 16 years. As I look back over my life, I think of critical pain points and I see Jensen’s face as a consistent piece of my life’s narrative.

He remains important to me, so many years later. When I need counsel, he sits with me over coffee. When I need wisdom, he delivers. When I need inspiration, I think of Jensen.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of having amazing mentors. Dr. Emmett Carson, Dr. Brenda Cassellius and Joel Jennings, are just a few. The list is a long one. All of these people embody the same characteristics that I have seen in Jensen. These characteristics, that are taught and modeled in the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) movement, are presence, wisdom, investment, hope, advocacy and commitment.

Because my constellation of mentors has helped mold my life, I am compelled to do this with others. This is the true heart of justice. This is the true spirit of community development. It requires time. It requires patience. It requires a belief that every single person is equally endowed with innate promise. Without people who believed in me, I am confident that I would be dead today. To borrow a phrase from economist Hernando De Soto, our community is filled with “un-mined acres of diamonds.” The world needs the creativity, innovation and value that many of our youth have yet to be realized. Will you participate in mining our community’s diamonds?

This year’s conference of the CCDA is a great place to start. Visit www.cdda.org to sign-up