

WIN FROM WITHIN

FALSE STARTS, FIRST DOWNS,
AND THE POWER OF SECOND CHANCES

HARRY SYDNEY III
FOREWORD BY JOE MONTANA

WIN FROM WITHIN: False Starts, First Downs, and the Power of Second Chances

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Foreword by Joe Montana

Published by TitleTown Publishing
Green Bay, Wisconsin
www.titletownpublishing.com

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Editing by Tracy C. Ertel and Erin Walton

Interior design by Euan Monaghan

Cover design by Travis J. Vanden Heuvel

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ISBN (paperback): 978-1-949042-12-2

This title is also available in electronic and audiobook formats.

PUBLISHER'S CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Sydney III, Harry

WIN FROM WITHIN/ SYDNEY

1st edition. Green Bay, WI: TitleTown Publishing, c2018.

Proudly Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Foreword

I FIRST MET my old teammate in 1987 when he made the San Francisco 49ers after trying to get into the NFL. He was older than most rookies that tried to make a career in this sport. The thing I noticed about Harry was his drive – he gave it everything he had.

Besides his role on offense, his main contribution was on special teams where he became the leader. He had an innate understanding of how to win, on the field and off the field. As I got to know him, the core of where that came from, become more evident with time.

For the 49ers, special teams were considered a valuable part of the game. To be the team of the decade in the 1980's; our offense, defense and special teams had to excel, and they did.

Harry excelled in leading his guys, with words and action. He could motivate and empower. This is the arena where I first saw his teaching skills. The men he led were always wanting to play offense or defense. However, they had to realize that until that happened,

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their role was to run down on kick-offs, bust wedges and love doing it!

Harry approached his role uniquely, having special meetings with his crew behind closed doors to ensure everyone knew exactly what was required of them. It is in this special teams role that Harry's mentoring skills took form. It takes a different mindset to run into a brick wall and embrace it.

He not only played with the 49ers but won two Super Bowls before the Green Bay Packers grabbed him in 1992 as a fullback. The Packers brought Harry in to teach the art of winning! He coached running backs for the Green Bay Packers for 6 years. He was and is a gifted teacher.

Still, he was called to the ultimate teaching arena when he founded and launched a male mentoring program, My Brother's Keeper in 2003. This created an amazing chance for Harry to take everything he learned on football fields and in life to honorably mentor and teach boys and men how to be the best at being good boys and men!

We came full circle as friends in October 2017 when Harry invited me to Green Bay for "An Evening with Joe" to raise money for My Brother's Keeper.

I got to witness the difference My Brother's Keeper was making while talking with and sharing a meal with some of the program's clients. I'm proud of my friend and former colleague.

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This book is about how a kid from a Fayetteville, North Carolina; given nothing – made something of his life. This book is about taking control of your destiny and realizing it's not what happens but how you handle what happens. We all have obstacles and we need to either run over, around or through them. Harry's story is for men and women, as well as adolescents. We all need a coach to realize our full impact and this story is a guide for the ordinary and not so ordinary in all of us, to reach extraordinary.

Harry tells his story and in the process we all realize anything is possible with hard work and conviction. We all have a past but it's up to us to decide our future because most of us have a simply complicated life! Thank you my friend, for taking the time to capture your winning journey. Your success was against every odd maker out there, but you took what was deep inside and shined it up. We are all better for knowing and learning from you.

— Joe Montana

Introduction

HELLO, MY NAME is Harry F. Syndey III. I'm the proud father of eight incredible young adults, four of my own and four more joined when I married my amazing wife. I have love for all of them; there's no blended here, we are a family. I'm also a proud grandfather of six grandkids. But the journey begins in a much different place. I grew up in Fayetteville, North Carolina. My father was a military man. In his eyes, that fact gave him permission to be evil. My mother was an alcoholic because she was married to him.

My dream from the age of six-years-old was to be a professional football player. Pipe dream, right? In 1977 I went to the University of Kansas to find myself and fulfill my dream. I received a degree in Criminology & Juvenile Justice. When it was all said and done, I had played three years in the United States Football league, one year in Canada, five years with the San Francisco 49ers, one year with the Green Bay Packers, and coached six years professionally for the Green Bay Packers. I won three Super Bowl rings: two with the

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San Francisco 49ers as a player and one with the Green Bay Packers as a coach.

Then, as a family, we walked away from it all. My wife, who you will see is an amazing woman, and I opened My Brother's Keeper (MBK). My Brother's Keeper is a male mentoring program launched in 2003, designed to help boys and men get out of their own way. Now it's 2018 and it's been one hell of a journey. We've come a long way from the little kid who was afraid to go to sleep and close his eyes, afraid of the devil in the house. Come join me as I share the story.

False Starts

I WAS BORN in Petersburg, Virginia. The only memory I have of the early years there is walking to a tree and breaking off a switch to bring to my grandmother so that she could spank my behind. My grandparents on my mother's side are a blur. All I remember about my maternal grandparents is that she looked like a Native American, he looked like Chuck Berry, they had an old-fashioned dryer and a wood burning stove. My grandparents on my dad's side scared me to death. My grandfather used to work on the docks and had the biggest arms I had ever seen. He bought a Cadillac every year and he worshipped a different religion-one where girls couldn't wear dresses in his house. My dad's mother was the loudest woman and always created some form of drama. Let's just say I stayed away from her. My grandparents weren't a consistent part of my life.

My dad grew up on the streets of Philly. His dad, my grandfather, lived in Germantown, Pennsylvania. I remember visiting him and the kids on the streets

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would challenge each other to boxing matches. Kids would pair up and hit each other from the shoulders to the knees to see who was tougher. I wasn't allowed to take part in these fights because I was a stranger. I had cousins and other relatives that ran the streets. You know how most people heard stories about their parents growing up from aunts or uncles, so you could put pieces of the puzzle together? I didn't know much about my dad growing up, except that his dad, my grandfather, worked hard and my father had one brother who ran the streets hard. One of his siblings died of SID, and he had a sister that wasn't sure of her identity, so she struggled. He had another, older brother that was as gung-ho military as he was. I only met him one time at a family reunion in Delaware. I remember that trip. There was drinking, music and people started to play volley ball. Someone hit the ball too hard and all hell broke out. They fought like they were strangers. Everyone was punching and kicking. A Sydney Civil War! Let's just say seeing that helped me realize why my father was the way he was.

Petersburg was also my mother's birth place. As the story goes, she was one hell of an athlete in high school. All I know about how their story together started is that they were married. I have no idea how they met, I never heard a love story. I assume they met at some dance or something. It was never mentioned, and I

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never asked. We lived there until we got shipped to France with my father's orders. I was too young to remember much about France other than my younger brother was born there.

My earliest memory of living in Fayetteville, North Carolina is driving on the Army base, Fort Bragg, and hearing the horns blow. Every soldier would stop what they were doing, even get out of their cars, stand at attention, and salute the flag.

Let me paint the picture of what my life was like growing up in Fayetteville, North Carolina in the mid 1960's. My first home was a white house on Smithfield Street, a dirt road right outside of Fort Bragg. The rules were different between Blacks and whites, especially off the Army base. Hell, I remember drinking from different water fountains and the KKK walking around my house. We lived in a neighborhood in Fox Fire, a 3-bedroom house, carport and everything. From the outside everything looked good, the All-American house – mother, father, good looking, polite and athletic kids. The crazy thing is that everyone thought we had the All-American family. When we were in public we knew how to act; mostly because we were scared. I grew up in a time when all my dad or mom had to do was look at us. Kids were supposed to be seen and not heard. Then, shut the door.

This was where I had my first real memory of how

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my dad played by different rules, and that the truth meant nothing to him. I remember playing in my front yard and a neighbor girl came over to where I was playing. She must have taken something from her mother and brought it with her. I never saw what it was. Her mom came over and asked her if she had this thing, and she said, “no, he does.” My father happened to be coming home at that time and walked over to see what was going on. The lady said that her daughter told her I had something that belonged to her. I told them I knew nothing about it. My dad looked at me and back-handed me across the face and said, “don’t ever lie to me,” in front of that lady. At that moment, for a long time, the truth meant nothing to me. I believe that’s when I realized my father’s only reason for having children was to be his servants. There was no compromise, no conversation. It was his way, or you got your butt beat, no discussion.

We all have someone in our lives that inspires us along our journey. My mother was that person for me. So much of my existence was because she was brave and courageous. She was a loud Black woman and angel, an alcoholic that didn’t know when it was time to shut up, and a protector; but more than anything else, she was my cheerleader. Please understand, I’m not writing this to crucify anyone, point any fingers, or blame anyone. I chose my path, or thought I did, but

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there was so much that was out of my control. I didn't understand that for a long time.

Let me introduce my family. My mom's name was Shirley Rose. She was an incredible woman. My mom sacrificed for her kids. Unfortunately, she had a drinking problem. Later I realized she drank because she was married to my father. When she drank she became that loud Black woman that was angry and pitiful at the same time. There was always a scene and drama. Most of my young life she worked at a dry cleaner, pressing clothes and Army fatigues, breathing in all those fumes and chemicals that I believe contributed to her now sitting in heaven. She was just trying to do what she could for her children because she couldn't count on my father, her husband. She was a frickin' saint. She was a warrior who protected her children from everyone, including her husband, our father, Harry F. Sydney, Jr.

Let me try to explain my father. He was Black Rambo, a Green Beret soldier. He was trained to be a soldier, he lived it and slept it. The Army taught him how to kill, not care. He didn't learn how to be a father or husband. He thought his kids were his slaves, there were no discussions. My dad came from Philly in the 1940's and 1950's. Do you think he played fair or cared about whether or not his kids were doing the right things? He didn't have to because for most of our lives we feared

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him, period, end of story. Our job was to make him look good. He was the 6,000-pound elephant in the room. You didn't know what he was going to crush or who was going to get it; but you knew someone would. He was the father and whatever he said, went. He was always testing us mentally. He never let himself get out of control. Everything he did was deliberate. I'd hear him come in the house around two or three a.m. then get up early in the morning to go for his run. The military shuffle.

My brothers, sisters and I went through a lot of stuff growing up. We all have stuff. I have an older sister I will call "Toughness" because she would stand up to my father regardless of the consequences. Toughness only stood five feet tall, but if she believed she was right or she felt she needed to protect my mom, she'd step in. I remember her dreaming of just getting out of the house before something happened and she *couldn't* get out. I was next, the oldest boy. Next, I had a younger brother that I was close with. I'm so proud of what he has become. His life was harder growing up. Not because of big brother/little brother stuff. In our lives, to this date, we've never had that brotherly rivalry. Never. No, I felt bad for him because my father always picked on him; he thought he was too light to be his son. I was never a big kid, but I knew how to handle myself. The rule was if my brother and I got into an issue, I would make a

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stand and his job was to run and get help. I would do what I needed to until help arrived. I guess that's where the molding of will power and stubbornness started to take shape. I have a younger sister that was one hell of an athlete. She always marched to the beat of her own drummer. Then I had a younger brother who is thirteen years younger. We know each other, but don't *know* each other if you know what I mean. He grew up in a different time. Things had changed by the time he reaped the benefits of being the last one at home.

As I look back now I realize everyone has stuff. Whether it's you, your family, the person you love, everyone has something in their way. I'll call it stuff. Unfortunately, I don't talk to my youngest brother as much as I'd like to. I love him dearly, but we have both dealt with my father's collateral damage.

My father was a monster behind closed doors. He would punch my mom and tell us kids that he was teaching her a lesson. He wasn't sorry when he hurt her. There were times when we would beg my mom to just shut up and let him leave. The alcohol would give her power to not care about what was going to happen, so she'd keep talking and he'd come back, and it was on. I used to hate myself because I'd be mad at my mom when she wouldn't stop. She seemed to say enough to allow him to believe hitting her was his way of teaching her a lesson. My older sister was fearless. She would just

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try to throw herself into the mix. Eventually I'd join as well as my brother. I felt ashamed because I always thought I should have protected her more. But, how could I? We were all scared to death. My dad never thought or cared about what we were seeing and how this was affecting us.

My stuff at this time was my dad, he was an evil man. My mom was a victim of that evil man. We had a dysfunctional family. Even though I knew why my mom was an alcoholic it didn't make the situation any easier. People would ask me what was wrong. They thought I had anger or aggression issues. No, I had a "my life is messed up" issue. I grew up not able to trust many. I lived life on my toes, I had to in order to survive. Did I act out? Absolutely. But, I didn't want anything to cause my mom more pain, especially because of something I did. I remember the time my mom told me she had found some stuff in my pocket that shouldn't have been there. She warned me by telling me, "don't make me tell your father." End of issues. I was never a great student. I did enough to not have my parents come to school. I knew if I didn't pass my classes I couldn't play sports, and sports were my only way out.

My father knew nothing about sports, except boxing. He was the heavyweight boxing champ in France in the late 1950's. As crazy as my dad was, he was one of the most disciplined men I knew. He ran four to

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five miles every day, no matter what. I never saw him drunk. I never saw him out of control. Everything he did was calculated. That's what messed me up most of my early life; I saw so much inconsistency and I was confused. The mind games he played with us would be considered a form of child abuse today. I believe this is when I first started living by the Duck Philosophy, something we talk about at My Brother's Keeper. On the surface everything looks calm and peaceful, but under the surface emotions are whirling just as fast as a duck's feet paddle under the water. So many boys and men fall victim to this. Just remember we all have stuff. Your stuff may be different from my stuff, but it's still stuff.

My father enjoyed expressing his power. All he thought about was himself and his image. My mother would put her check in the bank when she got paid. My father would go to the bank and withdraw it and do whatever he wanted. He thought it was his right. He also drove taxi cab around Fayetteville. He would hope people would try to rob him, so he could use his military background to hurt people. He got off on it. He used to terrorize us. If it was your turn to do dishes and he came home at two o'clock in the morning and there were more than two dishes in the sink, he'd wake you up and make you do them. I remember several times he told us to water the grass. If he got home

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at three o'clock in the morning, he would touch the ground to see if it was wet enough. If not, he would get us out of bed in our underwear and make us water it. There were also the car washes that we had to do every Sunday, you can imagine the level of perfection that was expected. Our job as kids was to make him look good, be his slave, turn his television stations; my brothers and sisters were his remote.

My younger brother got a lot of the rage because he was lighter looking than us, that "not Black enough" thing my father was hung up on. My father never cared about the collateral damage he caused. At MBK, we often talk about the collateral damage that happens with every decision we make. I was my father's collateral damage; so were my brothers and sisters. Trust me, I wasn't the only child that suffered at the hands of our father. Over time, as we grew up, some lost money, some lost stipes, some still carry the scars physically. Nobody that grew up in our house walked away without losing something. He was everything wrong with being a father, yet he always believed he was a contender for the Father of the Year award.

He thought it should take us boys thirty minutes from the time we woke up in the morning till the time we left for school. I remember one time I was working on some homework. He came home and asked me what I was doing. I told him I was doing homework.

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He went to the TV and turned it up loud and turned on the 8-track of his horrible music, some type of jazz. He simply looked at me and said, “if you think you’re going to be some football player, you better learn how to concentrate.” Our grades were important to him. If we didn’t get good grades he thought it made him look bad, even though he never opened a book or went to a conference. I realize my dad taught me some great things, although he could have taught them differently. My role model sucked.

I remember my dad getting orders in the 1960’s to Panama. Because there were so many potential disease risks, we all had to get a bunch of shots. I believe that’s when I became afraid of needles. Then his orders were changed. Since we wouldn’t be going to Panama, my mom decided that her kids needed a permanent place. We moved to 407 Boteny Ct, a new neighborhood. Nothing changed except our address. The fights got worse. My dad got worse. The higher he moved up in rank, the more power he thought he had. Not only that, but he thought he could do what he wanted, when he wanted.

My mom and dad didn’t argue, they fought. My dad wanted to be a player. He cheated on my mom and us because he thought it was his right as a Black man. My mother was a good-looking woman. I never understood why he treated her so badly. I remember

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being in the car one day when he took me over to his lady friend's house as if I didn't know what was going on, or I thought it was all right. All it did was make me hate him more. I couldn't do anything about the hate at that time except let it drive me and promise myself to never be like him. I realized at an early age my dad was an awesome role model because I learned from him what *not* to do. While my dad was out cheating, the guys he hung with would come around crippling, but my mom wasn't having any of that.

Often times, at My Brother's Keeper, I hear my clients say that they would have done this or that. Maybe they want to believe they would have, but in the 1960's there was no such thing as child abuse. They called it discipline. Let's just say growing up in my household was scary and confusing but I didn't know any better. In many ways I didn't know how messed up my family was. It's amazing how many scars you have when you look back.

In 1968 Martin Luther King was killed. By then I was nine-years-old and had experienced a lot of prejudice. I remember when I started playing football off base at six-years-old. I had a white coach. Instead of saying, "look at Harry run," he would say, "look at that little nigger run." The crazy thing was that he didn't think there was anything wrong with it. I was a Black kid growing up in the South and confused by what I

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was seeing from Black and white people, soldiers and civilians. Our parents, the older people in the neighborhood, were supposed to be our role models. They were supposed to be our guidance. I realize now, that there's a whole lot of darkness sitting in the nice houses and driving the nice cars. There was a lot I didn't like about my life growing up, but sports, especially football and basketball, gave me something I could control. I could get lost in sports. It would take me away from the reality I had to come back to when the buzzer went off; at least for a little while.

Life as a young kid was so confusing for me. I knew I was different, I could block things out mentally. I remember it happening when I was six-years-old. Early one week, there was a small group of us and four bikes. I was riding on the handle bars of someone's bike with no shoes on my feet. Like boys do, someone was reckless and got too close to the bike I was on. My left foot somehow stopped the bike from moving. It was a mess. My foot was cut up pretty bad. I was about two miles from home, so I had to ride all the way back on the handle bars again. My mother freaked out and took me to the hospital to get what I remember to be a lot of stitches. I had broken some toes and stitches on Monday and then played a hell of a game on Saturday!

I started playing football in pads when I was six-years-old. I didn't mind the pain. As a matter of fact, I

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enjoyed the hitting. I could throw myself into the game because I could hit people and not get in trouble. It felt good to be feared. On one of my teams my nickname was Animal. When I stepped on the field, I owned it. I sensed it, felt it. I had found my escape. I remember one day I was in the weigh-in line and I heard two kids on the other team say, “holy man, we have to play Animal.” I felt this thing click inside me. I was like a caged animal that had been let out. I could hit and hit and not get in trouble. Football became my world. Part of the thrill was the fact my father knew nothing about it. He didn’t understand the game and he wanted no part of it until I started having real success.

Sports was the only thing I had that was all mine. I realized at an early age if you can play sports and you’re good, people don’t care about the color of your skin. I let my ability speak for me. I became the guy everyone wanted to pick for their team. I realized the only way I was going to get out of North Carolina was sports, so I threw myself into every game.

I played most of my sports at the youth center on Fort Bragg. We were lucky, because my father was in the military sports were very cheap. So, we did it all. Football was my first love and basketball was my second. Crazy story about basketball, one year my father coached, and we won it all. My brother and I were the stars, but my dad, who knew nothing about the game,

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took all the credit. It seemed like because he didn't have a good childhood, he tried to steal ours. I played for Fort Bragg football all the way until high school because they played more games than the middle schools.

Luckily, the physical abuse toward my mother slowed down as we got older. Life started changing for my crowd in the sixth grade. Sports started to get serious. But I still wasn't sure who I was as a young man. I started noticing girls. I also started noticing girls liked guys that were good in sports. This led to other problems. I had a crisis because I was a young Black boy in the south. Most of my friends were white, because those were the guys playing sports. White girls were off limits, and Black girls were too loud, and my father thought that I should be something more than just an athlete. He thought I should speak for the Black movement in a town where the KKK roamed freely, so I rebelled. I got my ears pierced in the seventh grade. I wore jeans, a feather earring, and moccasin boots. It was my Black-semi-hippy-who-also-happened-to-be-the-best-athlete-around stage. It was my world and I know he hated it.

When I was in seventh, eighth, and ninth grades I worked odd jobs. Once I worked in a cotton field for four days picking cotton, bailing hay, working like a slave. Talk about incentive for school and sports. I had to make it, there were no other options.

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I was confused at times and often a loner. Don't get me wrong I hung out with other kids who played sports; we had something in common. I felt the hatred and the jealousy around me. I was hated by both Blacks and whites, with a few exceptions. Many would have called me an Uncle Tom or an Oreo cookie. Black on the outside and white on the inside. I was hated by Blacks because in their eyes I wasn't Black enough. I didn't do what they did. My dad was military, and we lived in a neighborhood. I wasn't on the corner, my clothes weren't dirty, I wasn't mad at whites for slavery. I was hated by whites because I was Black. The weird thing was my parents were prejudiced in their own way. They wanted us to be more than just Black kids growing up in the south. My father wanted that, but he didn't do anything except crack the whip. My mom, bless her soul, would blame some football game on a white ref throwing the flag for a penalty, even though it actually *was* a penalty.

As if I weren't confused enough about who I was, we threw religion into the mix. I didn't understand how it all fit. We'd get all dressed up to go to church and talk about God on Sunday. Everything the preacher said seemed to sink into the souls of the people there. Then, by Monday night I saw everyone drinking and fighting. They were back to doing exactly the opposite of what they had heard about on Sunday.

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Years ago, my brother closest to me in age and I were talking. We talked about why the kids in our family were great in sports. The answer, as crazy as it is, was because that was the only time we were at our best as a family. That athlete was the center of attention and the rest of our family was cheering. Our parents embraced those moments differently. They, especially my father, wanted us to get rest and to get places on time. He had to look good. It wouldn't look good if he wasn't in the stands talking about his kids and their achievements. Rarely were there fights between my parents before events. They wanted us at our best. It was usually an all-day event on Saturdays. I played, my brother played, and my oldest sister was usually a cheerleader. All day long my mom and dad would get praised for their kids. It didn't matter what sport it was, football, basketball, baseball. My sisters were either cheerleaders or played basketball. My little sister was really good.

So many things changed around the time I turned fifteen and was getting ready to start high school. I remember the summer before going into high school. For most kids, that was a summer of being scared to walk the streets. It was a rite of passage. If any juniors or seniors caught you out by yourself, they would try and beat you up. You didn't want to be caught in the bathrooms alone either because they would try and jump you there too. I guess because of the horrors at

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home I was immune to being scared and they learned to leave me alone. I wasn't a fighter but if I needed to I didn't mind fighting. I almost liked it. It helped create my "don't mess with me" attitude.

We had about 5,000 kids in our high school from tenth through twelfth grades. Even in such a big crowd there was nowhere to hide, I stood out. I don't really know why except that my dream was still alive to do what I needed to do to get out of Fayetteville, North Carolina. Up to this time I had been molded by fear. I was Black, but I didn't act Black. I was a great athlete, but nobody cared much, so every day I had to be on my toes. I had associates but not friends. The only common crowd I had was with sports. I didn't have many relationships with girls. I was too shy and introverted. I didn't want to bring anyone into my house. Everyone else thought we had the All-American house, but inside was absolutely nuts.

I remember the first day of football practice. The coach, Henry Van Sant, called out fifteen guys, gave us each a football, and told us to throw it. I threw it the farthest and straightest. He said, "Okay Harry, you're our quarterback" and that was what put me on the map. There's nothing like being the school quarterback, right? Suddenly, I went from the invisible kid to *the guy*! And, because I was *the guy*, I found myself surrounded by people yet still being alone. I was friends

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with everyone, especially the underdog. I could speak my mind and stand up if I saw unfairness. I hated bullies and there were many during this time in my life. There was my father that thought I needed to represent Blackness, there were the Black kids that couldn't stand white people, there was the rival neighborhoods that would fight you because you lived in a different neighborhood. I remember one day riding the bus to school. When I got there, I saw what I thought was one hell of a football game. I finally got close enough to see it wasn't a game at all. It was two neighborhoods fighting each other. At a party over the weekend someone had asked someone else for rolling papers and they said no. To settle it, they brawled at school. Fights were always happening. Then you had the white kids that only associated with me because I crossed their paths in sports, the jocks, my world. But they were only in my world because we shared working out. Sports was what we lived for. During this time, I was lonely for a relationship. I wanted to have someone to call or to be with after a football game or basketball game like the rest of my friends. There was no one until I met the girl that changed me. At first, I changed for the best, and then the worst.

I had never really been involved with girls before. I fell in love with a girl I couldn't be with. She was forbidden fruit. She was a white girl with a military

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father. Let's just say, he didn't want us involved. For that matter, neither did my dad. It was crazy; he told us to dream big but stay with our color. Don't settle but stay in your race; even though he expected us to be better than our race. As much as he taught me to see color, I chose not to. Maybe because I couldn't hurt him in any other way.

Joni and I met in my sophomore year. She was walking through the hallways and some of the knuckleheads weren't paying attention and bumped into her. I came to her aid. She seemed very shy, somewhat small, but looked at me in a way that I couldn't understand or explain. For whatever reason, she touched me. Maybe it was the way she started saying my name or maybe it was when I looked at her she didn't look away. I was Black, but she didn't see Black. Maybe I felt like I needed to protect her. I don't know, but after that chance meeting I made sure to cross her path. Our conversations got longer. She was a loner and so was I. She knew nothing about sports. She was white, and I was Black. She was the first white girl I dated; we kept it quiet. What the hell was I thinking? Our friends knew. Actually, my friends thought they knew. I never met any of her friends. I met her younger brother and sister but not her parents. It didn't matter, I had fallen hard.

Maybe I thought it was different, okay even, because with sports color doesn't matter. It's about whether you

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are good or not. If you are good, it's about winning. Does this guy give you the best opportunity to win? If the answer is yes, no one cares what color you are, as long as you don't break the wrong rules and bring unnecessary attention to yourself. Remember this was in the 1970's. It was a different time in North Carolina.

I don't know if I knew what love was, but in my mind, Joni was it. The way she said my name seemed to change the meaning of my name. My father thought it was disrespectful to him because she was a white girl. He thought I was like him, but I wasn't. I wasn't a ladies' man. He acted like it was just a thing, but it was so much more. Sports had taught me how important loyalty is. Team is team, and Joni and I were a team. When she came into my life, sports really started clicking. I was in love with a girl I had to sneak around with. Forbidden love, breaking all the rules, and people didn't like it. Remember the KKK in 1975 in North Carolina?

I was very serious about sports during this time. I was all-conference in football and basketball and my father thought he was Father of the Year. He thought my success was his success. What a joke. He thought it was because of him, but he didn't know it was my motivation to get away from North Carolina that inspired me. At the end of my junior year, my head coach left. The new coach came in and moved me to running back

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for my senior year. This was before any colleges and scholarships were making offers. When the season ended, my numbers were where they needed to be in this new position. Let's just say my senior year was eventful, like rain pouring down on me.

The violence was still going on, but I wasn't home to see it. Colleges were contacting me. I was getting scholarship offers in football and basketball and life started to get more complicated. I visited Clemson, NC State, and other schools in the state. But I wanted to go far enough away so I couldn't come home easily. I saw other athlete's come back home every weekend. How are you going to grow if you don't learn *how* to grow?

The other reason I wanted out of North Carolina was because Joni and I had planned to get married and raise our child. Yes, you read that right, our child. We weren't planning for Joni to get pregnant, but she did. The bottom line was Joni and I were having a child that nobody wanted to acknowledge. We had a son. Most of my junior year, except when I was at practice, I was Dad. Joni and I, somehow with our mothers, were defying odds. Even though I wasn't there for the birth, I wanted to be a part of everything else. He was my son, but only when we were in our world and behind closed doors.

My decision making about college now included taking Joni and our child into consideration. I

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remembered visiting Kansas and falling in love with everything about it. I hadn't made up my mind until New Year's Eve 1976. I was at a party across the street from my house when I heard two gunshots. They sounded close. Then I realized they had come from my house. I ran home, ran inside and saw my father with two gunshot wounds. My mother had had enough. While she was getting undressed they had been arguing and my father sucker punched her. She shot him twice, once in the leg and once in the chest. We made up a story that my mom thought it was a burglar so there would be no charges. My dad wouldn't lose any sti-pen-den-tary-ben-e-fit-s-and we didn't want Mom to go to jail. But that night decided things for me. Joni and our child were going to Kansas.

I just needed to figure out some things about their living arrangements for married students and how that would affect my scholarship. Our plan was for me to go to Kansas and get everything in place. Then I'd come back to get her and our son and her daughter. Let me explain about her daughter. Joni was older than me. The end of my junior year she left North Carolina, with our son to go to Illinois where she was from. We had a long-distance relationship for that year. When she came back late in my senior year, she said she had been raped and was pregnant. I loved her, so guess what? Instead of three of us, there were four. I didn't change

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my plans. I loved her, so I'd loved what came with her. I turned my focus to going to Kansas.

I have a picture in my office behind my desk of my mom, me, and my father on the day I signed my letter of intent to Kansas. If you looked at the picture you'd think, *what a good-looking family, they must be happy.* So far from the truth. My dad wasn't in the picture because he was a proud dad; he was in the picture so that he had proof. He could brag to his friends, or anyone else in his world that he was trying to impress by being *the man.*

My father had made many promises to me. He taught us, instilled in us, to autograph our work, strive for the best and always be the best. He would find ways to give me incentives. He even promised if I got a scholarship he would buy me a car. That didn't happen. He didn't forget what he said, he just chose not to. So many broken promises.

In the summer of 1977 I left to go to Kansas with fifty dollars in my wallet, my clothes, a scholarship, and the weight of the world on my shoulders. I wasn't going to college just to play football, but to make a life for my family. My plan was to come back to North Carolina for Christmas break, get Joni and bring her and the kids back to Kansas with me. I'd done my homework. They had living places for married players. I couldn't believe it! We had been talking and everything was set

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up from our living place to potential easy jobs for her and free daycare for the kids. Everything was in place. All I had to do was play football, which I almost forgot about while I was trying to take care of everything else!

My freshman year was an eye-opening experience. First of all, I graduated from high school weighing 171 pounds. I showed up to camp where I saw the most incredible athletes from all over the United States. There were thirty other high school standouts, just like me. Talk about a shock to the system and creating doubt in your head. I remember wondering *What the hell did I do? Am I good enough? Do I belong?* As I walked in everyone was sizing each other up. Then it dawned on me, *they gave me a scholarship, so I must be good enough!* And I discovered I was. My freshman year I returned kickoffs for varsity and played mostly J.V. and did well. I was excited because I realized I belonged.

I struggled my freshman year. I could handle the sports but didn't know how to study, or even what to study. All of a sudden, the teachers or professors didn't care whether you were an athlete. This teacher didn't care what another teacher gave you for homework. We had study halls and everything, but I almost flunked out of school because I didn't know how to study. High school and college were on completely different levels in the classroom and on the field.

Besides football, I was on a mission to find myself.

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One day I was on campus, at Westco Hall, where everyone hung out. I saw a Black fraternity's initiation, it was one of the most impactful things to happen to me. They had sixteen Black young men in rows, four by four. They were in chains, barking like dogs to commands with collars around their necks. Talking about messing with your head! Coming from the South, Blacks fought to get out of chains; and now in Kansas part of pledging was allowing yourself to be in them barking like an animal in front of a bunch of white people. Let's just say, no Black fraternity for me. I still remember that like it's burned into my head.

Most of my plan had been working out. Joni and I had been communicating about everything and were on the same page. Soon it was Christmas and I took a Greyhound bus home to Fayetteville to get Joni and the kids. We had planned to get married and really start our family. You want an adventure? Try riding a Greyhound bus from Lawrence, Kansas to Fayetteville, North Carolina stopping at every backwoods place, picking up people that scared the crap out of you. On this trip I had a bayonet knife strapped to my leg, just in case. I hoped like hell I wouldn't have to use it but knew I would if I had to.

When I walked in to my parent's house that night, I found courage that had never been there before. Maybe it was because I had been lifting weights and competing

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at a higher level. My mom and dad were there. I had heard from my brother that my dad had beat mom several times while I was gone. When I walked into the house he looked at me and said, "I thought we'd be fighting by now." You have to understand, I saw my Dad mess people up. But on this night, I calmly said to him, "if you ever hit my mom again, I will kill you and bury your body." At that moment I had finally had enough. I wasn't scared anymore. I faced my demon; him. But unfortunately, he was not my only one.

When I got back to North Carolina to get Joni and the kids, she was gone. No forwarding address, no nothing. Just some rumor that her father took orders overseas and she was gone. Everything I had worked for didn't exist anymore. Now what? Then I realized all my life all I'd ever had was football. The only thing I could count on was me. I became angry, confused and lost; and I didn't care. All I had was football and I was losing that because I couldn't shake the broken heart. Trust me, I understand being heart-broken, but I had my dream to play football in college. I had to go back to Kansas by myself and really face school and football. The lady I loved disappeared without a trace. She took my son and a daughter I was willing to make my own. I was willing to take responsibility for this package. I knew there was nothing left in North Carolina for me, except my little brother. Later in life he blamed me for

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leaving him. Like I was supposed to stop and help him through the maze of life!

Talk about anger, mad, insane hurt. I was a good guy trying to do the right thing, but in my head, I was no better than my father. A couple years later my mom and dad finally divorced. She had all the leverage she needed. She had found pictures of my father and his bad decisions. My little brother played the game on both of them. He was the baby and took full advantage of the situation. It wasn't his fault. As a kid his job was to get away with whatever he could. It's the parent's job to say "no" and neither of them did.

So, let's just say my freshman year was eventful. On my way back from North Carolina to Kansas, I rode with a fellow teammate who lived in Georgia. On that ride back, I realized just how alone I was; my life was up to me now. Who was Harry Sydney? I had no idea. I threw myself into football. In my mind, things changed. Girls were nothing but friends with benefits and nothing more. My thought was, *if they didn't like it, too bad*. Now it was Harry's time. It had to be about me and finding myself.

I was accepted by some of the older teammates, I was a freshman hanging with juniors and seniors. Barriers were broken down. They went through the doors first, and I walked through before they closed. After all I had gone through, I didn't care about people's feelings;

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especially when it came to college girls. I wasn't mean. I was just matter of fact about my wants and needs. I wasn't afraid to be blunt, even if they couldn't handle what I thought was truth. The summer of my freshman year was a rude awakening. With all that happened in my life, I hadn't handle my grades well. So, it was summer school, making up grades, correspondence work and working out-getting stronger and faster.

I knew the opportunity I had right in front of me. Regardless of my journey thus far, everything I dreamed about was right in front of me. Even though we stunk at Kansas, I was playing good football against great teams. I was hoping NFL scouts saw me when they watched films of the teams we played. I went from a shy kid from North Carolina my freshman year to starting quarter back for the University of Kansas my sophomore year. I had some good games as a quarterback. We almost beat Oklahoma when they were ranked number one in the country. I rushed for 100 yards and threw for over 100 yards. The feeling was incredible! I had an ability to put things in perspective even back then. Over time I learned not to worry about things I couldn't control, how to control what I could, and to control what was controlling me. I got my grades up, went to class, and felt I had a renewed purpose. My escape was still my escape.

College life was pretty good. I was the starting

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quarterback and drove a cherry red Trans Am; I felt like I was Burt Reynolds from *Smokey and the Bandit*. I really didn't date much. All I was doing was playing football, making grades and partying more than I should have been for a guy trying to make it into the NFL.

Then I met my first wife, Nancy. We met after I had been seeing one of her sorority sisters and we caught each other's eye. Nancy was a good girl with a good heart from a small town; Ellinwood, Kansas. After I met her my sophomore year, we became the ones that always ended up together at the end of the night. Nancy and I became serious. I couldn't let someone I loved walk away again, especially after the heart break of a year and a half earlier. Even if I might not have been *in love* with her I loved her.

My junior year I was switched from quarter back to running back. I really didn't mind. There weren't many Black quarterbacks in the NFL and our offensive line was terrible. I felt it would create a better chance to get into the NFL to switch positions. I was so close to my dream. I played well enough to hear rumblings from scouts about the possibility of getting drafted after my senior year.

Nancy and I were living together although I still hadn't met her parents. I finally met them on Thanksgiving Day in Wichita, Kansas. Talk about allowing

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yourself to be disrespected! I felt like the Black kid growing up in North Carolina again. They'd ask Nancy questions about me as I was sitting next to her. I wanted to scream, "*I'm right here!*" Now I realize I gave them permission to think my feelings didn't matter. Don't get me wrong, they weren't bad people. They were very polite. They were just parents of a Kansas girl who had sent her to school to get an education, not to come to Thanksgiving dinner with a Black kid from school. I filed it away in my head but let it go. It's amazing. When you don't stand for something, you fall for anything. Once you disrespect yourself you open the door for others to also disrespect you.

First Downs

THE SUMMER OF 1980, just before my senior year, Nancy and I got married at the courthouse in Lawrence, Kansas and went to Branson, Missouri for our honeymoon. We figured it was the next step on our journey. Then my football world changed. I went from a running and catching fullback to an extra lineman in the back field, just blocking. The pro scouts were wondering *what's wrong with Sydney?* There was nothing wrong with me. I was asked to do something other than catch and run, but I saw my career going down the drain. I couldn't moan or groan-they made me team captain-which actually sucked. All the coaches would need to tell a scout is that I'm not a team player, or I was a locker room lawyer. Things like that are a black mark. No team wants those guys. So, during my senior season I was married, doing all the stuff I thought I was supposed to do as a husband, team captain and expectant father. That's right, Harry Sydney the IV came in June of 1981. We called him "Little Syd."

The draft came that spring. On the second day, Mike

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Keller from Seattle was sitting in my house with a free agent contract for me hoping I wouldn't get drafted, so he could sign me. When I hadn't been drafted, I signed with the Seahawks. Now the pressure was on. I had a son who wasn't going anywhere. I realized the football dream was now a way to take care of my family. After Syd was born I had to leave to go to Cheyenne, Washington for training camp. It was my first experience with the NFL. I realized it wasn't just about being a good athlete; you had to be smart, know your stuff. I came to the Seahawks with players like Kenny Easley and Mike Tice, Jim Zorn was the quarterback. I was a hungry free agent just trying to make the roster. My family depended on it. I did a heck of a job on special teams and rushed very well. Everyone thought I had made the team. I had already called Nancy, excited, telling her to head West from Kansas where she was staying with Syd. Heck, I even had a Fan Club. Really, it was incredible! Their second-round draft pick David Hughes hurt his ankle, and I thought I made the team. Then I was the last guy cut. That is the worst feeling anyone could have. It's like someone telling you you're not good enough. I felt so low. My mistakes were in not understanding what was expected to make the team. Talk about a learning experience from falling on my face.

We went back to Kansas and finished my degree in

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Criminology and Juvenile Justice. I did every odd job there was. I worked for two brothers. For one I worked at the campus Hide-A-Way restaurant for the college kids. We made sandwiches and pizzas. Food that could be made and delivered fast. For the other brother I was a cook and dishwasher. The best thing about these jobs was that I could make food and bring it home to feed my wife and son. I also reffed intramural basketball games. I did anything I could. I felt responsible, so I had to fix the situation. That is one of the curses of men, we think if we touch it, we are supposed to fix it. Those were the only jobs I could do. Who wanted to hire someone full-time if they knew they were leaving as soon as something better came along? Even though all signs didn't point that way.

In the spring of 1982, momentum shifted when Cincinnati called and invited me to training camp. I thought this was the opportunity I was waiting for. I went to training camp. The backs were Charlie Alexander, Pete Johnson, and Archie Griffin, the two-time Heisman Trophy winner. I was battling Carl Hergrove for the fullback position backing up Pete Johnson. Carl and I were roommates; on cut down day I heard knocks on doors coming down the hall. When they got to ours, I opened the door and Frank Smouse, the guy responsible for swinging the ax asked me if I would take a walk with him. I left and when I came back Carl

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and all his stuff was gone. I made the team-talk about thanking God! I called my wife. Things were different then. Once you made final cut, they gave you time to find a place and make all your living arrangements. So of course, my wife and extended family were happy. The family that I talked to anyway. I hadn't talked to my father since my freshman year of college in 1977.

Cuts went down on Sunday. I went to practice Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. After practice Thursday, the trainer told me coach was looking for me. I thought I was getting a bigger role for the game, but that wasn't the case. They told me they were cutting me because a defensive back got hurt so they needed my spot on the roster. Ouch! I was shattered, scared. I was that close to my dream and it slipped through my hands. I went back to Kansas with my tail between my legs, shattered. The word "failure" couldn't touch how I felt. In Kansas I did every job I hadn't done the year before. I worked as a cashier at Quick Trip and for Manpower Temporary Employment at Kibbles & Bits. I was quality control. I counted how many Kibbles & Bits were in a bag. That's right, I made sure your dog was full and happy while I was an empty man going through the motions. Trust me, I felt the pressure of my responsibilities. I thought I could do it all. That's when I started asking, *Why God?* I thought I was a good guy.

Then something wonderful happened. The United

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States Football League was formed. The Denver Gold called me to try out for them. I made the team and signed a contract for about \$35,000. That was a lot better than a temporary job; I was playing football. It wasn't the NFL and it wasn't much, but I was playing and getting paid. I led the Denver Gold that year in rushing and did the same thing the second year. I represented the Gold at the USFL version of the Super Bowl. While I was there, I met Donald Trump in the elevator; he was owner of the New Jersey General. In my opinion, he caused a good league to fold because he was trying to force his way into the NFL. As the representative for the Denver Gold, I was expecting a new contract. Finally, I was going to get paid big money! At least I thought I was. In the third year they brought in another coach, Mouse Davis. He wasn't sure I could run the offense. They went out and signed a running back from the Denver Broncos and gave him a reported \$600,000 to play for a year. I felt like someone who had built a beautiful house and right before I moved in someone came over and hit me over the head. When I woke up, someone was living in my house. I couldn't take it. I forced them to trade me. My wife, son, and I moved to Memphis, Tennessee to play with the Showboats.

Talk about a change in every way possible. From culture, weather, how people drove to the pace of life.

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I remember the first day I got there. I met with Pepper Rodgers, who may be one of the craziest coaches I've ever been around. But it was a good team and he knew how to motivate. He didn't know much about X's and O's, but he had a good staff to coach the players.

This might have been one of the hardest years of my life. I came to many crossroads and discoveries about right and wrong and about who I was and who I wasn't. The first day, after our first team meeting, I rode with a leader of the defense to go get something to eat. I knew he was reaching out and we were forming a bond. We pulled up to the drive-thru and he asked me to grab his wallet. I opened the glove box and found his wallet, a gun and an eight ball of cocaine. He asked if I wanted some. Without thinking I said, "not now, I'm cool." My mistake. I should have said "no man, I'm not into that." I didn't, so I opened the door for the next time.

The season started well for me. Even though it wasn't the NFL, I was playing football again. Then I got hurt. We were playing against the New Jersey General's. I was going out for a pass play up the middle and cut to the right when a linebacker cut me off and ran across my left leg and I did the splits. The only problem was I didn't *really* do the splits. The pain was unbearable. I was afraid to open my eyes. I thought all my manhood was lying in a pool of blood in the middle of the field. This was the most scared I had ever been in my life.

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Everything flashed before my eyes at that moment. I had surgery to repair my torn groin muscle and was able to recover before the end of the season. It was scary as hell. All I could think was *what now?* I was in a dark place and it felt like nobody cared. I didn't know whether I was being punished or if this was just bad luck. For a guy trying to chase his dreams, I felt like I was running on a treadmill going nowhere. I had to fight this devil that was trying to take me where I didn't want to go.

Two things happened that really changed me in a period of a couple weeks. I went from the dark to the light. While I was laid up and recovering, a teammate of mine came over with an ounce of cocaine to make me "feel better." I never said I was a saint. We snorted and smoked it, for a brief moment it did its job. I forgot where I was and what I was facing. I had no idea what my future would hold and for that moment, I didn't have to worry about it. I dabbled, but coke wasn't my thing I didn't like how it made me feel. I was like my father in that way, I was a control freak. I hated feeling out of control. I also hated people knowing my business. With the coke, so many boundaries were being crossed but I didn't care at that moment. Like most men we teach in our program at MBK, it only takes a second to change the course of our lives.

One night I put my kids and wife to bed. The team

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mate that had brought the cocaine was over again. All of a sudden, there was a knock at the door and he went and opened it like he was expecting someone. I guess he was, because in walked this lady that I assume he had a relationship with. The drugs started flowing and I noticed he was being more aggressive with her. Being more touchy-feely, grabbing her, and not listening to her as she told him “no” or “not now.” It was like he forgot I was there; his behavior was getting close to crossing the line. I didn’t want whatever was about to happen in front of me in my house. But here’s the dilemma, he stood 6’4” and weighed 325 pounds. He was a big boy. I was still hobbling and recovering from surgery. I wasn’t going to win a fist fight or a wrestling match. I had two choices. I had grown up seeing enough violence from my parents. I’d be damned if he was going to hurt this lady, even possibly rape her, in front of me. One choice was to try to talk him down, try to get him to understand he didn’t want to go down the road he was on. He had too much to lose. I did everything to make that happen and fortunately I got him to calm down and think about things. We were able to avoid the second choice which was for me to shoot him. Can you imagine trying to explain to the police that I didn’t mean to kill him while I had coke in my system? Talk about wrong, wrong and wrong. That would have ruined everything for me, him, his family,

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my family; everything would have been for nothing. It's amazing how quickly bad things can happen.

That was the first thing that happened during this time of doubt. I couldn't allow myself to continue to live in this world of darkness. If I didn't believe in me, who would? The second life changing event was when Reggie White invited me to go hear Pistol Pete Maravich talk about his newfound faith in God. I went from guns and drugs to Reggie White and God. This is how God works. He knew I was frustrated with my football career, so He brought me into the world of Reggie White. Reggie White, in my opinion, was one of the most incredible men to ever walk on this earth.

In the spring of 1985, the USFL folded. I went back to Colorado to try to figure things out. My second son was born in Colorado in 1985. From spring 1985 until the summer of 1986 I did several jobs. I worked at a golf course cutting grass, cleaning out bunkers and doing maintenance. I was an insurance salesman, and coached high school football hoping to catch on.

In 1986, the Montreal Alouettes contacted me. They offered me a position to come play in Montreal, Canada. Still chasing that dream of the NFL, I left and went to play in the Canadian Football League (CFL). I knew nothing about the CFL when I arrived. I was so happy to still be playing football that I didn't pay attention to the difference in rules, field size or the style of play.

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I was in a different country playing a different style of football; I went anywhere someone wanted me to play. In the football I knew, only one guy could be in motion at a time. In the CFL, you could have two men moving. There were only three downs instead of four, so everything seemed faster. There was also a breakdown by positions; if there were two backs, one had to be Canadian. The defensive line could be American but offensive line had to be Canadian. The fields were wider than in the U.S. The game that I knew like the back of my hand had become foreign to me. I was back to learning simple concepts.

I remember walking into the complex and passing this big dude struggling as he was lifting weights. He was doing curls with twenty-five-pound plates on each side of the bar, something he should have been doing with ease. Back in the States, big boys threw this up like it was nothing. Then I found out he was our starting left tackle. In my head I'm asking myself, *what the hell am I doing?* The answer was easy—still chasing the dream. If had to learn new and different things, I would. I should have recognized this as a sign of things to come. Then I had to learn to deal with the exchange rate of my salary. I had to keep playing to keep my dream alive. However, playing in the CFL was like playing without pay. With the rate of exchange, my pay seemed to disappear as it crossed the border. Before,

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we would struggle and get behind when a \$200.00 bill came along. Now that same thing would cost us roughly \$350.00 in Canadian money. But I was still playing football, right? Still chasing that dream.

At the end of the season our visa expired, and we had nowhere to go. There wasn't anything waiting for us anywhere. Since 1981, I had been to Seattle, Kansas, Cincinnati, Kansas, Denver, Memphis, Denver and Montreal. My mother told us to come stay with her until we figured things out. Trust me, I hated going back home and living with my mom in the house I grew up in with all those memories. But things were different. It wasn't just me going home. My wife and two sons were going with me. By now my mother and my dad were divorced and she was living by herself. So, I went back to Fayetteville, North Carolina, a place I thought I would never be again. Talk about full circle. Talk about feeling like a failure. I got a job as a special substitute teacher talking to kids about life and success. The problem was they thought I was a success, but I felt like a failure. When I saw my father, I could see the laughter in his eyes. I could see him thinking, *so you thought you'd escape this life. You thought you were different.* I saw failure in his eyes.

I was slowly dying. All the motivation was being sucked out of me. I was scared I was settling for nothing. In our lives there are moments that define us, this

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was one of those moments for me. Along with the substitute teaching, I also worked in a factory in Fayetteville. That's right, the guy that had dreamed about greatness was driving a forklift truck in a carpet facility. In my mind I had failed. I was no different than the guys who had stayed with plans to work in the factory. I had become what I hated. I was just like those with no dreams. I had to decide, was this all there was going to be? I had a degree in Criminology and Juvenile Justice from Kansas, yet here I was. A forklift driver. This was not what I had envisioned, but the truth is, this is what I was. I worked the graveyard shift. One night around three o'clock a.m. an older gentleman came right up to me, looked me in the face and asked me, "aren't you Harry Sydney, the end?" I said, "Yes, I'm a football player" and he said, "no you aren't. You are a forklift driver." I wanted to pound him through the ground. I caught myself, but what shocked me most was that I wasn't mad at him. He was a stranger. I was mad at my family. They all said all the *right* things, but it took a stranger to tell me the truth. That morning I went home pissed at the world and myself. I was blaming myself for not being where I thought I would be.

It was time to change. I did like all businessmen do. I sent my resume out to all the teams in the league. Everyone and every team said I was too old. Every team except the San Francisco 49ers, and everyone except

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Bill Walsh their head coach. They called me and invited me to mini-camp. I was a twenty-seven-year-old rookie, but I had another chance.

We loaded up the kids, Syd and Zach, and headed to Kansas to live with Nancy's parents. Ellinwood is a city in Western Kansas with one stoplight. A town I could ride a bike around in roughly 15 minutes. We were living with her parents and her brother lived across the street. I was the only Black person in the town except for my sons. I knew this was my last opportunity. This quest had started in 1981, it was now 1987. I pushed my body and mind like never before. I would work out at the hottest times of the day, twelve noon and four o'clock in the afternoon. I ran by myself. No one pushed me. I even played tricks on myself because I hated running distance. I had Nancy drive me out between Great Bend and Ellinwood, five to six miles away and drop me off so I had to run back. Nobody was going to pick me up; a decent sized Black man running down the road with sweat pouring off of me like rain.

Nancy and the kids stayed at her parents' while I flew to California for mini-camp with the 49ers. I was both scared and excited at the same time. I was ready to take control of my life. I was tired of being what I had been and now I had a real chance. The 49ers signed me because Bill Walsh remembered me scoring

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two touchdowns against the 49ers in 1981 when I tried out for the Seahawks. I arrived in San Francisco and walked into the locker room. There they were—Ronnie Lott, Joe Montana, Roger Craig, Charles Haley, Bill Walsh and Russ Francis and so many other great players. Oh, don't forget Jerry Rice, ever heard of him?

The truth was hitting me in the face, I knew what I was up against. It's either now or never, so here we go. I was facing long odds. I was an old man by many standards, but I was going to run through a brick wall if needed to finally make an NFL roster. Mini-camp started but during the summer of 1987 there was a strike that stopped the business of football. The players' union and the owners were battling over money and benefits. That's right, I finally get to the NFL and no one is playing football. The crazy thing was, Eddie D, the owner of the 49ers, treated his players so well that nobody on our team wanted to go on strike.

Football was football and in my mind the business of football was someone else's problem. When there's a strike, everyone has to take a side. You had the union guys who had to stand firm believing what they thought was best for the cause and you had those who were loyal to the owners. I was torn. I was loyal to my quest to get to the NFL. I finally got there—I didn't want to strike. I wanted to play and finally make money and pay bills. Some could afford to strike but I couldn't.

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Fortunately, it didn't last too long. There wasn't total unity. Many didn't agree with what the union leader, Gene Upshaw, was trying to sell the players.

As I share about the 49er life, please understand this, I love these guys like they're my brothers. Like the brothers formed as guys go through war together. Football was about gladiators looking each other in the eye and doing whatever they needed to do, physically or mentally, to get the job done. Anything was allowed within the rules, the problem was, there were really no rules. Anything I say from this point on about the 49ers is what formed me; good or bad. I grew up by watching, paying attention to everything that was going on. I have nothing but love and respect for everyone in that organization from Anthony who still calls me now and then to talk about golf, to Eddie D, the owner. Eddie D has no idea how much I learned about who I am because of the gesture he made by showing me what a family does to take care of their own. The 49ers were class before class was defined. They breathed it from Eddie to Bill Walsh. Everything from here is meant with respect.

Whether I was singled out or not, I knew I would be tested during mini-camp, and I was. I remember it as clear as day. We were running a drill between running backs, linebackers, wide receivers and secondary. We called it seven on seven. On this play my job was

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to block the outside linebacker, Charles Haley—who was later inducted in to the Pro Bowl. I went to block him casually and he head slapped me unnecessarily. I learned later Charles had his own issues, but I was trying to make the team. The next rotation it was Charles and me again. He thought I was some punk or something, so he tried to do the same thing. Instead I stepped into him and shot my elbow up through his chin, knocked his helmet off and took him to his knees. He looked shocked. Bill Walsh was standing right next to him and said to Charles, “I guess you need to buckle it up.”

After that incident, Charles and Ronnie Lott came up to me at my locker and said something about what I had done to Charles. I looked them straight up and told them, “I’m a twenty-seven-year-old rookie trying to feed my family and if I have to go through either one of you, it’s not personal. I’m going to do what I need to do to feed them and put a roof over their heads.” They stared at me and then walked away. That felt so good. I wish I had respected myself everywhere else. It’s amazing when you look back at your life, you see so many things that you did wrong.

When mini-camp was over I went back to Ellinwood, Kansas. I had to prepare myself. I had to make it. During this time, we were still living with Nancy’s family. They were good people and we were

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grateful. We were so grateful that I shut my mouth realizing I was in their place; but I couldn't wait for the opportunity to finally pay the bills at my house. It wasn't just about the money. I was a father and husband, but I wasn't part of any decisions that were made. I think that's why communication in a relationship is so important. Everyone wants to be heard, everyone has something to say. When communication breaks down, people look elsewhere for that need to be filled.

I left to go to training camp to compete and make the 49ers regardless of the odds. At least I was getting paid, right? The joke in the USFL was that we made ten dollars a day for training camp. I don't remember much about training camp except that it was physical. The hitting was intense, but I thrived on it once again. I had to. I wasn't the fastest or the strongest, so I had to be the smartest. I had to make myself valuable. Coach said that one of us would make special teams. That stuck in my head and kept pushing me.

The main backs at this time were Rodger Craig and Tom Rathman. There were some other guys, but these were the mainstays. They were the guys. These were the guys I needed to learn from, along with Sherman Lewis our running back coach. This is where things got interesting. Everyone backing up those guys had to play special teams. Being on special teams meant we

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would play on kickoff team, return team, as well as the punt and punt return.

I was defying the odds just by being at training camp. I was a twenty-seven-year-old competing against twenty-one-year-olds. I saw this as an opportunity to excel, and I did. The battle was between Bill Ringo and me. He was a hard worker, not really gifted in anything but heart. He was just a great dude that reminded me so much of myself. We were a lot alike, but I felt I was the better athlete. Let's just say I had more of a mean streak. Or, maybe, it was that I knew this was what I was meant to do, and I realized it was now or never. Bill was a great guy, and the other guys loved him. He even had guys on the team running up to Coach Stiles, cheerleading for him like he was superman. But when you looked at the film, he wasn't delivering. I was. I made the cut.

I was rooming with Tom Rathman. We roomed together for most of my time at training camp and whenever we were on the road after I made the team. It came down to final cuts between Bill and me. Lynn Stiles, the special team coach, and I clicked. We thought alike, and he saw something in me. I became his voice, he trusted me. I made the team and backed up Tom Rathman. Slowly, I became leader of the special teams. I remember Tom and I talking one day at camp. I don't remember who brought it up, but we made a

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deal with each other. I'd hold down the special team, he'd remain the starter and together we could man the fullback position for a long time. Don't get me wrong, I thought I was better with the ball than he was. But he was smarter and blocked better, and I respected him. I never had much so I was okay with my share. I guess that's what a team player is. I respected this teammate as a man. I saw how he studied, I watch how he crafted his art. Tom was my standard for evaluating friendship. I knew if Tom and I were in a bar and something were ever to break out, we would have each other's back. We might get beat, but someone would pay a price and we would go down together. He wouldn't watch me get my butt beat or be over at the door holding it saying, "Harry run this way!" This was how I categorized people as friends for a long time. Right or wrong, call me old school. When people ask me how I define a friend, Tom is my example.

Talk about being fulfilled as a man, athlete, father, and husband. Now I could set up my own traditions and start doing things the Sydney Way. We moved to Sunnyvale, California, a little way from the practice facility. Nancy and my two boys at the time, Syd and Zach and me. I don't even remember my first contract with the 49ers. All I know is that we could pay bills and start to live.

I had a steady job playing football and I loved it.

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This is what dreams were made of, and I got to live it. The only challenge was, my mom had me ten years too soon. I missed out on all the big money other players made in the coming years, but that's alright, I was never driven by money.

In 1987, I was a rookie by NFL standards, but I had already played three years in the USFL and one in Canada. I felt like I was a veteran with rookie status. As a guy that had failed from 1981 to 1987, that season was so rewarding. I went from hoping, to finally being there. It was more than I could imagine. I was in the NFL because Bill Walsh and Lynn Stiles had given me a role and I lived it, loved it and needed it. That year was about so much more than playing football, so many things were starting to change. I had reached my goal. Finally, I felt like I was living the life that was meant for me. I no longer felt the need to prove others wrong about me, I just had to prove myself right. Finally, timing worked out, I fit. What the 49ers wanted from me was to back up Tom Rathman.

My role expanded as the years went on, but this was our starting place. Besides backing up Tom, I developed into the third down back. I earned a spot on the team as special teams, but I was doing more than just special teams. Lynn Stiles and Bill Walsh guided me and developed my talents. Before long, Lynn Stiles was giving me the latitude to speak my mind about

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schemes. You have to remember, back in those days, the style of play was all about physicality. My role on punt return was not just to call the returns, but I was also the one to peel back.

John Taylor was also on punt return, he was awesome. Everyone knows how great Jerry Rice was, but John Taylor was the difference maker. His worth was priceless. We, John and I, had it worked out. He would set up my kill shot. That's right-kill shot. Let me paint you a picture. Let's say he caught the ball in the middle of the field. He would start to the left as I'm circling and getting a beeline on my target. Then John would come back in my direction and the first guy down from the other team would turn right into me and I'd try to knock him out to create an alley for John to run. All John needed was a crack. My other role was to help double team someone that was having trouble. On punt team I was the personal protector, the guy that called the schemes and protections. On kickoff return I was either setting the wage on returned kicks. Now on the kickoff team I had a hell of a job. We would do directional kicks which means the kicker would kick it to the right or left. I was always on the backside of the kick and had no responsibilities other than to be a heat-seeking missile. As a running back, I would anticipate what I would do by seeing the running lanes develop.

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I loved it because during this era at the 49ers, Eddie D, the owner, rewarded his players well. Bill gave Lynn Stiles the authority to create an incentive program for special teams. First, you have to understand the make-up of our special teams. Most of the guys playing special teams were like me. Hungry guys that didn't make a bunch of money, so any chance to make extra cash, trust me, we were motivated. It meant doing our job, helping the team win, but each week we'd get points for *how* we did our jobs. The nastier you did it, the more points you'd get. At Christmas, those points turned into money. The biggest motivator for many of us was the acknowledgment we got each week with the points. Every teams talks about the importance of special teams, but the 49ers took it to a different level. Then again, the 49ers didn't win four Super Bowls in the 1980's by accident. We would get points for doing our job, but then we had Gut Buster, Pancake and Hammer awards. These awards meant you led in points or hit a guy so hard his head hit the ground before his feet. We got points for take downs, kill shots, physical play and all out dominating our guy. I was at San Francisco five years and I lead in all those categories for four of those years. The only time I didn't was when I had broken my arm and missed most of the year.

I had found my lane and Joe Montana, Ronnie Lott, Jerry Rice, Charles Haley and the rest of the team

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showed me the utmost respect. I was one of them. We were boys and teammates. I couldn't do everything they could do. I couldn't survive or afford to be in their circles away from the field. But that's not how we measured each other. The measuring stick was, *are you helping us win on the football field?* I felt like I had found my home and was finally respected for it.

I had a great year in 1987, but as a team we lost to the Vikings in the NFC Playoffs. I emerged as a leader and voted by the team to be the special teams captain. I felt incredible, vindicated even. That night, after we lost the game to the Vikings, some of us went to one of our usual spots. I remember there were shots of tequila and cognac in front of me. I remember Nancy driving and pulling over to the side of the road for me to throw up. But what I remember most was getting home and standing beside the bed. My son was talking to me, and I passed out on the bed. That was the first and last time my kids ever saw me like that. I made that promise to him and to myself days later.

At the end of the season I had my exit interview with Bill Walsh, the guy who had brought me back to life. In my exit interview Bill Walsh told me how he thought I had played and what he expected from me next year. It was all positive feedback. Then he asked me if there was anything I wanted to say. I told him I appreciated the opportunity that he had given me, I

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couldn't imagine anything better. My only concern was that when I signed my contract we were living in Kansas. Money didn't go as far with California prices and the cost of living as it had in Kansas. He thanked me and said he'd think about it and get back to me.

During the off season, guys would get together and work out and often Lynn Stiles and I would watch film and share ideas. Sometimes it was tough because Nancy didn't want to understand this was part of my job. Another challenge between Nancy and I was just because Tom and I were teammates, didn't mean I could always do what he did financially. It seemed as though she did not to want to understand that either.

The off season was incredible. It was great to have one job that took care of most of the bills. Nancy had stopped working when Syd was born. I even picked up golf. It was amazing. I used to clean the bunkers wondering what these people did for a living. Now I was one of them-the perks of being a professional athlete. During the off season, I would work out and to make extra money, I would do speaking engagements.

Nancy has always been a good person. Unfortunately, she thought she was the reason for our success. She thought she was the guiding force in our relationship. We didn't have a king and queen type relationship. It was more like a queen and court jester relationship. Because I was a doer, she'd sit back and watch me do.

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So much of the blame fell on me. It was my fault if things didn't work, her intelligence if they did work. I became a football player long before she was a part of my life, however in her mind I made it because of her. She was and is a good mother, but she thought her job stopped once I got home from practice and my second job started when I walked through the door. Let's just say life was an adjustment. We were both in foreign territory. When I played in the USFL and Canada, we had similar responsibilities as we did now that we were in the NFL. Sometimes they just looked a little different. I worked outside the home. She worked inside the home. However, to her understanding, I was supposed to come home and go to work again. Sometimes it was frustrating. What I thought should have been done wasn't. As I look back at it, I was living by the Duck philosophy that we talk about in *My Brother's Keeper*. I was calm on the outside, but inside my emotions were all over the place. Please don't get me wrong, we had a good thing. Maybe because we were experienced, but a new time and new life seemed to confuse the things that were important.

Our communication wasn't as good as it should have been because I stopped wanting to hear I was wrong. I got tired of being the Black kid from North Carolina that she had saved. Like I've said, she's a good person. There just seemed to be some confusion on

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who was driving and who was in the passenger seat. Unfortunately, she thought she had made it and I was in the sidecar. I stopped communicating. I got tired of hearing what we owed her parents and how grateful I should be that instead of her working they'd given her money. I loved her, but I wasn't in love with her. I had allowed myself to settle for less than what I deserved. Lack of communication slowly kills a relationship.

Nancy and I were good together, but not great. I felt as if she didn't like the fact people put what I did on a pedestal. Often times she reminded me of that in her own way. Don't get me wrong, she was a good woman but without realizing it she always seemed to try to control things, and me. Nancy didn't understand that I wanted to establish our own traditions. Christmas had been a love-hate thing for me as a child. It was a holiday, so my father wanted to do his thing and my mom didn't want to be left out, so fights became the norm as our holiday tradition. On Christmas I wanted to get up early, wake the kids and do all the things I never did. Instead, Nancy's parents would come for Christmas. That was cool, I had no problem with that. But instead of her understanding what I wanted, we had to wait until they got to our house. Sometimes it was 10:30 or 11:00 when they got there. The kids would look at me so excited and eager, I always felt guilty. But I kept my mouth shut. I didn't want to ruin the day, so

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we waited. We just rode the waves at times. I started spending more and more time at the 49ers facility.

In the off seasons, along with the work outs, guys would hang out to play cribbage, backgammon and dominos. I had never played but I watched and learned. I became pretty good after a while. Somehow, some way, Charles and I started playing. It started off as once in a while and turned into damn near every day. Charles was a deeply troubled dude. It's been chronicled on ESPN's *30 for 30*. He also talked about his bipolar issues as he was inducted into the NFL Hall of Fame. But back then I didn't know anything about bipolar, I just knew this guy would go off, lose his mind and not care who or what was affected by his behavior. Somehow, someway, Keena Turner, Ronnie Lott, and I became the guys that seemed to be able to soothe the beast!

In 1988 we had training camp in Rocklin, CA right outside Sacramento. Like the previous year, I roomed with Tom Rathman. We organized what each of us would bring to camp: music, TV, fridge, etc. But the most amazing thing happened the first day of training. Remember the interview when the season was over, and Bill asked me if there was anything I needed, and I mentioned my contract? We were just getting started, I was stretching, and everyone was thinking, *here we go again*. Bill walked up to me and said, "Hey, Harry, remember what we talked about at the end of the season?"

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I responded, “I do.” He said he had thought about it and I was right. He told me to go see John McVay, the VP, after the morning practice. He had a new contract for me and shook my hand. I couldn’t believe it, and neither could Nancy when I told her—he almost doubled my salary!

One day, after training camp as I was walking away from practice, I heard a voice call my name. I froze. I felt like I was stuck in cement. It was a voice I knew well. It was Joni. Hearing her shout my name crested a flow of so many emotions. I was relieved, pissed, scared. Just check it off the list, any and every feeling, I felt it. She came up to me and simply said, “Please, can I have ten minutes of your time.” In my mind I was thinking, *ten minutes is nothing considering I was willing to give you every second of my life.* She explained why she left. I couldn’t believe it. I was speechless, but I understood. She went on to say she was married to a good man in the military and he had adopted the kids. For the most part they were doing well and loved their life. I was somewhat confused. I said, “you walked away, and now you’re here to tell me you are happy.” I tried to explain how I felt as a man having that piece of my life ripped out of me and because of that, my trust was never the same. Everyone in my life at some point in time paid the price for my inability to trust completely. We talked for a while, and I told her about where I was in my

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life, married with kids. I finally asked her why she was there. She said she wanted to let me know her and the kids were fine. I told her I would never contact them, but if Mike and Julie ever wanted to contact me, we'd go from there. I know it sounds cold, but I never got to raise them. I was, or at least it felt like, the sperm donor. A father raises them, plays with them, teaches them, educates them and I had done none of that with them. The crazy thing was, I didn't tell Nancy at the time because I really didn't know how to handle it myself. I didn't want to answer questions that I didn't have any answers to.

That year was awesome. I got to contribute more on offense as well as lead the special teams. For example, usually we had a special teams meeting before the team meeting. In addition, I would hold a *players only* special teams meeting forty-five minutes before any coaches would be there. Let's just say, we would talk assignments in a way that might not be politically correct. We'd talk expectations, we'd talk about what each individual needed to do, what to be alert for as well as the attitude one might need to carry out such an assignment. Peer pressure isn't always a bad thing. Since most of us were free agents we knew we were expendable. Remember, at the time I was 28-years-old, so I had to make it. The 49ers saw my value and based on the new contract and expanded roles it was clear to see

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they believed in my leadership. A few things happened that made me willing to run through any wall if I were asked to.

During one of the pre-season games, I must have played pretty well. I was invited up to the Owner's Box. I said, "I have my boys." They said, "we are a family, bring them along." Nancy, the boys, and I went up to the box. Talk about feeling special. Then the most incredible thing happened. All of a sudden, I couldn't find Syd. I walked around the corner and there he was, sitting on the floor with Eddie D, in his suit, entertaining my son. The owner of the team took time to play with my son. It was on now. I saw family, I saw loyalty, I saw myself doing whatever they needed me to do with whatever intensity they needed me to have. From then on, they got it.

The season was interesting. We got to the Super Bowl and I was elected co-captain. Joe Montana, Ronnie Lott and me, Harry Sydney. That was the night the guy from Fayetteville, North Carolina that never quit, even if he wanted to at times, walked out for the toss in Super Bowl XXIII because my teammates respected what I did and how I did it. I returned the opening kickoff. Talk about a rush, to go from somebody no one had heard of to having everyone shouting my name. "*Returned by Number 24, Harry Sydney!*" I only went about ten yards, but I can live with it. We won by

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beating the Bengals 20-16. I remember the week before the game we had a ring fitting. It was either going to be an NFC Championship ring or a Super Bowl Ring. With the win, we made an extra \$64,000.

That night after the game was incredible. Of course, there was plenty of partying going on. Trust me when the 49ers do it, they do it right. Over my five years there, Eddie D spared no expenses from renting out the London Museum when we played in London to flying us to his home in Youngstown for a long weekend, just to have a private concert.

But that night, after everyone was in bed, I just sat up and laughed and cried. That night I didn't sleep. I remembered the journey to this point. I remembered my youth, my life, the pain, the road blocks, the feelings of not being good enough, the nights as a cook doing anything to put food on the table.

My mother was able to come to the game. I invited her and paid her way. She got to see her boy in the Super Bowl. Not only had I made it, but I had made it because of her sacrifices. She had made it possible for me to achieve my dreams. She was part of that Super Bowl, along with Nancy's mother and father. My mom was so proud. She had stopped drinking by then and found God, which changed her for the better. I guess my father was waiting for an invitation call that never came.

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My father and I had no relationship until, well, I guess we never had a father/son relationship. I despised him. Everything he stood for was everything I never wanted to be. He eventually married another lady and had some children with her. I'm sure I've heard their names over the years, but we never met. He supposedly changed his life. I hoped it was true. My pictures of him were burned into my head. I couldn't escape the crap I had witnessed in the name of what a man was. Now understand, I'm not trying to create an illusion of some monster. Don't get me wrong, we had laughs, but those few were shadowed by all that wasn't necessary, and the confusion caused. Maybe it was that I didn't call to spite him. Maybe it was because I looked at this soldier that had tortured us and wanted to rip his head off. I know my mother wasn't a saint. She knew how to twist the knife.

But as a son, or at least me, I thought I had to have a relationship with my dad. Why? I don't know. Maybe because all of us want acknowledgment, we're always seeking approval. I kept allowing myself to be disappointed because he was who he was. It was my fault for expecting him to change, to go against his nature. But like a fool, I'd keep trying, wanting something more. Idiot!

There were times I tried to reclaim that relationship, especially when he called me out of the blue. When that

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happens, the antennas go straight up. Well, he called because we were going to play the Eagles in Philly where my dad grew up. Most of his family still lived there. He started off saying he knew things could be better between us and he wanted to rekindle our father/son relationship. He didn't say it like that, but that's what I understood it to mean. As a son, even though there might be issues, we all want to hear the words, "I'm proud of you." I really understand being a father of 3 boys, a stepson and some grandsons. There's an underlying need, always wanting to please. So, with that he said the family wanted to come see me at the game as well as get together that Friday night. We'd fly in for away games, especially on the East Coast, on Friday. Bill Walsh thought we'd adjust better that way. We talked, and I asked him how many tickets he was talking about. He said twenty-two. This was a week prior, so I knew I could get it done. I said, "look, that's a lot of money," but he said they were good for it. I said I would take care of his. He said that was cool. So, everything was set. Except now I had to hear Nancy moan and groan about me doing this for my dad. She was reminding me of who he was, but I didn't want to listen. I was trying to give him the benefit of the doubt and hoping this time would be different.

Friday came, and the plan was for him to pick me up at the hotel. I had several hours before curfew. That's

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right, grown men some making millions of dollars, had an eleven o'clock curfew. The team got to the hotel and I got a call from another relative, not my dad. He said he would be there in five minutes and before I could say anything, like "where's my dad," he hung up. I went down and the car he described pulled up. I got in and recognized one of my cousins, so things were cool. You never know, as an NFL player everyone knows you, even if you don't really know them. While we were in the car he told me that my dad didn't make it, and thanks for the tickets. My father said I would take care of *all* the tickets. He got me again. Now I had to go home and hear my wife remind me of my stupidity. I was out the money that we had paid for the tickets which could have been used for other things. End of argument. She had won.

He was the man I never wanted to be. Let's just say, of the four Super Bowl tickets I had, I didn't allow him ever to sit in one of the Super Bowl seats on my dime. As a matter of fact, he got mad at me because I wouldn't send him any money to have a Super Bowl party. Bless his soul, he lived in a world where he thought nobody saw who he really was or what he was really doing.

That off season was different in many ways. Throughout the year I would go talk to schools and share my story. It seemed to touch people. Somehow, someone in San Francisco contacted me about some situations and

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asked if I would get involved with Mayor Art Agnos to create a treaty between rival gangs that were feuding around Candlestick. I agreed, and we eventually got that done. This was a new year and very different for me because Bill Walsh, the guy that signed me and gave me so much responsibility, retired from coaching in the NFL. It seemed all wrong. The game needed him. Hell, I needed him. Fortunately, Lynn Stiles, the special teams coach, and the new coach, George Seifert were old roommates. Because of that relationship things didn't change for me. As a matter of fact, we had to be even better because now we were the hunted. We were the team sitting on the mountain top knowing we were going to get everyone's best. Everyone was wondering what we were going to do.

The 1989 season went well. We started off strong. October 16, 1989 was a day that changed my life. I saw how God was looking out for me. I say this because I had a speaking engagement in Berkley, California and I went across the Bay Bridge at exactly the same time as the earth quake hit the following day, October 17, 1989. I could have been on the bridge at that time. People say God works in mysterious ways. I know He does.

With the damage to Candlestick, the next home game was played at Stanford against the New England Patriots. Two things happened during that game. Our teammate, Jeff Fuller, paralyzed his arm. I saw his eyes

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roll in his head, he was in bad shape. The hardest thing to do is see something like that, it scares you. Talk about putting things into perspective, but then when the whistle blows again, it's time to play. Jeff wasn't the only guy that got hurt. I went down on a kick off, swung my left arm into the kick returner's shin and broke my forearm. I had surgery the next morning. They rigged up some machine that would help the calcium and my bone grow back faster. The broken arm scared the crap out of me. I couldn't allow anyone to take my place.

Remember, I was captain 4 out of 5 years. I wasn't special teams captain this year because I wasn't on the field again until the Super Bowl. Lynn Stiles made sure I would be back by that game. Because I wasn't playing that season, I took more of an assistant special teams role. I still ran the players only special teams meetings. Spencer Tillman assumed the role as special teams captain. He was a very good player, but he was more of the *rah-rah* type than I was. For some people, it's about what they say, for others it's what they do and how they do it. I got back on to the field to help beat the Broncos by a large spread. That was the most incredible game I've ever been in. We beat them 55-10 but it could have been so much worse. You could see it in their eyes. They had no answer for us, it was just a matter of how much we wanted to beat them by. Back to back Super Bowls. I had two Super Bowl rings!

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That year we got our Super Bowl rings in Kawaii. Eddie took all of us there for a week and everything was on the house. He blocked off tee times at the golf course for us and he gave every couple a car to drive for the week. This was the first vacation I ever went on that I came back home with more money than I had left with. It was incredible. The 49ers had won back to back Super Bowls and I was back in my role. I remember when I put my first ring on. It was transforming; I knew I was doing something that many that have played the game have never done and would never do. But a second Super Bowl ring, that was confirmation.

Let's just say, all the attention isn't always a good thing. I found out the hard way. I lost my way due to insecurity, lack of communication and ego. I started to spend more and more time away from home. I was a good father. I could have been a better husband, but I kept waiting for Nancy to be a better wife. That's what I used as an excuse to lose my way. After our third son, Nathan, was born in December of 1989, Nancy and I had to work on things. It seemed that I had more to work on than her. It was my fault because I didn't know how to say what was on my mind. I could never paint the picture in a way to help her see what I was trying to say.

During the 1990 season, I had more of a role on the offense than I had ever had. Along with running the

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special teams, I had a legit role on the offense. I was the single back, Tom and I were goal line and short yardage, and I was the four-minute back; the guy they would give the ball to when a team just wants to run out the clock. This position really came into play when we lost the NFC Championship game to the Giants in 1990. We lost 15-13 when Roger fumbled with 2:36 left to go in the game. Fumbles happen, but this could have been avoided. Rumor has it that the call came in to put Tom and me into the game, but the running back coach decided to wait until the next play. That play never came because Roger fumbled. As a player, watching that field goal go through, seemed like it took forever. And just like that it was over.

In the 1991 season things were really changing. Ronnie had been traded or signed with the Raiders. Charles Haley was getting more volatile. I was getting older, and Steve Young thought this was his time. There was also talk of Mike Holmgren becoming head coach. Football was football. Nancy was talking about wanting another baby, and after going through some things with each other, I thought, *why not*. So, the season went just like the year before, but I had better numbers. I had more rushing attempts, more yards, five touchdowns rushing, two touchdowns receiving and a valuable role on the offense. My special teams role was also very solid. I remember one time talking with Mike Holmgren about

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playing time. He told me that because my role was so important on special teams he didn't want to use me much on offense. I understood that. It's a team thing. The season of 1991 fell short of the playoffs. At the end of the year, Mike Holmgren became head coach of the Green Bay Packers.

Nineteen-ninety-two was a Plan B year. This means teams protected a certain players contracts and the others could seek employment without hurting their club. In the spring of 1992 I visited the Green Bay Packers. They wanted me to come play for them, not because of my athletic ability, but for my leadership. The Packers didn't have a clue how to win. Before my visit to Green Bay, I had met with the brass at San Francisco. They asked me to give them a chance to match whatever Green Bay offered.

I had to think about whether or not I really wanted to go to Green Bay. During this time, Nancy and I were expecting our fourth child. I wanted to stay in California for all the right reason—family, weather, familiarity, even the boys loved living in California. At that time, Green Bay was thought of as Siberia. If you went there your career was over. Green Bay made me a nice offer. I told San Francisco what they offered, and they matched it. I was back at San Francisco for my 6th year in the NFL at thirty-three-years-old. Training camp was good. I had a couple of younger guys behind

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me, but I held my ground. I had gotten word from my agent that Green Bay had their eye on what was happening. If I was released I would be in Green Bay that night. My agent was a good dude. He lived in Monterey, California. I loved visiting him and playing golf. I met him when I spoke at his fantasy league final dinner and we clicked. He knew his stuff.

I had many amazing opportunities during my time in California. Leaving that wasn't something I took lightly. One of the most awesome memories of my life was speaking at a function in Monterey; a fundraiser for the boarding school there. On Friday I played Pebble Beach, on Saturday I played Cypress, and Saturday night I sat next to Clint Eastwood for two and a half hours. I felt like a kid in a candy store. Talk about a fan! I loved all his movies, his Westerns, his army movies, his Dirty Harrys. He was *the man*.

It happened just as my agent had said. The 49ers cut me after training camp in 1992, and that night I was on my way to Green Bay, Wisconsin. When I had visited Green Bay in the spring, they matched the same contract I had signed with the 49ers. When the 49ers cut me, the Packers picked me up and assumed that contract which was filled with many bonuses. I hit almost every one of them. From number of catches, to where I ranked on the team, playing time incentives, and more.

I stayed at the Residence Inn, it was perfect for the

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situation I was in. I didn't need an apartment. I needed a place to live, but my family was back in California and Nancy was expecting our daughter, Taylor. I needed a place that had the bells and whistles, a nice place so when the boys visited they had room, a home away from home. The Residence Inn was perfect. When I got to Green Bay and talked with the coaches, Holmgren, Rhodes, and Sherman Lewis, they explained that they were rebuilding everything from scratch. The Packers at that time had no clue about winning football. They needed help with everything, from knowing how to practice, how to watch film, how to behave in the locker room, hell, just how to be a professional athlete. My role was to teach these guys how to win. They had a loser's mindset. They had no clue how to win on the field or off. They were used to doing what losing teams do. Everyone was trying to learn on the run.

Gil Haskell was the running backs coach, a good coach, but he had learned the West Coast offense in only four months and was trying to teach it. I had played the offense for five years and knew it inside and out. I knew the blocking schemes, the pass protections and the audibles that should be called. I asked Gil whether it was alright for me to answer questions in the meeting rooms with the other backs. He was the coach and I didn't want to disrespect him by having people ask me instead of him. I had to tell some of the guys on defense how

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to practice, no one had taught them. I had to tell them they had made the team, “we play on Sunday or Monday, so stop trying to kill each other during the week!” The coaches knew it was a process; Rome wasn’t built in a day. I figured they didn’t know and until they knew, I was the guy to give them the knowledge.

There were some guys who were not really committed, there were pretty boys, and there were guys that thought they were the best thing since sliced bread. It was my job to give each of them a reality check. George Koonce, the starting linebacker, even called me “Harry Two Rings.” I was called to the head coach’s office because I was too hard on some of the guys who thought what they had done in college mattered. They didn’t realize this was the NFL and they weren’t on a college scholarship anymore. The change was taking place everywhere from the equipment men to trainers, and doctors. Everything went from the losing Packer way to learning what made the winning 49er way. I’ll call it creating the winning attitude.

There was no better feeling than when I ran out of the tunnel as a starting fullback for the Green Bay Packers. As I ran over to my teammates, it wasn’t just about me finally being a starter in a game. It was more about wanting them to understand if I can, they can too. I’m proof that dreams do come true and that the difference between dreams and reality is hard work.

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Then my world changed. Nancy and I scheduled to induce the birth of our fourth child for the Packers' bye week. Holmgren gave me time off but because he knew my situation. We both knew I was only going to play in Green Bay for one year. I was there to teach and lead. If there wasn't a fullback better than me, they were in trouble. I understood my purpose. My child's birth was the most important thing.

At that time Nancy was on the older side to have children. We made sure everything was good, she was healthy, and our child was as well. Everything went smoothly with the labor. Then when she came out I saw the doctors look at each other and I saw it too. Nancy of course didn't see the situation right away, but I did, and I knew it wasn't good. That night might have been the worst nights of my life. They told me my daughter had Down's Syndrome. Not only did they tell us about Down's, but they painted the worst picture possible to prepare us for what might be in-store for our family. They said they could tell by her eyes. I said, "my eyes look like that." I didn't want to believe them. I didn't want to believe what they were saying about the girl who held my heart, Taylor Jordan. I had three healthy sons and now my daughter was handicapped. Not only was she handicapped but I couldn't do anything about it. I was a physical, professional athlete that used to knock people out and

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now my little lady was laying there with tubes in her body and I was helpless.

I blamed myself. I thought God was paying me back for what had happened with Joni; maybe I didn't look hard enough for them. Maybe He was paying me back for all my mistakes. I didn't get it. *Why me? Why my daughter?* That night I questioned so many things. Later I realized God tells us in His time, not ours. At that moment I really hated God. Not only that, but I had to leave and go back to Green Bay. I was there all by myself, no one in the room. I was lonely, scared and still chasing, but I was not sure what I was chasing this time.

Because I came to Green Bay after final cuts, all the team knew about me was that I had a big role in San Francisco and won a couple of Super Bowls. I played under Mike Holmgren, Sherman Lewis, Ray Rhodes, and Ron Wolf so I had the inside track. I had the reins to be free to say pretty much whatever I wanted. The rings on my fingers made me different. I played with World Champions and was their captain. They chose me, and I was here for a reason.

Just recently, My Brother's Keeper had a fundraiser and an interesting story was shared with me. I've melted and there are a few people I do trust now. Gary is a guy with a heart of gold, I call him my brother. My Brother's Keeper exists today because he was there and

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believed in me. He saw what we wanted to do. Gary wanted to share this story with me, but he informed me it was meant as a compliment and he hoped I'd take it that way. My first reaction was, *what the heck did the doctor say?* Gary had hurt his knee and his surgeon was the Packers' team doctor. When Gary went in for a checkup, they talked about the work I did with My Brother's Keeper. The doctor said, "you know when they brought Harry in, they didn't bring him in for his athletic ability." To me that was one of the best things someone could have said about me. I believe in my life I wasn't appointed, I was anointed. No one had given me anything. I had to work my butt off.

When I came to Green Bay I was a lone wolf. I really didn't want to know anyone more than I had to. I played football then I would kill time by going to play blackjack. The only other alternative was staring at the wall. I was never a clubber. I'd do it on occasion, but that wasn't my scene. Remember, I was thirty-three-years-old. I knew it would be over soon. But for the rest of 1992 I played, had fun, and had my best year financially. Before I left when the season was over, I spoke with Holmgren about a potential opportunity to coach.

I was back in San Francisco and not sure what my next destination was. Because of the incentives in my last contract, we had some money socked away. For

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now, I was just playing Dad. Then the most interesting thing happened. I got a call from the 49ers; they wanted me to come back, so I did. Most people don't know that part of the journey. I went to training camp but soon realized once you leave a team you can't go back. Things change, relationships change. I was back rooming with Tom. After a week's time things were different. I realized I wasn't chasing anything anymore. I could play the game physically but mentally I didn't want to. I love the game so much that I couldn't be the weak link. I couldn't disrespect the game. I owed it to the team and the game to leave it behind.

The Power of Second Chances

REMEMBER CALLING Nancy and telling her I was going to retire. I remember her saying something like, “well you better find something else to do to make money.” That hurt. I don’t know what I expected her to say, but maybe, *it’s been a hell of a run* or *I know your body has been through a war*, anything but “what are you going to do for money.” Let’s just say it hit me all wrong. I realized at that moment it wasn’t us, it was me. I always felt the responsibility. It was 1993 and she hadn’t worked since 1981.

I told my teammates goodbye not knowing what the next chapter would be. It wasn’t long before I started doing radio work with a radio station in San Francisco, K60 Radio, talking sports and specifically the 49ers. I also coached high school football where I lived in Sunnyvale, California. Somewhere in there I became the president of Little League Baseball which was fun, but I realized that people were really a trip, especially

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parents. I had to write up flyers explaining the do's and don'ts of parents' behavior at baseball games. From language to what you can and can't say or even drink. I guess while I was concentrating on make a living and playing ball, I was sheltered from a different world; the make-believe world of sports.

I was done playing and I looked back on my career as a football player—three years in the United States Football League, one year in Canada, six years in the NFL. Not bad. And the guys I had played with—Reggie White, Joe Montana, Ronnie Lott, Sterling Sharpe, Brett Favre just to name a few. As a matter of fact, Brett's first pass for the Packers was intended for me, but he caught it himself. I won two Super Bowl rings as World Champions with the 49ers and was part of changing the culture in Green Bay; turning it from losing to understanding what they needed to do to start winning.

But the big question was, what now? I was living with my wife who was constantly asking me, "what's next" and I had no answer. I thought about coaching because I knew football like the back of my hand. I went and met with the guy that started it all, Bill Walsh. He was coaching at Stanford College and we talked football. He said he would make some calls. He set up a meeting with Coach Cowher of the Steelers, but before that meeting could happen, I got a call

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from Coach Holmgren reminding me of our earlier conversation. He asked me if I wanted to join his staff. Somehow, some way through God's reward system He allowed me to go through what I went through because He had a plan for me and He wasn't done yet. Then through His wisdom the connection between Mike Holmgren and the 49ers opened another door. Mike knew the 49er way, and the 49ers way led to success. I came to Green Bay not just to play but now to become a coach.

I was excited. Another door had opened. This time I could use my head instead of my body because my body had already taken a beating. Often you hear about concussions and CTE. Whether I have the symptoms or not I can't say, but I believe I'm a good candidate. I remember a couple serious concussions. The two that rang my bell the most happened in games against the Raiders and the Rams. In the game with the Raiders, I was covering a punt and wasn't paying attention. When I turned, I turned into a heat-seeking missile that was going head hunting, and he took me out. I got up and started running. As I was running, it was as if I was seeing the name on my jersey from behind and my brain was trying to catch up with my body. It was the freakiest thing that had ever happened to me.

The second worst bell ringing was against the L.A. Rams on a Monday night. I scored two touchdowns

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that night but what I remembered, I didn't remember. Please let me explain. We were on the goal line and on this play my job was to cut down the outside man, to get his hands down out of the throwing lane. I hit his knee with the side of my head. I went out quickly, then gathered myself, or at least I thought I did. But, when I watched the film on Tuesday, I had run three more plays that I had forgotten about. I had practiced these plays so much that I was on auto pilot. Even the way I was running was messed up, but I did it. Maybe because I was so scared as a free agent to lose my position. An older free agent to boot. I couldn't afford to allow myself to be hurt.

Lately there's been so much talk about concussions and the responsibility of the NFL. I was one of those guys that was on the side of many. We played the game, we knew what we were getting involved with. There's no way to play this physical game and not walk away without some form of a scar—knees, arms, fingers, backs, and head. Something had to pay the price. I had leaned against being involved with the lawsuit. But I was getting older and realized my body felt like it was breaking down. I've built a pretty good life for my family and I have a daughter that needs me forever, so I have to do everything I can to be around for her. I didn't mean to get off track, but that's how my mind works.

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They wanted me to get to Green Bay in January 1994. Nancy and the kids were coming after the school year was over. I was living at the Residence Inn again because they had everything I would need. The Packers would pay for it as part of my contract until we found a home. I was looking for a home when work and weather allowed. This was the Bay area, but it was much colder at this Bay!

I came to Green Bay and got a reality check. It was cold as all get out and I had no idea the hours that coaches put into the game. My first year I helped Kent Johnson with the strength and conditioning programs. Mike Holmgren said this was my starting point. He knew in 1995 there would be changes in the staff and he saw me as the running back coach. I was good with that. I was so happy to be able to be making a living doing something I loved. I was doing the teaching now. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't the greatest in strength and conditioning. I was old school. I didn't understand the process of being a cheerleader to grown men, motivating them to get in shape so they could make a bunch of money. I don't know if it was jealousy or envy. I remember one time one of the players asked me how much he had to run, and I told him go and run until he passed out. We laugh about it now.

I threw myself into the coaching world, trying to soak up as much as possible. In 1994 I was Kent

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Johnston's assistant which meant we were involved in many areas. The coaches coach, but Kent's job was to make sure the coaches had people in shape to coach. Not only that, I had to separate myself from the guys who were on the team when I played in 1992. I couldn't go where they went. I wasn't really one of the coaches that were working on the X's and O's. At least not yet.

With all these changes, things were also changing between my wife and me. I had more responsibilities in Green Bay. I couldn't be getting on the kids in California about things. She didn't understand she had to handle things there until we were together. Unfortunately, my wife was pissed because she was playing Mom in California in the house we had there. For whatever reason, I felt I always had to explain my time. She thought I worked eight in the morning till three in the afternoon or something. Let's just say we grew apart slowly. Part of that was we thought we wanted the same things, but we lost track of how to communicate. Sometimes as I look back, I think we were trying to make each other happy without really being happy. For a long time, we went through the motions, or at least I did. I found a house for us. During the summer I flew back, got her and the kids and we all came to Green Bay. For how long, I didn't know. What I did know was they were paying my salary which included health insurance, company cars and I was involved with football. During

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this time my wife and I seemed to be battling and arguing about anything and everything. I couldn't be her slave anymore and she had to hold up more of her end. It could have been me. I wasn't happy. I felt pulled, I felt disrespected and unappreciated whether it was in my head or not, I don't know. The rest of 1994 everyone was getting settled.

Then things changed in 1995 when I became the running backs coach and I was never home. The NFL also stood for "No Family Life." I was gone all the time. I realized I wasn't happy. I remember the moment things really changed. We were arguing so much I put my fist through a wall. When I looked in the mirror I saw the reflection of my father. I was becoming the one thing I had always hated. I couldn't do that. I withdrew and worked harder and longer, but that just made it worse. Eventually I asked for a divorce. I loved my kids and I still do. Don't get me wrong I loved my children's mother, but I wasn't in love with her anymore. Sounds cold, I know, but our course together was over. Now we had to figure out how we were we going to proceed. But, I realized that as long as we shared kids, we would never be free of each other. Those children were what connected us. We would have to make all those adjustments to keep the children the focus, even though everything that we knew was changing.

You learn a lot about yourself when you go through

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a divorce. You find out who your friends are, and who your associates are. You find out how strong you are. Just remember, there is a price for freedom. I remember sharing a two-bedroom apartment with a nice guy. My four kids slept in one bedroom, two on the floor, my daughter Taylor in the bed and the other son in the chair or on the other side of the bed. Think about that. I was coaching professional football and had two Super Bowl rings. I was giving my ex-wife child support, I didn't care about the money, they were my kids. But, giving her maintenance for seven years because she had been married to me was unfair. But then again, what is unfair and what is fair? I guess my first wife wanted to make sure she got what she thought she deserved.

I've heard it said people arrive at divorce at different speeds. One usually wants it and the other doesn't even see it coming. Either way, a person if he's honest with himself, has to take responsibility for his or her own actions and then choose to change and maintain that change. I didn't want to walk on this journey with Nancy anymore. Because I wanted the divorce, I was being made the monster; sides had to be picked. So, my first year as I coached running backs for the Green Bay Packers, I was facing a divorce, learning how to coach, learning how to be a better dad, and learning how to budget with no money.

Learning to coach was interesting. I knew football

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and now I had to learn how to teach it to guys who had each learned differently. It taught me the skills that I now use at My Brother's Keeper. Because each client is different, it's about finding the right button to push to make them perform, even when they don't want to, but they need to. That's coaching.

As I was learning how to be a better dad, I learned how to listen better. I learned the value of saying, "thanks." All of a sudden, we had to trust each other differently, even though they were hearing I was a bad dad. I had to be consistent until they were old enough to make up their own minds about what kind of dad I was. It was hard. I had to weather the storm, some days it seemed as if I were the worst father in the world according to my ex. I was never late on any money owed. In this area I went far above what I was ordered by any court. They are my kids. She benefited because she was the mother of my kids. They loved her, so as much as I wanted to just ignore her and act like she was the enemy, I couldn't. I would never hurt them. I became a better dad because I had to.

My lawyer was a great lady, but my wife's lawyer was out of control. She thought I was this million-dollar athlete instead of a hardworking man. I felt like most men going through a divorce. I thought fair meant doing what was best for everyone. Boy was I wrong! My ex and her lawyer wanted parts of everything and

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didn't care about me. I just wanted to be happy and move forward. They acted like I was going to forget about being a dad or something, but it was the total opposite. I wasn't relying on her to be the mom she couldn't be. It was unfair to put pressure on her to be what I wanted her to be. Divorce is hard for everyone involved; the kids, the one that wanted it and the one that might not have seen it coming. What we were going through was probably the same as everyone else who has gone through a divorce, but mine sure felt like I was becoming the bad guy; all because I wanted happiness.

Soon the word went through the coaching carousel that I was getting a divorce. I guess that was against the rules. Some coaches would rather be miserable and say nothing; just go through the motions. Divorce is messy and there's always enough blame to go around. Let's just say I learned a lot about myself and others during this process. I was committed to be the best running backs coach I could be and take my players to the Promised Land. NFL football is not just about being good, it's about winning Super Bowls. I would go to the functions and felt the stares of people wondering who I was going to rub my "divorce germs" on. But I was okay with that. As a player I had been a loner and as long as I did my job and handled my stuff at 1265 Lombardi Avenue, nothing else needed to be said.

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My divorce was right around the corner. My ex-wife didn't realize that this wasn't about her. My divorce was about me and what I wanted and needed for myself. I was never going to *not* be there for our children. They were my blood, I had raised them. They were never going to have to worry about whether their dad loved them. That wasn't going to happen. I became a better Dad even though at times I felt Nancy wanted me to fall so she could tell them, "See, I told you he wouldn't be there." But I was always there the best I could be. Finally, in early October the divorce was finally over, and like a fool I thought things would change. It continued to get worse even though she had gotten everything she had wanted. I could probably have fought to keep this or that, but when you're in that place you don't think certain things matter as much as they do. Everything matters. I remember how she would make me look bad until I figured out what I had to do. For example, at school, I had to contact the schools to send me the kids' calendars because my kids would ask me if I was coming to their function and I'd say, "sure, when is it?" and they would say, "tomorrow." I'd get upset. With such short notice I couldn't make it. Therefore, I was becoming what she said I would. I had to stop relying on my angry ex-wife to let me know what was going on, I had to find out myself. This divorce wasn't about anyone else. This was about two young adults who had

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gotten married, had kids and shared some incredible times until the fire blew out. Now it was time to decide what type of life I wanted, and what she wanted. But those lives weren't going to be together, they would just be intertwined because of our children, the children we both loved.

We all have unique moments that change our lives. One of mine was the divorce, it was finalized in early October. What happened October 12 at 7:00 pm changed me forever. This was my daughter's birthday. I called my ex to ask if I could see Taylor on her birthday. She coldly said, "No, you can't. You made your bed now lie in it." That took me over the top. I was pissed, and the reality of her words never rang truer. I did make my bed and now I was alone and bitter. So, I had a drink. As a matter of fact, I had two, but they didn't ease the pain, a pain I couldn't control because I felt powerless. For all that I *thought* I could control, I realized I could only control me. For whatever reason, I opened the Bible and started reading in the Book of John and it happened. I found myself on my knees praying to God. I felt so much pain being lifted off my chest. I asked Him into my life. He not only entered, but He also made me pay attention. I embraced God, but I didn't know what to do after that except further investigate what that meant, asking God into your life.

I threw myself into coaching the running backs. It

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was a great distraction. I'd get my kids when I could during the season, whenever we had a day off. Somehow, we made it work. We had an excellent season before it came to an end. During this time the Packers were becoming a powerhouse. They made it into the NFC Championship in 1996 then winning the Super Bowl in 1997. For me personally, this was an amazing feeling. Not just because I won another Super Bowl ring, but my players got a chance to understand for themselves what winning a Super Bowl feels like. I felt like a proud father. They listened and trusted me, and because of that trust they now got to put that ring on their finger that signifies being the best in the world.

Life was a blur for quite a while. There was so much happening in my personal life. I met an incredible woman, Madonna. She was going through a divorce herself. Our situations were similar in so many ways, but with a different background. She was born and raised here in Green Bay and her ex-husband was a good guy. Just like in my case, they had grown apart and didn't communicate the way they should have. I waited until her divorce was final, so we could be together the right way.

Nineteen-ninety-seven was also a big year for our family. Madonna and I got married and moved in together. We had our wedding at Lake Tahoe in California. It was an awesome, private event; one of the most

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important moments in my life. I was different than I had been before. She came into my life after I made enough mistakes to figure out how to do it right. Trust me, it was a process. Just because we loved each other didn't mean the kids would get along, especially when you have that many kids! I learned so much from her. Because I trusted her, I was willing to look at different ways of communicating. My boys learned how to treat and understand girls, how to communicate better. The girls learned how to communicate, respect themselves and others, and how to be part of a team. I know God put Madonna and I on this course. We found each other for a purpose and it wasn't just to raise a blended family and coach football.

We've been married 20 years now. She's that person I always visualized when I pictured my partner. We complement each other. Madonna pushes me to do my best and be my best. She doesn't want from me what she's not giving herself. She has three girls and one boy. I have three boys and one girl. We were the Brady Bunch plus two, minus Alice. She's an awesome mom and now grandmother. She has always been concerned with making sure our kids were grounded and respectful. We were lucky. We realized blended families have to operate differently. With her kids, because I wasn't Dad, Madonna always had to be the sheriff and I was the deputy and vice versa with my kids. We understood

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not making the kids pick and choose an alliance. For example, if my ex was at one of the kids' events I never told them they had to sit next to me. I would even go down and sit near her, so they wouldn't feel like they were torn. We, Madonna and I, recognized that as much as the kids like her or me, unfortunately the ex-spouse, hers or mine, were their parents. We realized the best thing we could do was be consistent.

The next year we went to the Super Bowl again, but this time we lost to the Denver Broncos. That loss really hurt because we should have beaten them. We were a better team. Mike Holmgren left to go to Seattle and I had some choices to make. It wasn't as simple as just finding another coaching job-with three Super Bowl rings and my connections, I had opportunities. I could have gone with him, but with a blended family, we would have had to decide who goes and who stays. We had ex's; how would that work with them? Or I could have gone with Andy Reid. He had a spot for me working with the run game. Then there was the possibility that the new coach coming in would hire me. In the end that's what happened. Ray Rhodes became the new coach of the Green Bay Packers and Sherman Lewis, my old coordinator and running back coach, was at the helm of the offense. They wanted me to coach running backs; for me that was awesome. I was still coaching in Green Bay, no one had to change anything, including me.

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That year changed things in me. I haven't talked much about the coaching world, but it was intense. We worked very long hours and up to this point, everyone knew their roles. Everyone worked together for the common goal; to win. Sherman Lewis was the offensive coordinator for the 1999 season. Sherman had an awesome football mind, but he was too nice. He wanted to make sure everyone was heard and because of that, the West Coast offense we were supposed to be running wasn't the same as it had been. The game stopped being fun.

We had one particular coach that made everyone's life harder. His name is not important, but those who played or coached at that time know exactly who I'm talking about. He was a bully. He had some health issues which he believed gave him an excuse to run rough shod over the other coaches. I won't speak of what he did to others, but I will tell you about an encounter between him and me. We were playing Detroit. This guy was our O-line coach, so he and I always talked run game and pass protection. Well, we were discussing something he wanted to do, and I didn't agree because it would change too much of the protections and put one of my backs in a bad position. I couldn't agree with it, plain and simple, and in the end, it was my call. Every time we would come near each other, he would mumble something under his breath. Finally, I heard

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him when he called me a stupid coon. I looked at him and figured I'd deal with him later. We had a game to win. He kept this up throughout the first half of the game. At half time we went through our adjustment, he brought up his idea again, and again, it was shot down for the same reason I had said no. He didn't like that, so he walked by me and elbowed me in the ribs. I couldn't believe it! I was pissed! I told another coach about the situation and he helped me keep my cool. Then, when it was time to get on the bus after the game he said something else. Now it was ON. I didn't sleep that night. You have to remember, I'm old school. I had played the game the way it was supposed to be played.

The next day I went old school. I'm an old wrestling fan from back in the day. If you have issues with someone, you handle it. I came to work wearing steel toed boots and my old sweats, the ones I wear when I know I'm going to get dirty and don't care. I had taped my fists the way fighters do so that when they hit someone they mess them up; hitting the right way will rip the skin. I walked into the staff meeting with all the coaches and they looked at me like, *OH NO!* They knew at that moment all I wanted to do was hurt this guy. Calmly I told him, "today I have come in here to hurt you, to make you bleed." He looked at me with fear in his eyes and I told him, "don't be scared now, because nobody in here's going to stop me from stomping your

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backside. I'm cleaning it up." I wanted to hurt him so bad. Somehow, somehow Ray Rhodes talked me down. I believe Ray was aware of the situation and had already handled it. I don't know how but I had to trust whatever he had done. But that incident changed me. At the same time, I was mad at myself, I had let him get into my head. But I was also pissed that he thought it was okay to do.

The season was not as good as it should have been. I saw the pressure Ray felt being the head coach of the Packers, and not just because of his X's and O's. Ray Rhodes was being made the scapegoat because we finished 8-8. The higher ups said they didn't like the direction the team was going. Whether anyone wanted to talk about it or not, the color of his skin affected how he believed he was perceived. He felt that as the head coach he didn't have the same time span for success as others might have had, getting fired after just one 8-8 year. A lot of things that happened that year fell under his watch, so he was held responsible. I'm not sure if it had anything to do with the color of his skin. At this time, they were working on the stadium and raising money to get it done. Not only that, but you never want to be the guy that replaces *the guy* because that's who you will be compared to. Mike Holmgren brought the Packers back to the Promised Land. Hell, there's a street named after him in the city. That's a tough act

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to follow! Either way, that Sunday night about eight o'clock, I got the call from Ray Rhodes. He said something to the effect that we were all fired and had to come in early to clean out the office. I was sweating when I took the call, it wasn't common for Ray to call after the game.

I told Madonna what Ray had said on the phone and she was in shock as well. Getting fired in the world of sports is different than in the everyday world. When a guy with a normal job gets fired, only his family and his friends know; and that's only if he tells them. But when you're fired from the NFL it's on the news and your names flow across the bottom of the television, for all the world to know. We told the kids. We didn't want them to go to school and have some kid tell them their dad or step-dad had gotten fired.

That night my wife and I spent time talking over the scenarios. I knew I could get another job in the NFL. I had the resume and the rings to secure another coaching position. The next morning, I arrived at my office by six o'clock. Everything in my office was packed up, and my computer was stripped. I had a feeling this would happen, so I had gathered the things that were mine that I thought I might use if I were to continue coaching in the NFL; things I thought could be important to my continued success. At that time, I was responsible for the run games, short yardages,

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goal line plays, as well as the wording and blocking assignments. I had exit interviews with Ron Wolf and the HR personnel. They let me know how long I had before I had to turn in my car, as well as details about insurances and my severance package. Even though I had been fired, I still got paid the rest of my contract. We had time to make decisions and figure things out.

I had ten years of playing professional football, six years of coaching, three Super Bowl rings, what more did I want from this game? I was married to an awesome lady who I hardly ever saw. I was leaving by five-thirty in the morning most days and getting home after the kids were asleep. How much of their lives had I missed? For what, chasing a paycheck? It all was closing down on me.

We decided to walk away from football as a family. Talk about a *now what?* moment! I had played or coached this game since I was six-years-old. There were so many things going through my head: *We have eight kids, two ex's, I have to get a new car, my daughter has Down's Syndrome, she needs insurance. We all need insurance. We have this big house so that everyone can have consistency-how do we make payments?* Talk about your mind going 100 miles per hour! But here's what I knew. Football was over for me. I felt I'd missed too much and what was I chasing? I had a very successful NFL career. Now it was time to be husband, dad,

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stepdad and look forward to whatever was to come our way.

Even though Madonna was scared to death she reassured me, we'd make it work. Before we met, Madonna was a stay-at-home mom and did hair and nails at the house to make extra money. She said, "Well, I guess I will get another job." It killed me. You see, my mom had me ten years too soon, I missed out on all the big money players make nowadays. Everyone thinks just because you played in the NFL you're a millionaire. Not the case. My wife was a magician when it came to paying bills, and together somehow, we would make it. All I knew is the noise had stopped and now I had to figure out which door I was going to go through. I knew I was different. I had always known I was different since I was a kid growing up in the North Carolina. But, different from what?

Once I left coaching I started cohosting a sports talk show for the radio station WDUZ, The Fan, on 1400 AM and 107.5 FM. We talk sports and I try to drop a few life nuggets as well. I have been on the radio for fifteen years. I do shows three nights a week and a post-game show following each of the Green Bay Packers games. I love doing it because it forces me to stay up on my sports and it gives me a platform to discuss different issues as I see fit. I've been known to give public service announcements based on things that I believe

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need to be addressed. People know I will say what's on my mind. Today this helps potential clients to understand—don't come to me unless you expect the truth.

Since I accepted Christ in 1995, I went to church when it worked into our schedule. During the season, they always had chapel on game day for us to have time to connect with our God and share some fellowship. During the off season I had more time to attend a regular church. I needed more. I knew God had plans for me. I had to be patient and even though I was, I need to know what was next on my journey. After getting fired, I thought about going into the ministry. I did some one on one discipleship with the pastor at our church. But, unfortunately there seemed to be a lot of unnecessary drama that goes with that. I wasn't sure what was going to happen.

My wife changed jobs and went to work in an insurance and investment office. The people who ran the office were friends of hers when she was married to her ex. Lifetime friends, damn near, and good people. The only problem was that they used to hang out together and now she was working for them. I wasn't sure what I wanted, but I had to do something. Eight kids are expensive, and I'd be damned if my lady was going to have to take care of me. So, I joined the firm also. I had done something I thought was similar in Colorado while playing with the Denver Gold. We all

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think we can be salesman, right? I got my licenses from NWTC, the local technical college. The cool thing was Madonna and I took the classes together. It was awesome because I didn't have to tell her what they were like, because she already knew. Don't get me wrong, they weren't that hard, they just required me to think differently. After I got my licenses and became official, I could sell life insurances and work with certain investments. I was trying to become that smooth talking insurance salesman, but I struggled. I wasn't going to lie to anyone. I struggled trying to talk someone into something they needed, and probably wanted, but because their cousin was in insurances or investment, they went with their cousin instead. But that didn't stop me, we had a pretty big house payment and I had an ex-wife that really didn't care what was happening. All she cared about was the money, really. She wanted Madonna and me to fall on our faces.

I really believe there are a lot of people who are used to going home to their husband or wife, kissing them, doing their routine and then lying in bed looking at the wall, feeling trapped in their world. They may wish there was more, but they are not willing to risk it all to find out. But here's the thing, my life was about defying the odds. I made it into the NFL at twenty-seven-years-old, I had won three Super Bowl rings, I had been a captain, I played with Joe Montana, Brett Favre,

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and Reggie White, played or coached with some of the greatest in the game. Talk about beating the odds! But now I started asking myself *how?* And *why?* By asking myself these questions, I started to realize it wasn't me doing this. I knew it was God. But me being a man, thought I had more control than I really did. I was battling with who I was, I was battling with my next step, my next challenge.

All my life I had to prove people wrong. I needed motivation to push myself to rise to the challenges. I remember going to the insurance office and not knowing what to do. When I was coaching or playing football, everything was time oriented. At 7:50 special teams meeting; 8:20 team meeting; 9:00 group meetings; 10:15 break; 11:30 walk thru; 1:00 special teams practice; 1:30 practice; 4:00 individual and so on. Every second of every day was accounted for. One of the big differences between playing and coaching is after the afternoon meeting the players leave. Their day is over, except for guys who were doing extra work. But for a coach, that's when our day really kicked into another gear. And no one wanted anyone thinking they weren't doing their job. I remember Bill Walsh telling his coaches, "when your job is done, go home." But as a coach you didn't want it to appear as if you weren't doing everything you could. You didn't want to be the first one to leave, even if you were done with your work earlier than others.

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I remember one morning in 2003 I went into the bathroom at my office and looked at myself in the mirror. I had no idea who I was looking at. I didn't like myself much at this point in time. While I was coaching I had gained weight. I had gone from my last playing weight of 235 up to 285 pounds. I'd gotten fat and sloppy. Everything changed that one morning. I'm not sure exactly why this day was any different, but it was. I told Madonna I needed to leave. I was alright, but I had to clear my head. I went home, changed my clothes and went for the most intense, thought-provoking, mind-bending walk. I walked for ten miles crying, praying, asking God for direction. This insurance guy wasn't me. I needed someone to talk to who would understand my journey, recognize that as much as I was like everyone else, I was a different guy. My experiences made me different, my thought process was different. I even met with-for the lack of a better word-a shrink. I'll call him Steve. First, Steve asked me how I felt, and in my head, I asked myself, *does it really matter how I feel?* No, it didn't. I looked at his walls, there were framed degrees, and then I asked him about his world. I struggled when I realized this dude's experiences with struggles were limited. What could he tell me about handling my life? He didn't have enough life experience, end of story. So, I remember leaving and I found a hop in my step like I hadn't had in quite a while. All

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of a sudden, things started to become clear. Before I did anything, I had to make sure what I was thinking made sense. Talk about God working in mysterious ways. I don't remember how we met, but one of the guys I respected for a long time was Judge J.D. McKay. I set up a meeting with him and shared my idea. I asked him what he thought. He thought there was a need for what I had shared. And, that's all it took. Finally, I was ready to tell Madonna what I wanted to do.

Time Out!

During games, teams would call a *time out* to change the momentum. From the beginning of the book I've been talking about my story in a chronological timeline. From here on, I'll be weaving in the fundamentals of My Brother's Keeper. It'll all make sense, but sometimes events may be out of sequence, or I'll call a time out to tie in concepts from MBK. I was our first client. MBK was formed because I had been prepared through my life to take on this new role.

Time In!

"Babe, we are going to open a male mentoring program and call it My Brother's Keeper."

She didn't say anything. So, I explained why our

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community needed this program and how our experiences could help people. We talked about my life from growing up in North Carolina; the abuse from my father and alcoholism with my mom. That checked some boxes on a list of life experiences. I talked about what happened with Joni and not getting drafted. I talked about disappointment and feelings of failure, more boxes checked. I explained how I felt about not making it into the NFL and struggling, doing all kinds of crazy jobs to make a living, always feeling not good enough. We talked about the old dude at the factory that finally told me the truth about who I was and how that stranger made such an impact on me. I talked about deciding to pursue my dream one last time because it was then or never. I talked about the disappointment of doing everything I thought I could, but still falling short. We talked about raising a blended family and the hurdles that went with that. We talked about me as a man feeling lost. As much as God wanted me to put it on the cross, I believe He still wanted me to control what I could and be a better version of me. Not that I handled all these things well, because I didn't. Nobody had taught me how to be the man I want to be; and that's when I realized God put me through all that I went through, so I could share that with others.

Then I explained that she had gone through what she did for the same purpose. She went from a stay-at-home

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mother to the wife of an NFL coach. Talk about dealing with all kinds of personalities. Some of the coaches' wives were a trip. They thought they coached too and it was all about them. Then there was the balancing of ex's, her ex and mine, along with making sure all the kids were loved and treated the right way. Then going to work and basically becoming an office manager. God works in mysterious ways, doesn't He? During that last job, we were unknowingly preparing to run the office of My Brother's Keeper.

Now she was intrigued, I could see it in her eyes. I was on a mission. I felt it inside my soul. I felt all my life I was special, I was different, and finally I started to understand why. I had the idea, now I had to figure where and how. I understood more of the battle that men faced after going through the divorce in 1995. I was also paying attention to how Green Bay itself had grown and what was happening right here in our city. I realized that there was a serious issue that we were facing in our society. Our boys and men were becoming lost. Our world wants to build more domestic violence shelters, after school programs and even more animal shelters, which are all awesome. But I felt the need for those were the trickledown effect of men not doing their jobs, or not assuming their roles. Nobody was teaching them, the boys and men, how to be better men. That's what we wanted to tackle. To make sure I

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was seeing what I believed I was seeing, I had met with the friend of mine who was a judge and with a friend of Madonna's who had been in the counseling world. I ran the idea past her and she also thought it could be an awesome resource for our city.

We had a great idea, but so far that's all we had. Now the question was where were we going to set up shop? Well that fell into place as well. We settled on the Executive Office Suites, a perfect place for any start-up business to get started. Included in our rent was use of the offices materials including chairs, desks, mailing facilities, restrooms, conference room, security, everything we needed to start without costing an arm and a leg. I was the only mentor, so it worked well for us. We met with a lawyer to lead us through the process of acquiring 501(c)(3) non-profit status. We had to establish our organization right from the start. I remember my wife and I were walking when she asked me, "what if this doesn't work, what's our back up?" I told her I can't have or think about a back-up. I needed to give this everything we had, no back door, so we did. It was amazing how things came together over a long weekend. We put a curriculum together for My Brother's Keeper and the basics of what My Brother's Keeper would be all about. Our motto became *Straight Talk-Sound Direction*. This program was about telling boys and men the truth about what was happening in their

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lives and giving them the power to take control of the only thing they can, themselves.

I realized throughout my life that I tended to worry about things I couldn't control instead of controlling the one thing I could, which was me. I realized that I would get mad at the salt shaker, but it had nothing to do with the salt shaker. I had anger issues. I realized that boys and men thought differently than females. I remembered the things I learned while getting a degree in Criminology and Juvenile Justice from Kansas. I remember the issues I dealt with when I was part of setting up a treaty with the rival gangs around Candlestick to stop the unnecessary bloodshed that was happening. I remember being the leader of the special teams for the 49ers and the characters that were under my watch. I remember playing dominos with Charles Haley and being able to calm down the beast. I realized because of all God had put me through, He was preparing me. He was always driving. He just allowed me to think I was.

It's absolutely amazing how things came to me as we prepared to go out on our own. My wife, my partner, was also preparing. She knew what we needed for an office. Together we were getting ready to take control of our lives. Because of my success as a player and coach and having some Super Bowl rings, I had doors open to me that others might not have been able to go

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through. I met some very nice people. Here's what I understand about people: everyone has stuff, everyone has issues and most of us are either running from or to something.

I met with other men in our community to become board members, to help us make a difference where we live. Green Bay was changing. The best and worst thing possible happened to Green Bay in 1997. The Green Bay Packers won the Super Bowl. That put Green Bay on the map. There are some very positive things a Super Bowl win can have on a community. There are also some very negative impacts. One of the dangers of winning a Super Bowl is that others saw the area as a land of opportunity. Green Bay really is a great place to live, but it wasn't ready for all the growth that flocked to the area. The city wasn't ready for all that diversity, and what came with that diversity. Don't get me wrong, it wasn't a Black, white, brown or red thing. The city was a virgin for those who thought this was a land of opportunity to make money with whatever hustle they had. People from Chicago and California visited Green Bay to make it their territory. Why not, business is business. Why not come to Green Bay and ruin it with drugs, prostitutes, and gang businesses. They all wanted a piece.

As much as it was a land of opportunity for those from other places to make a dollar, make their mark,

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get their hustle on, it also was an opportunity for a small town to become big quickly. That Super Bowl allowed Green Bay to think they could compete with the big city, but it couldn't. It didn't have enough to offer. Green Bay, at this time, was as lily white as white could be and that Super Bowl forced change in the eyes of those that were responsible for protecting that change. It was a serious work in progress and many people had different ideas about how to deal with it, good or bad.

What I was doing was trying to get ahead of problems, the problems that many didn't see coming. Because I had lived in California, Memphis, Denver and growing up in North Carolina, I saw it coming. That's how God works. I had the opportunity to see Green Bay before the Super Bowl win and after. I had the opportunity to see the challenges other cities were having with this situation Green Bay was going to face. Here's a little perspective. When I was coaching and marrying my wife, who's from Green Bay, this place started growing on me. It's a very safe place. I remember one day, Madonna and I were driving in Green Bay when we first got together, and she said to me, "You see this neighborhood? You don't want to walk in this neighborhood at night or basically anytime." I cracked up laughing. She asked, "what's so funny?" So, I had to explain some of the other parts of my journey. I told her about the day in high school I was riding the bus

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and as we got near the football field I saw what appeared to be one hell of a football game. As I got off the bus and headed to the football field, I couldn't wait to play. Then I heard chants, "Fight! Fight!" so of course I wanted to go check out who was throwing hands. They weren't playing football it was two neighborhoods going at it. I'm old school. Back in the 1970's and 1980's fights were fights. Even the bad boys fought with their hands, maybe a bat or stick when they were outnumbered. Even back then, there was a code on how to fight. Nobody wanted to kill anyone. They just wanted to prove a point, teach you enough so you knew when to stop next time. And usually when you got your butt kicked, you learned to stop doing what you were doing. Let's just say I learned a lot.

Then there were the times when I played for the San Francisco 49ers and someone had to pick-up chicken on the way to the airport for all our away games. Not just any chicken, Popeye's Chicken. It was a thing we made the rookies do. Yes, rookie hazing is allowed as long as the right people do it. Or at least it was when the football field, locker room and workout facilities used to be part of the players' sanctuary but slowly that has changed. Now it's a workplace and with that the rules have changed. You can't do or say certain things and those that need to lead can't lead unless they are politically correct when they do it. Well, anyway, don't

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let me get off on those “back in the day” moments. I never want to be that old guy saying, “back in the day this” or “back in the day that,” but sometimes truth is truth and back in the day in my world, football was special. The rules allowed there to be separation and the average couldn’t play the game.

Back to the chicken, I’d pick it up because it was on my way; we flew out of San Francisco and most of the guys lived closer to Redwood City where the facility was during the season until the 49ers moved to Santa Clara. Instead of one of them having to back track I would pick up Popeye’s. The only problem with getting Popeye’s was the location. It was located in East Palo Alto, which in the late 1980’s was one of the cities that led in murders in the United States. Popeye’s was the first drive-thru I had ever seen with no human contact. They had bars on the windows and you had to put your money under the tray. They rotated the tray to retrieve the money. I often felt we were allowed to use the drive-thru because, and only because, they knew we were 49ers, so we had a free pass.

So, when I finally stopped laughing and explained this to my lovely lady, she gave me that crazy look. You know how you ladies do it. Not only that, Green Bay will always be a safe place because of the Green Bay Packers and the money they bring in. This place is a

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tourist attraction, no one wants to come to a place that's not safe. Green Bay *has* to be safe.

Through My Brother's Keeper I work with many young African American men that come from Milwaukee, Chicago or other places where the police officers are often overwhelmed with major crimes. Smaller crimes are often overlooked in those cities, so they might get away with minor offenses. I have to tell them Green Bay is different. Here the officers have time and the ability to pay attention to the small things to make sure they don't become major things. A big difference!

There were a lot of organizations and still are, that work with boys and men, but My Brother's Keeper's mission was and is different. Our approach is unique. I went on a mission to find others that felt what I had or had issues themselves and at one time wished they had someone to talk with. People who saw the value in what we were doing. Everyone has stuff. Stuff that if they don't handle might affect others.

On November 3, 2003, we officially opened the doors to My Brother's Keeper, a male mentoring program working with boys and men ages eleven to sixty-five. People ask why we start at eleven. There are several reasons. Much of what we talk about requires an individual to understand the relationship between decisions and consequences. Also, I know myself and I can only water down what I say so much, and most ten-year-old

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kids can't understand or handle my approach. I've gotten better over the years, but most of the time I let my other mentors work that level. Along with opening my Brother's Keeper I have continued co-hosting a radio show on The Fan. It's a nice platform to talk sports and sometimes my harshness gets melted down with honesty. I respect sports and see the value beyond just the players. Again, God working. He'd already given me a platform and trust me I didn't understand it until I got out of my own way. In so many ways that's what our program is about, teaching our boys and men to stop getting in their own way by understanding who they are and what makes them tick. To help them figure out what's stopping them from being their best.

The doors were open, it was awesome and scary. I had bet on myself again, but this time was different. My wife was with me, side by side. We were doing this together. She was the detailed one and I was the big picture guy. The first years were about getting the word out to the schools, judges, lawyers, case workers, and any organization that dealt with boys and men and the trickle-down effect of them not doing their jobs. Did my wife and I sacrifice? Absolutely. We went without, we watched every penny, we made sure our kids' lives didn't change. Sometimes at night we would pray to God for His continued guidance because we both knew this was His plan. I remember after opening we

spent a weekend and created the essence of what we call the Code of Life. The core values My Brother's Keeper teaches.

Time Out!

For somebody to change, they must have a reason to change. Former First Lady and wife of President Reagan, Nancy Reagan once said, "Just say no to drugs." In my opinion that was the most incomplete statement she ever said. She should have added the word, "because." "Just say no to drugs because _____." Each person needs to finish that statement for themselves. Growing up my reason was sports. I couldn't or wouldn't do anything that would risk my opportunity with sports. I had to decide. If you don't have a reason to change, you won't.

Before we had clients, we had the time and opportunity to find those "reasons" that are often forgotten. Everyone's different, but we were able to identify some common responses. At first, much of My Brother's Keeper was to keep me in line mentally. I found myself getting mad a lot. I started to understand my problems which are the same as most men. We feel frustrated, a lot. I will get into frustration in a little while. We even came up with a definition that I believe fits. I would just be pissed off moment and I had no real reason why.

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So, I took a good look at myself. As the program started to develop we had to realize something about men. When I say this, I'm not trying to disrespect anyone, but this is a male mentoring program; it's designed to help boys and men see themselves in a way they understand so they can change the things they need to change.

I ask our clients, "when do boys and men get into the most trouble?" and trust me, I got a thousand answers, but then I shock them. I tell them most boys and men get into trouble when they think like girls or women. BLAM! right between the eyes. Then I explain how girls and women think. I ask them if they have a sister, mom, girlfriend or wife and they say yeah, then I ask them how those ladies think? I can see it in their eyes. They are thinking, *what the heck is he talking about?* I tell them most girls and women think based on their emotions and feelings. But, when we as boys and men think with our emotions or feelings, we tend to lose control because we react first, we tend to lose control. Then I write *REACT* on the board.

REACT

I explain what happens within this word; I break down what this acronym stands for. Let's take the *R*. I ask what happens when a fly flies by their face. They say, "I

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swat at it” and I say, “right, we automatically *Respond* without thinking about it.”

Then we go to the next letter, the *E* and it gets real interesting. We have developed a description of the evolution of anger and explain it this way. We respond *Emotionally* based on what we are feeling. For guys our emotions fall into many categories. For our clients, especially men who are married, have a lady, have kids, or work with people, communication is key. Men want and expect to be on the same page with whoever they are in relationship with.

After *E* we move onto *A*. Anytime we Respond *Emotionally*, our *Actions Cause* – *C* – us nothing but *Trouble, T*. Then I ask them how many times they have said to themselves *oh shit, I didn't want that to happen?* Most have learned to react quickly. We work with them by teaching them how to *TTR* – *Think, Then React*. I ask them, “what’s the first thing you do when you think, then react?” The answer is to slow down. That’s the first step; teaching them how to slow down. This is a crucial step to problem solving and decision making. My Brother’s Keeper is about helping our boys and men learn how to think. Many of our males don’t slow down. They think they are weak if they don’t react right away. All our lives we’ve been told it’s a sign of weakness if we hesitate. Our teaching at MBK shows that slowing down is a sign of strength. Again, we are

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talking about controlling ourselves, and in order to control ourselves we must learn how to think. Not only thinking, but *what are you thinking about?* There are a lot of ways to go about thinking. My way of thinking has to do with an old football strategy. It's the old KISS philosophy, remember it—Keep It Simple, Stupid. I have found that *simple* is a lot easier to teach; it's about finding your lane. Everyone thinks it's about finding a job. No, it's not, it's about keeping the job. Everything is about the thought process.

That's where that word frustration comes into play. This word is the key to taking control of our lives. At this point, I ask them what their definition of frustration is. Our clients will give me many different answers, but a lot of them have to do with not being able to control situations. For our program, we discuss that frustration occurs when we get mad at others; when they don't think like us. Think about it. How many times do you get mad because people are doing things differently than you would? We use phrases like: "*what are they doing?*" "*I wouldn't do it that way,*" "*that irritates me.*" You don't understand how or why they went about something the way they did. We forget, not everyone has walked in our shoes.

Usually feeling frustrated flows into feeling disrespected. Now follow me, we are frustrated, because we believe whoever we are having this issue with should

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be thinking like us. We think they are disrespecting us. We think they are purposely not doing or acting like we think they should, hence the disrespect. In our mind, this is a deliberate act which now leads us to feel, especially in regard to a partner, frustrated and then disrespected. Feeling disrespected leads to feeling unappreciated. At that moment we go to this place mentally where it seems nobody sees what we are doing. Your partner, or whoever you are having the challenge with, may not want to recognize what you've done to change and make things better. This leads to confusion; and when boys or men get confused, their natural defense is to fight, rage, get angry, or blow things up. Most boys and men do a great job of sweeping things under a rug or say, "it's no big deal," because they don't know how to communicate the right way. This is the evolution of anger, and we know this because anytime we react in the moment, we usually respond emotionally, and our actions cause us nothing but trouble.

A few years ago, I was raking leaves. For some reason I enjoy doing yardwork. I believe it's because it allows me to be alone with my thoughts. Since I talk for a living, whether with My Brother's Keeper or on the radio, when I don't have to, I enjoy listening to music. I can't sing worth a darn, but I appreciate good music. This day the radio was on a country station. I was listening to this artist, Chris Young, the gist of his song

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was about hearing voices. Voices telling him all the right stuff about being accountable, being responsible, and all the right things we need to know and do as men. I went into the house and told my wife, “I think something’s wrong, because I’m starting to like country music.” At that moment, she looked at me and told me one of the most profound things I’ve ever heard. She asked me, “do you know what country music is?” I said, “no.” She told me, “country music is rap music.” I could understand, and it made all the sense in the world because she painted a picture I could see. That’s what we do with our program. I realized to be different we had to Keep It Simple Stupid, and help our clients see themselves, because it doesn’t matter what we see; they have to see it.

Earlier, we talked about having a reason to change. It’s not enough just to want to change. You actually have to do the work to change. We help our clients develop and remember their own reason to change. We help them understand what consequences are. We talk about the ripple effect. Most know what that is, but don’t understand how it really works. I draw on my white board what they think is a bullseye. It’s really a ripple. Next, I draw a decision they have made in the center circle and draw out those consequences and how it has affected themselves, their family, or people that just happen to cross their paths. Remember our motto?

Straight Talk-Sound Direction. Remember back when I talked about being a forklift driver and that old dude hit me right in the face with truth. Our program is about absolute truth, but in doses people can handle. You see, there's a lot that goes into the makeup of boys and men. They are so complicated because of what they have been told to be, how they were told to be, and what they were told they couldn't be. We were told as boys and men if we touch it, we are supposed to fix it. So much of the program is based on teaching our client a different way to be a man or how to take it to a different level.

One of the hardest things for men to do is forgive themselves. That's another part of the MBK program. Everyone gets there at different times. Those that believe in Jesus Christ seem to be able to forgive themselves sooner than those that don't. I really struggled with this as a man. I thought I could control anything and everything. I tell my clients you can't put any new in until you get rid of the old stuff. If you don't forgive yourself, every time you're reminded of your mistake, a button is pushed. It could be pushed by a thought, a person, or an event. Until you put it where it needs to be, it owns you; and if it owns you, you will react to it. Think about it this way – how many mistakes have owned you, and when you're reminded, what does it do to you? Do you squirm? Do you get angry? Are you

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reminded of your failures? Are you reminded of a time you want to forget, but can't? Now ask yourself how much you are staying stuck and beating yourself up for something you can't change. I'm not saying don't be responsible for things, but you can't move forward if chains are holding you back. For my clients who aren't believers, they think it's about them. For those that say they believe in Christ and struggle to forgive themselves, I remind them of God's power by making them feel somewhat stupid. I simply ask them what the Bible is about. They will say many things, but I want them to focus on this:

Jesus' birth was because God knew what was going to happen and He needed purity to sacrifice.

Jesus' life was about humility, compassion and being that role model.

Jesus' death was about God sacrificing His Son to pay for all our sins.

Jesus' resurrection was about all who believe having eternal life.

I ask them if they agree, and they say yes. Then I say, "well if you believe that and God has granted you forgiveness..." I'll pause for a second, then write on the board for more shock value, *when did you become more powerful than God?* They all say the same thing, "I'm not more powerful than God!" then I say to them, "if you hold on to what God has forgiven you for, aren't

you saying that you are?” Man, you should see their reaction! It’s like their eyes open; like they have received some amazing gift-that they already had! By now, we usually have our clients’ attention. They realize we go about things differently.

Time In!

Everything takes time to grow. Doors opened easier for me because I had three Super Bowl rings and was an ex-NFL player and did a radio show. I didn’t have to knock the doors down like others who wanted to do the same thing. Don’t get me wrong, I had to hustle, bust my butt. I would go meet with any organization that called and inquired about what we did. The first couple of years was all about explaining My Brother’s Keeper; what made us different. Early on, two African American guys came to our office. They had been doing things in the community and heard about what I was doing. They walked into that appointment with the mindset of becoming a part of My Brother’s Keeper.

As we met I couldn’t get over a couple of things. One of the guys was sitting there talking to me wearing a wife-beater undershirt and more chains than Mr. T. I knew the other one. He looked like a pretty boy. Interestingly, I was working with his son-that he had nothing to do with! In my head all I could think was,

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don't they know what we are about? The first thing they started talking about was what the white man was doing to disrespect the Black man. They went on about how we had to stick together and fight the oppression. I let them talk because I wanted them to know I heard them. Hell, I might have agreed, but I didn't like how they wanted to go about things. Needless to say, we never worked together. It never stopped them from doing their thing. They just couldn't do it with My Brother's Keeper. We were building and separating ourselves from other organizations based on how we did things. We were finding our lane. We knew what we wanted to do and what was working with clients. MBK wasn't the sort of organization that would take anyone fishing. I wasn't interested in doing anything other than asking our clients what they were thinking.

Around the time we opened My Brother's Keeper, Reggie White had a situation with a fire at his church in Tennessee. Many questioned what happened with some of the funds that might have come from Green Bay. Whether I was an athlete or not, especially in Green Bay, everyone wants to wait until they can see if something is worthy before people get behind the cause, and I knew that. In the early years, it was a struggle because while I was out telling people what we do, there wasn't anyone in the office meeting with clients. We had to stay the course. I remember, Greg,

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one of our board members who lost his life too soon, telling me we weren't selling My Brother's Keeper; I was selling myself, the whole package. I knew we had to grow slowly, God seemed to remind me all the time, slow and steady.

There were a few things early on God used to remind us we were doing what He wanted us to do. I remember a couple years into the program, counselors from a local Green Bay high school called us. They had two minority families feuding in school and asked if we could help. We arranged a meeting with the counselors. They explained as much as they could, and they were doing as well as they could; but they were dealing with a world they knew nothing about. They didn't realize the loudness of African American families. Just because they were flopping didn't mean they were going to hit anyone. Already there was confusion on *how* to communicate. We set up a day and time for everyone to meet. On that day the school counselors came into the office all nervous. We met in a big conference room that I often used when I worked with bigger groups.

When the families came to my offices I directed them to the conference room, paying attention to who was going to try to take control. I was waiting to remind them of how things were going to go; I hoped they'd respect each other. For sure I was going to teach them how to respect me. Sounds cold, but it's not. I

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was just going to remind them of who's house they were in. Each family had men, women, teenage kids, and two grandmas who were obviously the voice of reason. They sat on either side of the table and the counselors walked in behind me. I sat at the head of the table, introduced myself, gave them a little history of myself and what the program was about. I told everyone the rules we were going to use to communicate. Then I asked them to explain what had happened between the families. The whole situation started because two of the kids who had been going together broke up and one of them had hurt feelings. So, they started war with each other. I can't make this up!

After hearing both sides of the story, I simply asked Grandma #1 why they moved her from Milwaukee and she said, "a better way of life, peace opportunity for the kids and grandkids, jobs, a piece of the American Dream." I said, "Nice." I then leaned over to Grandma #2 and asked her the same question and she answered the same way. What I said next shocked everyone, including the counselors and the grandmas. I simply said to both of them, "If that's what you wanted to get away from, why in the hell did you bring it with you to Green Bay?" They all looked shocked as hell and said nothing. I further explained the drama they were bringing into their lives. I reminded them that change starts with them. Then I asked them exactly what they

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were fighting about. Both grandmas started laughing. The reality was they were fighting change and were using a teenage breakup as the fuel to destroy instead of build. When the meeting was over I had the grandmas exchange numbers and they explained to everyone else in their families how they were going to behave from then on. After that the school had no more issues with those families. I guess we say what everyone thinks but doesn't know how to say. My Brother's Keeper says it—*Straight Talk-Sound Direction*.

Don't get me wrong, not everyone can take the truth right between the eyes. They may say they can, but often they can't. My role is to be able to tell them the truth in a way that people can absorb. Kind of like throwing a bucket of water in their face, we just make sure it's the right temperature. After that meeting the word started leaking out. We had people thinking, *hey, there's a new program that might be different*.

After that I met with Probation & Parole, the organization that handles the guys on parole. I made a presentation for them; they too are always looking for different ways to get their message across. They'd given our organization the funding to hold weekly group sessions. We held twelve sessions to help the men understand the changes necessary as they go about facing their day-to-day lives.

One of the next organizations I made a connection

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with was Brown County Human Services. Their case workers would send their clients to us at a reduced rate for sessions. My Brother's Keeper was starting to be in demand. One of the things I loved to do, and still do, is go to the Juvenile Detention Center weekly to work with the kids locked up in there. When I first started going, I was under contract but now I'll just say the suits in Madison wanted to spend money on more preventive measures. They didn't understand when you go into the Detention Center with a young man and ask him how it's going while he's wearing someone else's underwear, flippers, and socks, truth has no choice but to slap him in the face. It's not going well if he's sitting there; period, end of story. I still go to the Detention Center every Tuesday most of the year. The great thing about MBK, it's never been about the money because I never really had a lot. At my Brother's Keeper, we are proud to say in thirteen years we've never turned anyone away.

The lessons I've learned from being a father, step-father, athlete, three-time Super Bowl winner, coach, forklift driver, pizza maker, cook, a guy that had his dreams hijacked, divorced man, angry kid growing up with prejudice and a soldier for father, a mother who gave us everything including drunken stupors, and a degree in Juvenile Justice are what created My Brother's Keeper. My wife always reminds me not to forget about

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the degree. I see people with all kinds of degrees and certificates on their walls-but they don't know a damn thing about life and the real struggles that knock each of us off our feet.

Talking about getting knocked off my feet. In 2006 I had a great honor from my hometown of Fayetteville, North Carolina. I was inducted into the Fayetteville Sports Club Hall of Fame. That was awesome, but it meant I had to go back to Fayetteville. I really didn't mind; going home was different now because now I felt I'd accomplished enough. My father and I, let's just say, found some common ground.

Back in 1998, Madonna, my boys and I drove down to North Carolina. I wanted them to see where I had grown up and I was invited to speak at a banquet at that time, so we took a trip. My dad and I had made contact, I didn't want to be angry or hate anymore. I was lucky because my mother and my wife Madonna really loved each other. It was nice to see two of the three ladies I love getting along. On that trip my father, of course, showed up like he still lived there. Remember, this was the first time my wife met my father. You'll never guess what his first words were to her – you ready? He said to her, “You know, none of my kids married their race.” What do you think of that? No shit, no “nice to finally meet you,” no “how was the drive?” That was the kind of mind games my father always played. On that trip

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I told my father our relationship is what it is, but the relationship he would have with his grandsons was up to him. Let's just say over the years, nothing had really changed.

So, in 2006, and Madonna and I were back for the Hall of Fame induction. My dad called and asked if he could attend. I said yes of course, because for whatever reasons we are constantly searching for approval and maybe I would finally have my dad's approval. Well, I could hope, right? Believe it or not, my mother and father started arguing during the ceremony right at the table about something stupid. I had to tell them, "not tonight and not here." They shut up; I didn't care if either one's feelings were hurt. The only saving grace was that everyone at the table knew their history. Regardless of my parent's crap, it was a special night.

We all decided to have a family reunion in Tennessee where my two sisters lived. They lived roughly thirty miles from each other but never talked. Imagine the first time we were all in the same house—parents and kids—in thirty-four years. Of course, my father tried to be Father of the Year, but he overstepped his boundary as usual. Now let me break down my family again without trying to disrespect anyone. I'm the oldest boy. My oldest sister is a year older and my younger brother next to me is two years younger. We were the ones that really had to run through the fire. We got most

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of the heat along with my mother. Let's just say dad was different by the time my younger sister fully understood the dynamics of the Sydneys. Our youngest brother is about thirteen years younger. He got to reap the benefits of a different father. By the time he was old enough to know what was going on, it wasn't going on anymore. My youngest brother and sister were close to my father, so I couldn't be close to them. It sucked, but that's the way it was and still is, even after my father's death. We will talk about that later.

Somehow, somehow, I found out the daughter I never had contact with had been communicating with my mother, my father and my younger sister. Let's just say, my sister thought Julie should attend the family reunion. I said, "not if you want me there." I knew nothing of her, and it actually pissed me off that they were trying to force something that I didn't want any part of. Julie, instead of coming to me or writing or calling me, was doing the end around. I wondered what kind of game she was playing. You have to remember, I would've been easy to find, I wasn't hiding. I didn't trust her intentions, right or wrong. So, I wanted no part of the games being played. All I had known about her since 1977 was her name. The reunion went off without a hitch. Julie wasn't mentioned again and there were no issues. We had all agreed if something

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hadn't been brought up before anyone got there, don't bring it up just to have drama.

Everyone played nice at the family reunion. Like I have said over and over, everyone has their stuff; the important thing is how you handle that stuff. On the last day, as everyone was saying there so longs and goodbyes, someone said, "we'll we have to do this again." Before you know it, my beautiful and awesome wife said, "next year you guys need to come up to our house in Green Bay." And before I could say a word, everyone agreed. Boom, there you have it. Everything I tried to keep away just got an invitation to invade my life, my world. Don't get me wrong, my older sister and brother were always welcome, and we had visited several times before this. I didn't get mad at my wife. She is all goodness and meant nothing but good. I told her on the way home, "there's a reason I've kept my distance," and she soon found out why.

A couple of weeks after we got back I happened to check the mail and there was a letter from my dad. Of course, my reaction was *what the hell is this?* What did he want? Did he think we were good just because we survived forty-eight hours together and we had played nice? I could just throw it in the trash, but if I did that, I was still letting him affect me. I opened the letter. It was a letter giving me advice about how I was handling my relationship with Julie, he thought I was missing

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out. He didn't want to realize there was no relationship with Julie; I was starting to get pissed off because things were getting forced down my throat.

I called him about the letter and asked him why in the hell he thought I should take advice from him. He said he'd found God and was a changed man. If he did awesome for him, but I assured him that I won't be taking any advice from him. Thanks, but no thanks. Would you believe less than a week later he called me asking for money because his daughter, that I had never met needed a car. He asked if I could help. I said, "no I have my own kids to raise." That was how my dad worked. Once he thought he was in, he'd try to bulldoze you over. Unfortunately, over the years I heard too much about his collateral damage, mainly because of what my other relatives shared with me. Right after that, my little sister wrote me a letter. Again, talking about Julie and what her opinion of the situation was. The difference was my sister wrote me what seemed like a 1,000-page letter. More than half the words were "God this" or "God that." She thought her God was different than mine. I guess I had to educate her, which I did of course. My wife, because she is a great lady, had no idea what was on its way to Green Bay, Wisconsin. I had to educate her. All of this was heading my way because I invited it. I opened the door and invited this drama.

Time Out!

At My Brother's Keeper we've centered in on what the essence of change is. Most people want to change, but they don't know how. We have created the vehicle to do that. Earlier we talked about having a reason to change, that reason has to be your motivation.

We have to stop worrying about what we can't control and control what we can. The one and only thing we can control is ourselves. I ask my clients what makes the difference between a professional athlete and an amateur athlete. The answers are many: money, skill set, experience, size, knowledge. All true. But what I say is:

3 SECONDS

They look at me and ask, "what?" and I repeat, "three seconds." I explain it like this: Since I live in Green Bay, if the starting right guard for the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point football team got a DUI last night, who would hear about it? Probably just his school, family, the coach and anyone else he would tell. But, if you are the starting right guard of the Green Bay Packers and you get a DUI who hears about it—the world! The point is that it takes:

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3 SECONDS to BUILD or DESTROY

I ask my clients what's going through their mind in those 3 seconds. That's what we focus on; what to think about. The essence of My Brother's Keeper is about giving our clients the ability to slow down and think, TTR. What should they think about exactly? That's where the IRS Code-Integrity Respect and Standards comes in.

Integrity is the foundation of everything. Once I understood this my life changed and so have the lives of thousands of our clients. Is it easy? No. Integrity is everything; that's the first step. Every decision we make has to be based on being a man of integrity. There are a lot of definitions, but here's ours:

INTEGRITY – KNOWING WHAT THE
RIGHT THING TO DO IS AND BEING
WILLING TO DO IT AT ALL TIMES

Let's break this down:

- 1) We all know what the right thing to do is, at least we usually do when we allow ourselves to think.
- 2) It's about being willing to do it period, end of discussion. It's not about whether you want to or not based on how you feel. It's about being obedient.
- 3) At all times. It's automatic. Think about it, you

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get to decide who you are going to be. What decision doesn't involve integrity from throwing trash out the window to lifting the toilet seat? Remember, we are talking about wanting to change.

It starts with being a man of integrity. To be a man of integrity, we have to be a man of respect.

INTEGRITY _____ RESPECT

There are many definitions of respect. The universal one is to treat people the way you want to be treated. But, again, ours is different at MBK. This word is the area I didn't do a good enough job throughout my life until I realized how important it was. Our definition of respect is:

RESPECT – I HAVE TO TEACH
PEOPLE HOW TO TREAT ME, BECAUSE IF
I'M NOT RESPECTING MYSELF WHY
WOULD ANYONE ELSE?

Here's an example of what I mean. My wife and I work together. If she does something I don't like and keeps doing it and eventually I get mad, is it her fault or mine? It's mine, because I never told her I didn't like it. The key is how I tell her and that's communication. There's a fine line between respect

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and fear. I learned this while we were in Japan for a bowl game while I was coaching. I couldn't take it any longer. No disrespect, but I needed me a burger, some fries-salty fries-and a cold Miller Lite. My lady and I got into a taxi. The driver said something, I said something and before I knew it, I was yelling at the little dude. My wife grabbed my shoulder and said, "Harry, he's not deaf, he doesn't understand." All of a sudden, I realized I was yelling and this poor guy was scared. So, I got a grip, walked inside to the concierge, got a business card for Hard Rock Café, handed it to the driver and we were there in eight minutes. At that moment I realized that I needed to learn how to paint pictures others could see. I had to communicate better.

In order to be a man of integrity, I must respect myself and others based on being a man of integrity. This is where I fell short in my first marriage. Like most men, I kept sweeping things under the rug. I didn't know how to say I didn't like this or that, so I said nothing and things that were mole hills became mountains. If you don't respect yourself, why would anyone else?

So far, we've talked about being a man of integrity and respect. In order to be a man of integrity, I have to respect myself and others by creating new standards. Standards are the way we do things. How we walk, how we talk, what we do, what we won't do. We need

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to live up to the standards we've chosen to set. You are now taking control over you.

In order to be a man of integrity, you have to respect yourself and live up to your standards; and to do that one must be disciplined. My clients will ask "be disciplined to do what?" Ask yourself if every decision you make leads you to be a man of integrity. Are you holding yourself accountable for your actions? That's our individual responsibility. Let's put it together:

INTEGRITY
DISCIPLINED

RESPECT
ACCOUNTABLE

STANDARDS
RESPONSIBLE

Now what does this mean? It means if we master these skills we can control ourselves better. But, if we do this, it doesn't mean we can control the outcome. We never could anyway. It helps us control our intentions.

How much change is made if we make decisions based on the IRS Code versus making decisions based on reasons, excuses, drugs, drinking, emotions or feelings? Think about it, it's about controlling what we can.

Sometimes young men are put into a role before they've developed these skills. Think about this situation:

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The battle between mom and teenage son who has been made the man of the house. When it starts out mom has a husband or boyfriend, then the man leaves for whatever reason: jail, abuse, no money or they just get tired of things the way they are, for whatever reason they split. Now you have the son who has become the man of the house. Why is this a problem? He's in charge of the siblings or he has to work. If he's not helping with bills, he's making his own money, buying his own things, and gaining independence. Then the mom starts to talk to him like he's an adult or asks his permission or thoughts on things that he should have no business being a part of. Mom's talking to him like he's a co-parent, therefore he's gaining power. Now he believes he has a 50/50 vote. They are walking into dangerous waters, especially if this young man thinks he's smarter than his mom. Or, if mom doesn't have her stuff together and he's bigger he stands overpowering her. Sometimes these young men pump up their chest trying to show they are the bullies now. This happens a lot when the family was a victim of a father or boyfriend or husband who was a yeller or abuser or put holes in the walls to show his power, that's how he scared and controlled people. That boy has been watching this and the moment he does the same thing and mom flinches or backs down and gives in, it's over. Now that boy has become the monster like the one that

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just left. In fifteen years of mentoring at My Brother's Keeper, we've seen so many cases of the same scenario. Believe it or not, there are no color barriers. It's not a Black thing or a white thing. It's a man thing.

I look at what is wrong in our world; the things that keep happening over and over again. It's simple: integrity and respect aren't being practiced the right way. There's confusion with what these words mean and how to apply them. Everyone throws around the word "respect" as if once you reach a certain age it's an inherent right. Wrong!

With My Brother's Keeper we go into schools on a regular basis. We see how this word "respect" gets misused. Many of today's youth have no real clue how it works. They don't understand the complete simplicity and the power of the relationship of respect and integrity. Or they think respect is supposed to be a selfish thing. Let me explain through an example that happens all the time in schools. A kid is messing around in the hallway, or just not paying attention to what he's doing, and the bell rings so he comes into class late. The teacher then points out that he's late and an argument breaks out and she kicks him out of class. He's pissed because the teacher, he believes, is disrespecting him. But, didn't he disrespect the teacher by coming into class late? He doesn't see his disrespect. He doesn't see how what he did was disrespectful; he was only a

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little late! These are the things we try to get out clients to see in their everyday decision making, how their actions impact others around them.

Sometimes people assume simply because they have certain titles, they also deserve respect. We have mothers who come in and want us to “fix” their sons not realizing that the son’s problem is trying to navigate around the parent’s crap. It’s amazing how many people don’t see themselves clearly and don’t realize the damage that they are doing with the power that comes with the position of “Mom” or “Dad.” I had a mom come to the program and bring her son because he wasn’t listening to her the way she wanted him to. After fifteen minutes of meeting with them both at our first session, the break-down in communication was clear. You’d be amazed how two people can see the same thing, but their versions are totally different.

Our clients range in age from eleven to sixty-five. That’s a wide range, but as we go through life and our age changes, our needs and demands also change. A young man goes from thinking about himself, then finds love, then has children looking up to him for answers when he may have none. Or, you are married, and you and your wife don’t know what happened. Somehow where there was once love, now you find hate. Talk about different pages. Hell, you guys are in

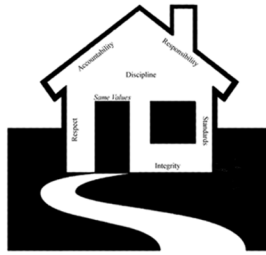
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different books. You want to connect but forgot how because life got in the way.

My Brother's Keeper is about changing how our boys and men think. In my opinion our boys and men have been brain washed for as long as I can remember. Ask yourself what the difference between a successful man and a man of success is. For a long time, our society has told our boys and men to be successful men. Every commercial is about the hot car, hot lady, big house, money. If you aren't chasing these things, you are a failure. We've been taught to chase the stuff. The problem is if we make one mistake we can lose it all. Our program is about helping our boys and men be people of substance; being boys and men of integrity, respecting themselves and others, living up to standards, being disciplined, holding themselves accountable. That's their responsibility. Our clients have learned that by being a man of substance you can still acquire the stuff, but if you don't have the right substance you will loss the stuff.

That's why it's important to build your house the right way, let me explain the analogy of building your house. You need to complete the house and understand what can take it down. What's the most important part of the house? The foundation, right? Understand, just because you build your house doesn't mean your job is done. It's not about getting the job done, it's about

keeping and maintaining the house and understanding what's going on. The walls and roof example:



Once you have the floor *Integrity* done, then you can build the sides and roof. But here's the key, you can't let anyone in your house unless they have the same values you do. People with different values are like termites, and you know what termites do. They eat the house from the inside out. Sometimes that's the hardest part of the change. We think we have to be loyal to the neighborhood, to the color of our skin, to our family, to our past. What chains are holding you locked down?

Many organizations say you can't hang around old friends. I don't necessarily believe that. If the old friend respects who you are, and what you are trying to do, what better person to roll with?

The journey may become hard for many reasons. I look at myself and even though I know this and teach it, there are always people or situations that make you question your direction. I remember a saying I heard: *you can't be friends with someone if they aren't happy in their own life, otherwise they try to bring your life down to their level.*

We are always being tested, tested by what we know and quizzed by what we don't know. Talk about being tested

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in thirteen years. You would not believe the storied and wounded souls that are walking next to you, living next to you. That's why I say everyone has stuff. The twelve-year-old boy that's scared to come home because he gets into fights at school because he'd rather be seen as a bully than someone who struggles with learning. You have the athlete who's not good enough to play anymore, so now he's lost. You have the dad who works his butt off to make a living for his family, but his family hates it when he's not home. Or you have the male like me, I didn't know *how* to be the best I could be. I didn't know how to respect myself. I even put up a wall and loved in doses because I felt I had to protect myself. There's the guy who worries so much he paralyzes himself with fear. This program taught me so much about who I am. I wasn't a bad guy, I was an okay dad, but My Brother's Keeper taught me to not settle anymore. How to be better and how to be the best I could be. Different situations in my life forced me to take a look at myself. If we are not looking in the right place, we can get lost. My Brother's Keeper helps boys and men to not get lost, to find a better way. So much of the program is because my mother did everything in her power to give us, her kids, a chance to become more.

Time In!

So now back to our family reunion in Green Bay,

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Wisconsin. All my brothers and sisters, my father and his wife, she's a minister, and of course my mother. For the longest time my mother would come every year or two to just get out of North Carolina. I could finally pamper her, pay back her sacrifices by putting money in her pocket, and let her feel like the queen she was. The time for the family reunion arrived and of course I was telling myself, *it's okay. I can handle these people in my house, I can put up with my father. He will respect me. He's finally going to be what he's supposed to be.* That was the stupidest thing I could have ever thought. In my head, I actually thought for those three days he would be cool, not try to act like I didn't see through him like I always could. My Brother's Keeper also has a lot to do with what I had learned from him.

The devil himself was coming to Green Bay, Wisconsin to step into the world that I've been building brick by brick. I had to make sure I made nothing about me. That's right make nothing about me. Let's do this cool. And I was good, my mind didn't run. I was actually doing everything that I was teaching in the program. How could I teach it if I didn't do it? Don't get me wrong, I am not a saint. I make my share of mistakes. I still get mad but based on the feedback I am a hell of a lot better than I was before My Brother's Keeper.

Things seemed to start well. But my wife held out on me because she knew if she had told me about a

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situation, I would flip my lid. I had to do the radio show for the 4-6pm time slot on Monday, Tuesday and Friday as well as the post-game show after the Packers game. I wasn't home when they arrived, so I told them to go ahead and eat. My wife Madonna is a gift and she's everything to me. She loved my mom but after hearing stories from my mom and me, she despised my dad too. But, since she loved me, she wanted everyone to enjoy themselves. She prepared an awesome meal of breadsticks, lasagna, and salad for the travelers. My dad decided he wanted a ham sandwich. Yeah, that's right, a ham sandwich. Instead of asking his wife who was with him to make it and taking into consideration what my wife had already prepared, he asked Madonna if she could make him a ham sandwich instead. So of course, my wife did because she loves me. He gave her his particular ingredients and she made it and brought it to him. Believe it or not, he had the balls to ask her to cut the crust off the bread. Yeah, yeah, you heard me. He asked her to cut the crust off the damn sandwich while his wife was sitting next to him and didn't step in to help. Now at that moment, my wife became his slave. For no other reason than he was who he was, and I wasn't there.

Later, my wife told me what had happened and my mother who had witnessed the situation confirmed it. Of course, when she told me I went to the place I

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tried not to visit. I'll try to describe that place. When I played football I enjoyed the contact, the hitting, trying to destroy. I didn't see name or number, I saw targets. I consider myself one of the last gladiators. I just picked the football arena. My wife says when I get angry my eyes go black. I couldn't do what I did if I had a conscience. I hope that makes sense. Sometimes it's hell being civilized. As a man, I realize that we all have different sides. We can push different buttons and become what we have to be for that situation. I remember telling my kids when they were young, "what you see Dad doing on television or at the game is just what he does at the game. When I'm done, I'm Dad." Like I've said, if My Brother's Keeper can change me, anyone that wants to change, can.

If I had been home he wouldn't have ever tried to pull that stunt, because I would have put him in his place and he knew it. The guy who was supposedly changing was still the same. The only difference was that he was now married to a female minister and supposedly found God. I was pissed. I was angry at him, my wife, and me for expecting him to be different. Remember earlier when I talked about building your house by being a man of integrity, respecting yourself, creating new standards, being disciplined, holding yourself accountable because it's your responsibility? How we can't let anyone in our house if they don't have

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the same values otherwise they become termites? Well I had let the termite in. That's right. I was even more pissed because I knew better.

Since I was putting standards in place, I also had to do the same thing with Julie. It seemed like she was always the eye of the storm. And believe it or not, I had an opportunity to have a face to face meeting with her when I took her to the airport when she came to Green Bay. Confused? I bet you are no more confused than I was when I called Taylor the same as I do every day and I asked her what she was doing. She said she was hanging out with her sister, Julie. I almost lost my cookies. She said her sister was visiting her from Georgia for a couple days. Remember back when I said my ex-wife seemed to never want me to be happy? I thought we were past doing things to cause drama. So, I got her on the phone and she acted like she had nothing to do with it. She tried to explain that Julie and Zach, my second oldest son, became friends on Facebook and wanted to connect. I would actually have been good with that if I thought that was everybody's intention, but I struggled with it because nobody had told me. My ex-wife could have let me know what was happening. My son could have told me. Their relationship is their relationship, but the fact that nobody told me, except my daughter, Taylor, was absolutely disrespectful in my eyes in every sense of the word.

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Maybe I felt disrespected because Julie tried to go through my mom, worked my father, sister and younger brother and now I felt like that was what she was trying to do here. I had talked to her before all this. We wrote letters back and forth trying to figure out who we were to each other. First, she was mad at her mother for what happened in her life when they left. She had assumed I was her father, she never really knew the story. She was a young woman trying to find her place, I got it. I just didn't like the way she seemed to be going about it. And now she is sitting with my reason for living, Taylor. Hell yes, I was pissed. I didn't know her or what she wanted. A long time ago a friend of mine, Greg, told me to always question people's motives until you didn't need to anymore. I was pissed at her, my ex-wife, and my son because I should have known they had been in contact. Period. End of story.

I called back later and asked when she was leaving and agreed to take her to the airport. I went to pick her up and we talked about our journeys and our versions of what had happened. I told her that she and her mother needed to talk. They had battled all of Julie's life for one reason or another. I felt we ended our visit well. Julie and I said our so-longs. It wasn't "talk to you soon," or "come back soon." It was more, "have a safe flight" and "thanks for the ride." We hugged and said good-bye. I hope things are well with her and Michael,

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but fatherhood is more than making a baby. Fatherhood is raising a child so that child knows who and what you are to them. We haven't talked since, in my opinion there is no need to. We were strangers. I knew nothing about her life and didn't feel like I wanted to because she was a stranger to me. Nothing more than a painful memory. My kids were the ones I helped raise and have been in their lives as much as humanly possible. I know it sounds cold, but all I've learned to do is be honest.

Notice I haven't talked about Michael, my son. We have never talked. I hope he's in a good place. After this encounter with Julie, I calmly wrote Michael a letter telling him how I felt about the situation and that I still love him, but I have to love him from afar. It's better if we touch base maybe on holidays, stuff like that. He accepted it. Again, that's the respect part of the IRS code. I had to finally teach him how to treat me.

During this time our program was growing larger and larger. Not because of other mentors or staff, I was still doing all of the mentoring and would continue to do so until 2008. MBK was getting bigger because of our exposure. We were going into the schools, the detention center and doing a lot of speaking engagements regarding boys and men, my life, football, you name it. While I was working on the big picture, my wife was working on details. Let me explain something about

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starting a non-profit and working with boys and men. Most people really don't care because they think boys and men should know how to make decisions, they should know how to work, treat ladies, be good people, how to be a dad. Who's taught them? They learned how to be men from TV, books or the streets. Trust me, I'm not making excuses because no excuse is necessary. That's why we opened My Brother's Keeper.

I remember one day I had a young man into my office. He was in the ninth grade, stood about 4'11" and weighed maybe 120 pounds soaking wet. I asked him what he saw himself doing for a living. I asked him what his dreams and goals were, trying to find that reason for him to want to change. He told me he wanted to be a professional football player. I told him point blank that wasn't going to happen. He looked at me, almost in shock. I told him unless he grew another foot and gained another eighty pounds, he would need to find something else. That's like some of my young African American guys dreaming about a rapping career. Well, I have to tell them that isn't going to happen in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Just like that guy way back in North Carolina when I was a forklift driver. We use this approach at My Brother's Keeper, we speak straight truth. We tell our clients the truth about who they are and what they are doing. The truth hurts sometimes, but it's one of the first steps toward change.

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We help our clients based on what they need, but it's amazing how confused they are when it comes to needs and wants. It's like my philosophy on drugs and drinking. Drugs and drinking aren't the problem to contend with. The problem is *why* you are doing the drugs and drinking. Figure that out and there's no reason to do either. Then it becomes a matter of want, not a need, and that's different.

One of the things I really enjoy is when I go into the prison and work with different groups of men who are trying to figure out why they're there, wondering how it went wrong. I will bring up the differences between a man of success and a successful man and simply ask them what they were chasing. Then we get into what they are thinking about while they are locked up. Are they just doing time or changing their mind? We talk about setting themselves up for success opposed to failure. They ask me what I mean. I simply ask them why people quit diets. I get the usual answers like food or discipline. I say most people quit diets because they set themselves up to fail. A person will say I'm going to lose fifty pounds and when they lose twenty-five they don't see the twenty-five they have already lost; they only see the twenty-five they haven't lost so they QUIT. Instead of setting yourself up for failure, set yourself up for success by losing three pounds at a time and allow yourself to gain

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momentum by rewarding yourself. We have to learn how to crawl, walk, skip, jog, run then sprint. Start with small steps and grow.

Unfortunately for most men it's like the nursery rhyme. I know myself I made mistake after mistake until I figured it out with the help of this program and built a solid foundation. Think of The Three Little Pigs, society is the Big Bad Wolf. Remember how it goes? There were three of them and the wolf was trying to eat them. Isn't that our mistake? Things we don't handle the way we should, so mistakes are made over and over again. (Like when my Memphis teammate offered me the coke. I should have taken care of it the right way by saying no.) Remember one built their house out of hay, one out of sticks and the last out of brick.

The big bad wolf said he'd huff and puff and blow their houses down. He blew the house built of hay down and that pig ran to the stick house. Same thing happened, the wolf blew down the stick house as well. Then both pigs ran to the house made of brick and what happened? The wolf tried to blow the house of brick down, but he couldn't. Why? Because it was built on a solid foundation, like integrity. Our program is about painting a picture that our clients can see; all pictures based on the truth they can understand. Our clients have to realize if they want to change we will help them, but we are not going to work harder than

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them. That's another unique thing about our program, we aren't going to chase anyone.

I remember years back I had a client come in. He was probably twenty-five-years-old, a big young man. He came in and sat down and I asked him why he was there. He said he was there to see what we could do for him. I said, "my advice is don't let the door hit you in the butt on the way out." He looked shocked and I told him "it ain't about me, it's about you and when you're ready to figure that out, then come back. Because right now you're not ready to work. You're ready to watch me work and that ain't happening." He left, came back two weeks later and eventually got it together.

I've mentioned people throughout this book who are clients. Our clients are your neighbor, your neighbor's son. Our clients are you, our clients are any man that isn't were he believes he should be. That could be because of them, their life, their circumstances. When our clients come in I don't do the dance, nor do I make them. They fill out a brief informational statement sheet with their name, their number and who referred them to us. Since we work on a sliding fee scale, the most anyone pays for a session is fifty dollars. Period. I simply sit with the person that's paying for the session and ask them what they can afford, and we go from there. We don't deal with insurances and we've never turned anyone away. We get referrals from police,

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lawyers, teachers, judges, guidance counselors, board members, business owners, fathers, and mothers. On the information sheet there's a place for the client to sign that lets them know everything we talk about stays in the office. Our offices are designed to make it more comfortable for boys and men; our waiting room is inside our offices because there's nothing worse for a man than to have people walking by wondering what's wrong with the dude.

Why do boys and men come to My Brother's Keeper? Because I believe they want to hear the truth, but in a way that they can understand it. We just paint a picture regardless of whether they like it or not. Our program is about giving our clients the ammunition they need to change the course of their life by taking as much control as they can. As we are helping boys and men we are helping wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters. Our clients are the sixteen-year-old boy that didn't make the basketball team and he's pissed because in his head he should have and now he believes everyone thinks he's a failure. My clients are kids that have parents that are absolutely messed up and the parents blame the kids. My clients are boys that have become the man of the house at fourteen-years-old when their mother wants them to sit in the big chair and work the remote until she gets a new man; and now he has to go from the man to the boy again. My client is the boy that sees Mom go from

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man to man and each one tries to play his dad. And then we hear, “but I don’t know why Johnny’s acting this way.” My client is the twenty-one-year-old that went to college and got some stupid degree and has to find a job in his field but can’t, now he hates the system. Our client is the dude that comes to the program because he doesn’t know why he does what he does. There are a lot of people searching for that reason to change, that reason to wake up each day. Our clients are good guys going bad, bad guys trying to be better, evil men that have to learn to play by different rules and blame everyone else for their life being what it is. We’ve worked with murderers, rapists, gang bangers, bikers, professional athletes, and business owners because everyone has stuff. What you think you know, you don’t know. I love my wife, but sometimes I just wonder where her mind is. What I mean is she can read some story about some guy in an article and she can say, “what a good guy.” I have to remind her that article is what he wanted people to hear and see.

As we were expanding, I wanted to find another guy to help with the mentoring. It’s hard to find someone who’s willing to expose themselves to others. In my opinion you have to be transparent, especially when you’re trying to help a person change. And, you have to be in the right place yourself. This position wasn’t just for someone who had degrees to hang on the wall.

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I remember how we got our grant writer. I did a version of *Dancing with the Stars* in Green Bay. Our grant writer came up to us and said he was retiring. He believed in us and wanted to help and then asked if we could use him. “Of course,” I said, “hell yes!”

That’s when I did one of the more stupid things I’ve ever done. I went back into coaching. Not the pros or college level, I coached high school football from 2008-2011. I became the head coach of a school that really had to take a look at what they were trying to accomplish. A good high school sports team can only flourish if it has strong support from the parents, the teachers and the students as well as the athletics department. This school had none of those things at the time I was there. Everything was like pulling teeth, nobody went out of their way for anything. I remember sending an email to all the teachers saying if any of my players act up, are disrespectful or anything like that, let me know and we would do running or something related to sports as discipline to help develop work ethic. I think I got five emails back. I had Parents’ Night and roughly ten parents didn’t show up. The numbers were so bad that at times we couldn’t have 11 on 11 at practice.

But, I felt we were making a difference. We gave them something other than winning and losing. We took them to eat before the game, so we knew they had a meal. We got new jerseys and when I needed

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shoes, the Packers would give us some because of our connections. Trust me, everyone wanted this team to do better, but they didn't. No matter what our coaches did, it didn't work. They played their butts off for two quarters a game, then they couldn't hang on any more. It was the damndest thing. We were food for half a game! Talk about feeling like I didn't know anything about football.

I took the job at this school forgetting what and who I was. I took it thinking I could change the culture but unfortunately that didn't happen. There were too many factors involved. We needed the parents to care, not just by putting on the jersey and being at the game. We needed the teachers to care for more than what their student's letter grades were. I remember one day I got a call from a teacher to meet about a player. When I got there, she was upset because a player had signed his mom's name on a form. She felt insulted and violated personally. I had to explain when a kid's drowning he's just trying to survive. She didn't want to hear this kid's mom was bipolar and she'd lose it on him if he brought something home. His mom did not see the importance of school. Unfortunately, this is what this kid lived with and this teacher didn't want to see the battle he was fighting.

I coached high school football for three years and we won two games. That's right, two frickin' games!

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It hurt my pride like hell. Because as much as it was about what we were trying to instill in the athletes, as a football guy it's also about the scoreboard. I felt like the other teams didn't just beat the school, they beat me as well. For me it was hard to stomach. I hate losing in anything—cards, dominos, spades, golf—but football, this was my game!

The fortunate thing was that we formed nice relationships with some of the boys that played. Two of my sons coached with me which was fun and challenging. They had to realize that when I walked on the practice field, or held meetings, or told them to do something it wasn't Dad talking; it was their head coach, their boss. There wasn't room for a debate. The cool thing was they wanted to coach with me, their Dad, the same guy their mom tried to make out to be a monster. She didn't mean to, she couldn't help putting those unnecessary thoughts into their heads. I remember one of my sons came up to me during this time and said, "Thank you, Dad," and I asked, "what for?" He said something that meant more to me than anything. He thanked me for making it so he didn't have to worry about when he was going to eat, or where he was going to sleep. He could go to the refrigerator and there was food. He said he never felt unsafe. He didn't have to worry about how he was getting to practice. He thanked me for allowing him to know he had options. At that moment I knew

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that I had done the right thing. I had decided to weather the storm with their mother. Now, because of what he said I realized I had done the right thing. I had my two sons coaching with me and my grandson was the water boy, not bad. All that was good for family, but I signed on to be a football coach and coaching is judged by winning and losing.

Not only that but my baby was My Brother's Keeper and that suffered. When I was coaching the doors were open, but no one was there to do the mentoring.

Don't get me wrong, I was always looking for someone to join My Brother's Keeper as a part time mentor. I still hadn't found the right guy with the right reasons to join us. If he didn't have his head on straight, he could ruin a kid. I think that's what makes our program different. When I say this, it isn't about bragging rights. My journey has been rough as hell but I'm on the other side. I guess what I'm saying is many people try to tell others how to be successful when they aren't successful themselves. They tell them to think, but they aren't thinking, they are hypocrites and they don't understand the people we are trying to help change. Why in the hell would somebody listen to a guy about housing or work when his life is no better. I was at home and had no job. I've been there, I get it. I don't work with volunteers, especially when it comes to mentors because it's hard to fire volunteers that give

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of their free time. But, if I pay them then they have to follow our instructions. So, I quit coaching because winning and losing meant too much to me. And my baby, My Brother's Keeper, needed me to stay focused. My purpose was to still coach; but coach more important things that had nothing to do with the X's and O's. The football world just gained another fan-me.

Why was this the right time? I don't know, maybe it had to do with God, or maybe it had to do with my daughter Taylor. Let me try to explain what Taylor is to me. She's my daughter and any man who has a daughter knows what I mean when I say she changed me, she kept me focused. Her love has nothing attached to it. I'm her dad and she's my daughter. As I'm writing this, she is twenty-four-years-old and works at a place in Green Bay called Aspiro. Aspiro allows those who have disabilities not notice the differences they deal with, they help them live their best lives. Taylor is so special. I don't know if the Down's gave her special powers, but she's the glue that keeps me appreciating and embracing life.

Let me try to explain. I remember years ago when we first opened My Brother's Keeper I had a physical and I discovered I had Type II diabetes. I knew better, I could have been doing a better job taking care of my health. But like most athletes I felt invincible and thought I was on vacation pay after years of hard

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work. I had worked out all my life and now I thought I didn't need to work out any more. I remember one day taking a shower and felt the tears falling down my face. I thought no one loved Taylor like me or could take care of her like me. Don't get me wrong, Taylor is deeply loved by her brothers, sisters, moms and the people who know her. But I realized, no one's going to love or take care of her like me, so I had to get my diabetes under control. That's all I could do. When I opened My Brother's Keeper I had turned into a fat man. I had stopped working out. When I started coaching we would play racquetball every now and then, but most of our time we were sitting on our ass. Instead of working out, I just got bigger clothes. I mean no disrespect to those who are fat, but my fat was self-induced. Believe it or not it just happened. When I stopped playing in 1992 I weighed 235 pounds, now I was up to 285. Talk about blowing up. I educated myself with the help of my wife; her ex-husband was a juvenile diabetic, so she was familiar with the right eating habits.

I started walking with my wife for exercise. She had been walking for a while even though I always told her walking wasn't a work out. That was until I started walking with her. Damn could she walk! I slowly started losing weight and over time started to keep up with her when she let me. But the best thing about walking was that it was our time to get on the same page and

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stay there. Rain, hail, sleet or snow, walking we would go.

That was until I fell in love with golf again. Golf and me, we have this crazy relationship. It started back in 1982 when I used to work at a golf course to pay the bills. Then when I made it at San Francisco I picked up the game and was hooked with all those great golf courses. Being a 49er, I played as soon as the season was over. One of my greatest moments ever was playing eighteen holes with Arnold Palmer at the TPC in Jacksonville. Talk about an incredible but scary time. It was scary because with Arnie came Arnie's Army. On the first tee they lined up on both sides of the tee box and in my head all I thought was, *don't duck hoot it!* which means pull it hard to the left, because with everyone lined up like that, someone could die! Fortunately, I was playing well, and the bright lights didn't affect me. I had loved the game and at times played it well, but I had stopped playing from 1992 to 2004. I had no time and no money. Once I found out I was a diabetic and working out became a must, I started playing again. I was always hooked, but things were different now and it changed my world because I made my serenity a priority.

The golf course is the place I go to before I do anything else. During golf season I play roughly six out of seven days. I'm usually the first to tee off around

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5:30-6:30 a.m. so I can play, shower and eat before my first appointment at 10:00 a.m. I usually play Brown County Golf Course. In my opinion it's the best course in the Green Bay area and I can walk it and get my exercise. I have a buddy I play with when he can, otherwise I play by myself which I really don't mind. Golf is a game about self, it's about me, my swing, it's me against me. And, it's the one game you can't master. Funny thing, about five years ago with playing so much, my wife asked me why I carry my clubs. I had no answer except I didn't want to give into getting old. She was right, so I bought a pushcart which allowed me to go faster. Let me paint a picture of my mornings when I golf. I get to the course, I stretch, chip and putt. My wife got me hooked on wearing a Bluetooth ear piece so as I'm playing, I listen to my music. I call this doing me, stealing time for myself before I do anyone else. The golf course is my sanctuary. Think about it. Teeing off at sunrise with nothing but music, the golf course, my game, nature and my God.

I have to share a story about God and the golf course. I used to hear people say God talked to them or God showed them a sign. I realize we can interpret anything to make it what we want it to be. Well this is my story about God talking to me. At Brown County the second hole is a par five. I usually pray after I hit my second shot until I get to my ball. It's easy to do when

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you are by yourself. When I play with others I don't want to be rude so it's a little harder. Besides that, I talk to boys and men all day so on the golf course all you are going to get from me is, "good shot" or something else relating to golf. That day it had rained, and it was rainbow weather. I was praying and said something to the effect of *God I know you are hearing me because you are God. I'd love to see a sign that you are hearing me.* Something told me to turn around and as soon as I did, a second rainbow appeared. I freaked out for a second, then called my wife and smiled because God is good. He had reaffirmed what I already knew. Look at my life, it had to be about God.

Last year I went up to one of the guys that I see often on the course. I believe I freaked him out because I said to him, "thanks for being you and remaining consistent." I told him I appreciated every time, regardless of who he was with, we acknowledged each other. He was the same guy, always. That's not how it is for the most part and I don't get it. Everything doesn't have to be a penis thing between men. Everything doesn't have to be about who's the Alpha. Whether I intimidate people or not, that's on them. I just love playing golf.

I am often asked if My Brother's Keeper is a ministry or a mentoring program. I believe in God, I'm a Christian, and My Brother's Keeper is in my heart and my head and so is God. What I have realized over

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these years is until you believe in you, you can't believe in anything else. God saved me. He had a plan for me. I just had to get out of my own way, so I could see it. Once I started to control me and let Him control everything else, my life became better. That's what this program is. It's a program that defies being labeled. We help boys and men find themselves once they realize their way isn't working. I hate the term "at risk youth" because the way I see it, any boy or man that isn't getting what he needs is at risk. We believe by teaching our boys and men the skills they need, they can change their course and the course of those they come in contact with, really making a difference. When you help men be better, their relationships improve. This will also help the ladies in our society. What I say we do at My Brother's Keeper is take the excuses away. Don't get me wrong, we do acknowledge how the events in your life determine much of your direction. It's not what happens to you, it's how you handle what happens. But you have to know how. Men have to stop beating themselves up because a lot of times we don't know what we don't know until we know.

The word about My Brother's Keeper has started to spread throughout Green Bay and neighboring areas. We have clients from Milwaukee, Sheboygan, Sturgeon Bay, Crivitz. We're in several schools along with the contract with Brown County. What we wanted to

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happen was happening. I was doing speaking engagements, and we held fundraisers to keep the doors open. We knew what we were doing was working because we were getting referrals from everywhere and we saw clients changing their lives. I think about where it started and what drove me. Why me, why the confused kid, why was football my way out, why did I go through what I went through, why, why, why? The program taught me, why not me? Everyone wants to make a difference but for some reason I feel like God chose me because He helped me understand why the lessons were important. My stuff, your stuff, my family's stuff, your family's stuff. Stuff that has nothing to do with you but because you fall in love with someone, it becomes your stuff.

Then things got a little crazier in February of 2014, President Obama announced his new program and called it My Brother's Keeper. I remember my mother calling me and asking me if I had called him. I asked her who she was talking about. She told me the President, for stealing my idea of course. I laughed. I didn't know what she expected me to do. Personally, I felt honored in so many ways of course. Our program began in 2003. Our program is for all boys and men not just minorities—big difference. Boys and men had the same issues whether Black, white, brown, yellow or red. I felt flattered that the most powerful man in the

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world recognized what was happening in our country. I had realized it in 2003, God does work in mysterious ways, doesn't He? Since then, we've been contacted by a dozen states to help them recreate what we've created in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

With other states trying to get us to their state to help them, I was looking for another mentor, someone who was younger, who spoke the language, who had the passion and wanted to make a real difference and I found him, or he found me. He was good because he grew up in the system. Unfortunately, he confused passion with emotions and he wasn't strong enough to not carry the burden without reopening his scars. He was making their story his story and you can't have that. Emotions are dangerous because when we are trying to affect change in someone, missing the mark is costly. We have a short time to make that connection. Especially when we take the role as father, older brother, peace maker we are trying to make men and boys think in ways that they've never entertained. We break the rules that they have lived by, tell them their father or role models were full of crap, teach them how to stand when everyone around them is falling.

Sometimes it's the struggle of a white teenager of a divorced family who's listening to a Black man tell him how to be everything his father isn't, and he knows what happens when he's under his watch. Trust me,

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it's not always a success story. One of the clients who haunts me is a young man that was more advanced for his age. He got caught up being the pawn in the game his parents were playing, so like most kids his job was to get away and he couldn't. Unfortunately, the parents were caught up in a divorce battle, they were feuding parents. He enjoyed coming but dad couldn't come to terms with me guiding his son, mentoring his son. He couldn't recognize what or how his decisions were affecting this kid, his son. When he had him the son wouldn't get to his appointment. Mom saw the improvement, but she got tired of battling, so he stopped coming. Then I got the call that he had killed himself. I felt like I had failed him even though I knew I could only do so much. But, it hurts to lose such potential because he wasn't allowed to be free. He deserved more. He should be alive!

That's why I'm particular about other mentors and finding the people that understand the responsibility that comes with guiding our clients. The role of a mentor is so important. The mentor has to have his own head on right, if he doesn't he can cause more damage than good. I try to tell our clients what could lie ahead. Our job is to help them see the hole they could fall into. Do we have all the answers? Hell no, but with all the boys and men that we've worked with they all have things in common, regardless of whether they are

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Black or white. As much as color affects things, communication or lack of communication causes the color of our skin to become relevant and once we see that, things usually change for the worse.

So up to this point when it comes to issues that men face, I've checked a lot of them off the list myself. I've understood or dealt with prejudice, white vs. Black and don't forget Black vs. Black, because that fight is different. I remember how my father would punish one of my brothers worse because he wasn't as dark as the rest of us. I had experienced being broke and having no way to pay for things. All the pride disappears when the phone rings and you're hoping it's not another bill collector. I've been the kid scared to go to sleep at night, just in case I had to go stop my dad from hitting my mother because I knew it was coming. I was the one praying my mother would stop talking, but I knew the booze was giving her courage. I would have to try to reason with my parents that were both fighting their own demons knowing damn well what was going to happen, I was just trying to minimize the damage. People couldn't understand why Harry was mad all the time. Boy, did I check off many boxes there. Then there's the heartbroken hurt box when Joni disappeared affecting how I loved others. So far, I could talk about so many issues now throw divorce and the trials and tribulations of dealing with the courts and how I felt

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I was treated like I was a criminal because I wanted a divorce. They made the rules but didn't abide by them. For example, through our divorce we were supposed to split medical bills. Our son hurt his shoulder and had some procedures done. We got the bills. I paid my half to the penny based on our divorce paperwork, but my ex didn't. We both got called to small claims court and even though I had paid half, somehow, I eventually had to pay the full thing, because I could! Talk about really wanting to be in contempt of court, I almost had my chance.

To raise money for our program we have three major events during the year—a golf tournament, a steak fry and a bowling tournament. One evening the judge that sat in on my divorce was at one of these events and I had to do everything I could do to not run over and cold-cock him and then ask him if the next time he screws me if he could at least kiss me. So, divorce was checked off. Next came getting remarried and helping raise a blended family. My wife and I navigated through raising four boys and four girls, two ex's, in-laws, leaving the NFL and believing in ourselves enough to open My Brother's Keeper. Now we are business owners, check, check, check. So, when my clients come in we feel we can share information about most things that they deal with shaping our decision making.

Except death. I was never a funeral guy. I never knew

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how to feel, because if I didn't know you, I didn't know you. I couldn't feel for a stranger. Sounds cold I know, but I remember when I was coaching I wouldn't learn a guy's name until he made the team. He'd be Number 87 or whatever his number was. It didn't matter until it needed to matter. People don't realize how we as men are molded. We are molded by everything that happens in our life, some just hide it better.

Like I said, when it came to issues our clients faced the boxes were being checked off my list, all except death. I couldn't really relate; everyone I loved was alive and I could talk to them until November of 2014 when things changed. I lost my cheerleader, my mom, Shirley Rose Sydney. Her death made me want to remember it all because each day when I talk to my clients about life, I need to understand me, what formed me. You have to understand my mom was as complicated, loving, prejudiced, compassionate, quiet, loud, proud and humble as a person could be. Something about her voice and the way she said my name made things better. My mother was different in her later years. She mellowed out, stopped drinking and many times she felt the need to apologize for her behavior even though I told her she didn't need to because I had seen the situation, I had been there.

Years before her death she'd battled cancer which I believe was related to her working in the cleaners

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with chemicals and heat, then add high blood pressure and diabetes to the mix. Talk about a time bomb. My mother would come up to Green Bay every year, so we could spoil her, make sure she was okay. She did a good job of hiding things. All my brothers and sisters worried about her being by herself in North Carolina and we'd told her it was time to move; she had choices—Green Bay or Tennessee and maybe Washington. It was a Saturday and my wife and I had just gotten back from our walk when I got a call from my mom's sister telling me my mom was in the hospital with a heart attack but was alright. We made arrangements and all of my siblings and I converged on my old home. One sister got there Monday and within seven days we had gotten rid of her house, sold her car, her furniture and the plan was for her to move to my sister's house. She was in her new room in Tennessee by Saturday afternoon. My wife said it was the damnedest thing. My two brothers were military, one sister was also military, and my younger sister was married to military. She said it was like a covert operation and when it was over all that tied me to Fayetteville was gone.

My father still lived in North Carolina, although in a different part of the state. He came over acting like a proud father watching his kids work and take care of their responsibilities. The things he never really did. I know he loved her and knew he'd let a great thing

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slip out of his hands when she found his pictures and finally had the leverage to get a divorce. The military handles their leaders that have affairs pretty seriously. He was cool, not a distraction; the distraction was my little brother. He wanted answers as to why Dad was on the outside, but he wasn't ready for those answers. The truth usually hurts. On this night my brothers and sisters connected in a way we never had. Finally, I felt like I wanted my siblings, all of them, in my life. Then two weeks later, I was playing golf, and I got the call from my sister. She said, "Mom's gone." Of course, I asked, "gone where?" She told me, "gone to heaven." I fell to my knees and lost it. I was pissed and felt cheated; and I was being selfish. My mom couldn't die on me, but she did. I still feel pain.

She had left instructions to be cremated so my sister took care of that. We all decided to get together a month later in December, just the kids and spouses and grandkids. It was absolutely awesome. The cool thing was how she touched each one of us differently. She was there for everyone. From babysitting her grandchildren to keeping a room ready for when one of us fell on our face; she was always a safe place to come to regroup, refocus. So much of My Brother's Keeper has to do with her ability to weather storms and still give her kids a chance to be whatever they dreamed. I remember seeing her hide money away, so we could

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have the same shoes as everyone else on the basketball team. She gave us every opportunity to make it in the world. And as we were sitting in this room I realized something. My mom lived long enough to make sure her kids were okay. When we came and moved her to Tennessee she saw us working together, loving each other the way she had hoped. She didn't need to live on this earth anymore. Her job here was done. At first, I was angry at God because we were in a place where we'd put so much behind us and we really got to love each other, and I wanted more; but now she was gone! Call it selfish. For a moment I realized she felt no more pain as she sat in heaven where she belonged, watching all her children with a smile.

The cool thing was I didn't have to worry about her living alone any more. Even though she had good neighbors who all looked after each other, I always worried about her safety. She was an elderly lady living alone. I worried about her house breaking down like years earlier during a storm when a tree fell on the house. I knew it was a matter of time. She was a strong woman. Hell, she would even drive herself to the hospital when she was too sick to walk for her chemo treatments while dealing with cancer. We didn't have to worry anymore because her ashes were with me, but her spirit was in heaven. My brothers and sisters entrusted me to spread her ashes. She loved visiting Green Bay and Mexico. My mom needed

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to be free she couldn't be enclosed. She was so much more vibrant than that. My wife found these nice little urns. We put some of her ashes into each of them so that all my brothers and sisters had a piece of her to keep. I took most of her ashes and spread them in the Gulf of Mexico at sunset, I took pictures and sent them to everyone. They thanked me for setting her free. Unfortunately, I had checked off another box on the list of the things I had in common with our clients.

Remember when I talked about moving my mother to my sister's house on that Saturday? My wife and I were the last ones to leave. My father was staying at the same hotel we were. He stopped by before he left. We said our so longs, but both of us knew this would probably be the last time we saw each other. For whatever reason, I watched him get into his car and he was wiping his eyes. The vilest man in the world all of a sudden became human. He had feelings and he hurt and I wanted to run out and hug him, but I couldn't. For that moment I saw him differently. But, I couldn't give in, so I just watched him leave.

I wish he would have talked with me and been there when I was younger. He didn't always have to make it hard to love him. What I realized over the years is that a lot of what the world calls success is the stuff I learned from him. He also taught me much about *not* being a man. This isn't about hating or loving my

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dad, it's about what happens when boys and men don't have the right relationship with the people they look up to. I looked up to my dad because who else was I supposed to look up to as a kid? This confused the hell out of me because the messages I got and what he was saying were absolutely messing up my mind. For us boys and men, we've learned that when our mind is always racing it causes us to crash and burn. When that happens, it impacts so many others, there's a lot of collateral damage.

All these moments of my life that molded me became part of My Brother's Keeper. All of us have things that we are running from or running to and our life is about handling that stuff; but if we don't have the skills to do so, we won't. MBK teaches those skills and we know it works because of the clients that have changed their lives and become the boys and men they want to be. Our goal for my clients is to find their lane, not someone else's lane, but theirs, making the best of who they are, setting them up for success, not failure. No one wants to stay stuck. No one really wants to keep falling on their face. Our jails are full of men who didn't know what being a man really means. They are full of men who had no teachers, or the teachers weren't qualified to teach. Being a man isn't about reading a book, it's not about the money you have, it's not about the clothes you wear, it's not about the stuff.

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My Brother's Keeper continued to grow. We now have volunteers and two part time mentors that have the same fire Madonna and I do. They have that desire to make a difference. We still get contacted by other states about My Brother's Keeper. They call us and ask if we are related to President Obama's My Brother's Keeper. I explain we aren't, but we are. We are all trying to change our world. I don't care who shares the name. Many people ask where the name for My Brother's Keeper came from, I don't know. Probably a song, a movie or simply a thought. I don't really know but isn't that what we are supposed to do? Help our brother regardless of the color of their skin or the size of their wallets.

When I was a young man I was helpless, I was scared. I was growing up a young Black man in a white world filled with hate. I saw the hate but didn't understand the reason for the hate. Maybe I was different because I didn't hate because of the color of one's skin. I hated because I didn't like what a person did or said. Maybe My Brother's Keeper is about righting a lot of wrongs. Maybe My Brother's Keeper is about proving that people do care. I care. We care.

Unfortunately, I got to check off another box. I became parentless in March of 2016 when my father passed away. He'd also been battling cancer and other things. I think the Viet Nam War killed him, just

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not physically at the time. He carried death with him for a long time. Unfortunately, he wanted what my mom had gotten. He wanted his kids to sit around the table and talk about our love for him. I'm sorry, but that couldn't happen, at least not for me. I remember one of our last conversations when he was in the hospital and I wished him well. I told him I wasn't sure I would be at his funeral and he said something that made my decision easier. You see, he still thought I was the scared little boy that choked when he spoke, that feared the boogie man. I informed my brothers and sisters I wouldn't be at the funeral and I asked them to not be offended, don't make excuses for me. I made my peace. The reason I didn't go to the funeral was because I didn't want to make it about me and I knew it would be because of how I felt. I know over the years he might have changed in other's eyes, but I couldn't sit there and hear all his new friends talk about how good this man was. I couldn't hear his other kids talk about their relationship when all he did was take from us. I couldn't hear about his relationship with God when I prayed to God to stop him from hitting my mom. I couldn't be there because I would have ruined it, and to me that would have been selfish and made it about me. Did I want to be there for my family? Yes, I did. I hoped they'd understand. Some did, and some didn't, but I was okay with that, it was my decision.

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We often think death brings family together, reattaches that bond. That family bond that we all talk about can't just be invented, you can't just say wish it and it's there. Some families might have been able to pull it off but not us. Not the Sydney Family. Still too many scars. Too much had been ingrained in my head about who we are. All the knowledge I have of the power to take control of my life still doesn't eliminate those thoughts of my life growing up. As I get older I often wonder if I am just remembering all that bad times and getting pissed; because I know there were good times, weren't there?

My Mom and Dad are both in their resting place. I wonder what their relationship is like now that they are both in heaven. Everything in heaven is about goodness, greatness, pure harmony, no pain, no hate. I do believe my father was a changed man according to those who knew him. I'm not the judge, only God is. I tried not to know him, but that's me. I couldn't judge him because I didn't know this man. I knew the man that I grew up under. Since his death I wonder, did I make the right decision? Should I have gone to his funeral? Trust me, even though I know why I didn't go, sometimes I beat myself up over it. As a Christian man that forgives, things still ring in my head. But I did forgive him. I put it where I needed to put it.

Many times, when I talk with clients and the

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question of forgiveness comes up, they are stuck and can't get past that moment in time or even think about how they could move forward. I had a client that was going through a divorce. During the process of the divorce a child died while doing a favor for the client, his father, and he was stuck. In his head, if he moved forward, he wasn't honoring the death of his child; because he blamed himself for the death. That's that blame thing. We all do it. I did when my daughter Taylor was born with Down's Syndrome. I thought it was my fault just like my client thought it was his fault. Fortunately, or unfortunately, we don't have that power. Only God does. So, if my father and God had that conversation who am I to stand in his way? But that didn't mean it wasn't going to affect me, I am human. Just like my clients are human. Pain is pain. Things happen that knock us off our feet and sometimes forgiveness is hard. I learned and taught my client that you don't have to forget, but you have to forgive. Otherwise you're done, and you fall in to a hole. That hole that leads you to think, *because of these circumstances I will always have something or someone to blame my problems failures, mistakes and bad moves on.* I had to learn how to take my feelings for my father and put them in a box and store that box somewhere in my brain. Feeling couldn't be the first reaction I used. I had to tuck it away under lock and key and stop letting any decision

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come because of how I felt about it. I also realized that sometimes we need things to give us the motivation to push us toward whatever the finish line of our journey is, to find that thing we are looking for. But if we aren't careful, the things we are running from we run right into and we become what we hate.

Unfortunately, my father's funeral didn't change anything with regards to the relationships with my brothers and sisters. The ones that I was close to before my parents' deaths are the same ones I am close to now. Those that weren't close; nothing has changed and that's a shame. It's amazing how we all just fall into our lives and we get into a routine. We simply don't have the time or desire to change that flow. Don't get me wrong, if my brothers or sisters called and needed anything, I would do my best to be their knight in shining armor and come to their rescue. But, our lives are different in a good way. All of us were scarred in one way or another. We just dealt with the pain differently. Until our parents left this earth, when we got together there was too much pain in one place. We stayed away from each other. Now there's not much pain, but there are a lot of regrets. The regrets of life, knowing that we couldn't change anything. With all the modern technology available today, we could be closer if we wanted to. But we haven't.

We continued business as usual until a unique

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opportunity came along in May 2016. My Brother's Keeper had an incredible opportunity to move into another location because of a relationship we had. They were building a new building and they made room for us. I'm not using their name because they weren't doing it for notoriety or to see their name in lights. They wanted to help us make a difference, so they let us do our thing, rent free, in a very nice set up. They were just helping a program that they knew was making a difference in the community that they loved, and they saw our work firsthand. One of the reasons they moved was because of growth. We were growing as well and before we realized it, we had outgrown this place as well!

We had hired two part-time mentors and they were splitting Wednesday and Thursday. The problem was they couldn't be there at the same time because we didn't have space, so I felt we were confining ourselves. Our client base was growing but we didn't have a place to put them or see them-but how could we walk away from free? You know when you talk to God about things and you say, *God please send me a sign?* He did.

When I was putting together this program I met with a good friend of mine, J.D. McKay who I consider one of my mentors, he won't accept that role, but he was. J.D. called and said he was going to stop by. I don't know why, but something about him made me

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want him to be proud of me and what My Brother's Keeper was accomplishing. When he came in his words chilled me, he meant it in only the way he can say things. He said, "Are you in the witness protection program? I couldn't find you. The people need to be able to find were you are." We laughed, but he was right. That conversation changed things.

Fourth Quarter – Finishing Strong

WE HAVE INDIVIDUALS on our board that are involved in various businesses. From business owners to hardworking individuals that were self-made people just wanting to make a difference in their community. One of these people is Steve Finley, our real estate man who found our home for us. We had a conversation about our space issue and where we should move next. He sent us several options, some for lease, but this time by the grace of God, we wanted to buy our forever office. The only question was whether I want to be a landlord and have renters. You know that big time retirement vessel people talk about. So that was my mindset, until we saw this building at 1462 Main Street. I tried not to like it, but then Madonna saw it. She said she had a vision and, of course was she right. We called Steve, went and saw it again, and had Steve put an offer in immediately, on our fourteenth anniversary. They accepted our offer.

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To many people it's just a building, but for me it is more than just a building, it is our building. Please don't get me wrong, there are a lot of people that we have met over the years that are part of this building. But when I look at this building, I see God's work. Make no mistake about it, but I also see hard work, I see never giving up, I see surviving, I see the jobs I've held, I see all that was both good and bad about my life. I remember the talks with myself. I remember the times when I wanted to quit. I see the strings of coincidences that helped me connect the right dots, all the thoughts that were playing bumper cars in my head until things became clear. I see the young Black boy from North Carolina that used to dread going home because of the monsters. I see all that I went through. I see all that I survived.

Sometimes when I'm talking to people and they ask how I'm doing, I'll respond with something like, "good as long as I don't get shot in the head or heart." I'm good because to steal a phrase from Tiger Woods, a man that I think was the greatest at what he did when he did it, "some days it's a grind." It's about just fighting through things and doing your best. But when your best isn't getting it done, you may not know how to change. Then you have to realize sometimes your best isn't good enough. I've been blessed man. Some people think they don't have anything to show for their life,

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but they are wrong. We have kids, families, degrees, scars, history.

I'm fortunate, I have hardware to represent a time, a place. Super Bowl rings from being part of the 49ers in the 80's, the team of the decade. The rings I won with the 49ers as a player represented a payoff for the grind. Coaching with the Packers allowed me to go from having to do it myself to teaching others how to do it. I helped teach them how to work together for the ultimate goal in football, to win a Super Bowl ring. Many people ask me which one gives me the most joy. I tell them that's like asking which one of your kids to you love the most. All three mean different things. My first one meant that I had made it, I did it. I defied the odds. The second one was very special because when we won the first one in 1988 we were chasing everyone to be the best. Then in 1989 we had a bullseye on our backs. Everyone in the NFL was targeting us. We were king of the hill and we knew every offseason meeting the other teams held was about how to beat the 49ers. We were everyone else's measuring stick; we knew we would get their best. We were their Super Bowl. And we withstood the challenges we took everyone else's best shot, and in the end, we had another ring to put on our fingers. Imagine the kid from Fayetteville, NC now having two Super Bowl rings. The grind does pay off. The third one with Green Bay brought me a

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different joy. When we won in 1996, I was in a different mindset. I was a teacher trying to get my players to where I've been. It was such a proud moment to see my guys—William Henderson, Edgar Bennett, Dorsey Levens and Travis Jervey put that Super Bowl ring on their fingers. It transformed them. I never will forget when we talked, and they told me I was right about that feeling. You see, they trusted me, my teaching, my coaching and because of their trust they were rewarded with their place in history. I like seeing reminders or rewards for achieving certain things. Staring down challenges, I call them measuring sticks.

It's like when I was a little kid and planned on being in the NFL, but I knew that wouldn't be a long time, if ever. I had to be the best in Pop Warner, the best in middle school, the best in high school, get into college then have a chance in the NFL. Please understand, when I talk like this in no way am I saying I'm great. I was and still am a guy that doesn't see myself the way others do. I know what I've achieved. Hell, I'm the only guy to catch a touchdown pass from Joe Montana and Brett Favre. But I never was just a dumb jock. There was always more. I just didn't know what that more was until I started coaching with the Packers.

I believe those three Super Bowl Rings, ten years of playing professional football and six years of coaching really prepared me for *My Brother's Keeper*. I wasn't really

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athletically gifted, I possessed no amazing speed, I didn't jump out in the gym or even in my basketball days back in high school. I could play the game and got scholarships to play basketball from many colleges, but I knew I needed to play football. The odds were in my favor, there are more football players than basketball players. I needed that physical contact. I had to hit someone or be hit. All that taught me hard work and perseverance.

But, back to our new home. I call it our forever My Brother's Keeper home at 1463 Main Street. We moved in November 30, but we weren't complete until Todd Thomas, another member of our Board of Directors who happened to be the president of Creative Sign Company in Green Bay, added his contribution. Since we opened in 2003, of all the things that I wanted a real sign was a big deal. I know that may sound petty or ridiculous but for me it represents so much. When we first moved into Executive Office Suites, we were trying to keep the doors open and because of where we were, we could just tell people to look for the landmarks around us. We were easy to find. Then, when we moved in with American Antiques because they were the main building, our sign was an after-thought. We had our name on the door, but you had to find the door. When J.D. McKay asked me whether I was in the witness protection program, it made me remember that I promised we would never settle again.

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When Todd and I met about the sign, it took on a whole new meaning. Our sign says:

My Brother's Keeper
Male Mentoring for Boys and Men
Straight Talk-Sound Direction
Founded in 2003 by Harry F. Sydney III
Dedicated to my Mom, Shirley Rose Sydney

That's what the sign says to everyone else, but for me it reminds me of so much more. When I look at that sign I see hard work, I see the little boy that didn't quit, I see something that my wife and I decided to do together, to make our lives matter by helping those who need help. When I look at that sign I see all the broken bones, I see all those that said I wasn't good enough. When I look at that sign I see something that matters so much more than Super Bowl rings. Am I proud of that sign? Hell, yes, that sign represents everything important and it also helps me realize the responsibility that comes with me being me; President and Founder of My Brother's Keeper. It helps me stay focused.

Why is my mother's name on the sign? That answer is easy. She's on that sign because she was the strongest person I have ever met. I know why she was the way she was. I remember her working at the cleaners just to be able to have money so we could eat, but more than

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that she was the rock for all of us kids as well as grand-kids. When my brothers or sisters were going through a rough time, her home was always that safe place to fall. She endured so much so her kids could reach out and believe in the possibilities. That sign represents belief, believing in myself. It represents betting on myself. I look at that sign and it means overcoming obstacles. It's like that old Sinatra song, "I Did It My Way." That's not bragging, boasting or anything like that. I wasn't given a silver spoon. I wasn't drafted. Everything I ever got I had to work harder for than everyone else. I had to be mentally stronger to overcome my physical limitations. I had to be willing to do what others wouldn't do.

The other day one of my mentors and I were talking about our clients and he said something about how a lot of Black men don't come to our program. We have our share, I believe they don't want to come because I don't care about the color of one's skin. I don't allow color to be an excuse or a crutch. I also realized that I am different than most people. I'm not one to play games. Other organizations have asked me to join this board or that board and I haven't because I hate to meet just to meet, and I'm not as politically correct as I should be. I'm not one that sugar coats things. You will always know where I stand, whether you like it or not. Sometimes I wish I didn't see what I saw because

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once I see it I can't un-see it. My wife tells me this all the time. I don't play well with others, and I am such a creature of habit. I wish I could let things go. My standards are ridiculous, but I don't ask anything from you that I wouldn't do. Since coming to Green Bay in 1992, I've learned so much about myself and still it's a battle. Even though I might not want to change at times, life changes, so you have to adapt. I realize life isn't always about us nor is it fair.

I'm fifty-nine-years-old now as I'm writing this book and revisiting my journey. It has brought me to tears; all those memories and moments of disbelief, many times feeling broken and full of pain, but it also reminded me of how God chose me. How God, even though I thought it was me, led me through all the trees, the smoke, the rubble, the heartache, the failures, the cuts, the Super Bowls, the divorce, the times when I didn't have a dime to my name. He provided, He disciplined, He humbled, He cherished, but more important, He loved me. He took this kid from Fayetteville, North Carolina and gave me the skills to paint the pictures that my clients could see to change their lives and the lives of the people that their decisions would affect. He gave me the power to trust myself by trusting Him. It's amazing what happens when we get out of our own way by trusting God, even when we don't want to. It helps me realize we are all imperfect creatures. I

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know He loves me even when I don't love myself. He understands I've always been a work in progress, but He knows I have a good heart and I mean well. The things we teach here at My Brother's Keeper I, we, will never master, but if we keep our eyes on the prize, the journey will be easier. We started our fifteenth year on this journey. Fifteen years of trying to make a difference with the boys and men in our community at My Brother's Keeper!

But there is much more to My Brother's Keeper. It's not about me. We have one hell of a group of individuals that make up this program. You should see our offices. My wife made it so homey. Like I said earlier, I didn't want to like this place but now I love it. I love coming into the office, opening the shades as the daylight comes through the windows. Even when it's cold as hell outside, sunlight makes the difference. My wife is an incredible lady and I love the office set-up she created. I call her area air traffic control. She orchestrates everything, and I love watching her do her thing even though this wasn't her thing to start with, it was mine.

She gave up a lot for our love. She went out on a limb in loving me. She was a white woman from Green Bay marrying a Black former Green Bay Packer player who was then a coach. You don't think many of her friends thought she had lost her mind while having four children of her own? So many of them thought they

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knew me, knew us. Were we crazy? Probably. But when you know it, you know it. And we knew it. It wasn't easy, but I believe we are so organized now because we had to be then. We had eight kids, two different high schools, different friends, Catholic high schools, public high schools, ex-wives, ex-husbands, different rules at different places. Hell, I remember one time we had five kids in select soccer! My wife and I would see each other in the morning and then slide into bed together at night, but we did it and now our kids are all grown from ages thirty-six to twenty-five. Were our kids spoiled? Hell no, but they were respected and valued. They understood what was expected of them.

Was divorce hard on them? Sure, because change is hard for anyone, especially when it's because of their parents' adjustments that they had to adjust. Those changes weren't their idea. It was the parents. In my situation it was me. Did we, my wife and I, try to fix things? I will say we tried, but once your mind is made up, your mind is made up. You can't go back and ring the bell. I couldn't re-feel what I didn't feel. It had gotten lost. Through divorce everyone wants to blame someone. It's my fault, her fault. Sometimes it's no fault; it's just people growing apart and me and my first wife, we ran our course. We were different people wanting different things in the name of marriage.

My wife Madonna is a special woman. Her strengths

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fascinate me and her heart pumps nothing but goodness to everyone who crosses her path. At different times in this book I've talked about God and His power, His messages for us, the gifts He gives us. He gave me the gift of an incredible partner in Madonna. They used to say behind every successful man, there's a good woman. I disagree. The real truth is *beside* every good man there is a *great* woman. I am blessed because I know I am loved from my head to toe. Please don't think it comes easy because we work hard on our relationship. We made it a priority because it had to be otherwise we would be settling; and never again will we settle. I refuse to just go along to get along. That's not me anymore. It can't be.

Some people might say I'm complicated, but I don't think I am. I know what I want in my life now and for that reason I won't settle. I won't just give in to make someone like me or feel better. I had to because growing up I had no clue what a man was let alone what a Black man was. Sometimes that's the hardest to deal with in the world we live in. Because there are so many sides to me as a Black man, I always have to make sure people are seeing the side I want them to see. Sounds crazy, right? But, it's not when you've walked in my shoes. If you are too Black, you're a militant. If you aren't Black enough, you are an Uncle Tom. Well, that's what they used to say, now it might be an Oreo-Black

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on the outside, white on the inside. If you are a successful Black man, the kids want to know what car you drive? How big is your house? Then try being Black and marrying a white woman; that creates all new stares. Sometimes I feel as a Black man we are an endangered species. Especially if we stand for things like being men of integrity and refuse to take a short cut or make excuses for our short comings. Instead of making excuses, we learn and grow. We humble ourselves, we appreciate the ride, we look back at our journey, well at least I do, with disbelief sometimes wonder, *why me God?* For some reason He chose me and all I'm doing is being obedient to what He wants from me.

Sometimes life's about just getting out of our own way. Recently I didn't do a good job of that and I'm so pissed off at myself. Let me explain. Our program is about controlling what we can and not worrying about what we can't. Let me paint a picture for you. I've always been a freak, some would say obsessed, with raking and picking up leaves in the fall and shoveling the snow in winter, and in Wisconsin we have plenty of both. Years ago, one of my daughters came to visit us. That day I had shoveled the driveway. I usually put salt down to melt the ice, our driveway was hilly, I didn't ever want anyone to slip and fall. Well, this time I didn't, and my daughter fell down. I felt horrible because that could have been avoided. I vowed that

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would never happen again. In our program I often say snow is like life. You can build snowmen, ski, have fun with it but the moment you don't respect it and aren't paying attention, you can slip and bust your butt.

Well, that was me recently. It was January and we had just had snow. Of course, I shoveled, and put salt down as usual, but this time was different. First, I have to paint a better picture of how I think. I'm the guy that's always paying attention. I pay attention to other drivers, I always sit with my back to the wall. I'm the observant guy. Am I anal? No, but I see things others might overlook. Sometimes I wish I didn't see what I see, but that's me. On this Saturday morning at 7:15, I went out to get the paper and wasn't paying attention and stepped on a piece of ice. I flew up in the air. The Rock from WWF would have been proud of me because I came down with the perfect elbow drop. The only problem was I elbow dropped the concrete and it hurt like hell. I hobbled into the house with tears in my eyes. The pain was incredible but me, the ex-athlete who had my share of injuries, knew I had I torn my rotator cuff. The crazy thing was as I hit the ground what flashed through my mind was, *oh no, golf season!* I was so mad at myself because that's not supposed to happen to me. My wife tries to tell me things like, "that happens, that's what they call an accident." But in my head, that accident could and should have been avoided, if I

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was on top of my game and paying attention to what the hell I was doing, not trying to read the paper.

That's another thing we talk a lot about in our program. By paying attention we can avoid a lot of unnecessary drama. For example, when I call my wife, based on how she says "hello" I can tell what type of mood she's in. Even though she's an incredible woman, I can sense whether she's bothered or something's on her mind. We can control so much more if we slow down and pay attention.

There are somethings you can't control, like what happened to me on February 12, 2018. Maybe it was God humbling me, I don't know, but physically I've been pretty good except for my torn rotator cuff and battling Type II diabetes. Briefly about the diabetes. I don't understand it, sometimes it gets so frustrating because I work out, walk 4-5 miles a day, and really try to watch what I eat. Sometimes I take my blood sugar and it's higher than it should be, and I have no reason why. Ok, I just had to go there. Back to the story. On February 10, we had our Bowl-A-Thon Fundraiser for My Brother's Keeper and because I had hurt my shoulder I couldn't lift as much as usual, so I used the right side of my stomach to help balance. No big deal, right? Sunday it had snowed some, so I shoveled, and we went for our usual walk, my wife and I and our dogs Moses and Abraham, two golden retrievers. Moses is twelve-years-old, and

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Abraham is nine-years-old. Make no mistake about it, Moses is the smartest dog alive and Abraham, let's just say, he's my learning challenged dog. Moses goes around the puddle, but Abraham goes right through it. Well, we got back from the walk and my stomach hurt. It felt like a pulled muscle, no big deal. I put ice on it like all us old athletes do. I figured once I went to sleep, the next morning it would be all good. Boy, was I wrong.

I woke up at 4:00 in the morning, reached over to my wife and said, "Baby, we have to go to the emergency room now." My stomach felt like someone had gotten inside and poured gas and lit me on fire. We got to the hospital around 5:00 a.m. and the pain was so intense, nothing like I have ever felt before. They ran me through a series of tests. By 9:00 a.m. they told me it was my appendix and they need to take it out. I was surprised as hell, I always thought that was a little kid's thing. Boy was I wrong. Well, I had emergency surgery and after it was over, I was told my appendix had been leaking and it burst that morning, it was ugly. So, there I was sitting in the hospital recovery room, surgery on my stomach while at the same time my shoulder was hurting like hell. This was that moment in life that I felt old. I know age is a number and that old saying *you are only as old as you feel*, but for some reason for a guy—right or wrong who is supposed to be superman—I didn't feel it.

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I believe God wanted me to just slow down, look at my life and really be happy. I was lucky, let's just say, timing is everything. This happened February 12th. My wife and I had planned to get away to our favorite spot on March 9th, to celebrate our twenty-first anniversary in Playa Del Carmen and enjoy a week, just us in Mexico at the Riu Tequila. I say "just us" because when we are in Green Bay, our world is full. Our life consists of children, even though they are grown they are still our kids and we are Mom and Dad. There's My Brother's Keeper, that's a 24/7 thing. We are always on call or always having to be ready because when people need you, they need you. Madonna is from Green Bay, so she has her Mom and Dad and siblings nearby that all have agendas. Then there are six grandchildren all within five minutes of where we live. My wife Madonna is a great wife. But her love for the grandchildren and their relationship is a thing of beauty. To be honest with you, I wish I was a better grandfather. I'm not a bad one, but I could be better. And that something that I plan to work on. Then, besides the kids, grandkids, My Brother's Keeper, there's the radio show. Some say my voice is distinct and it must be. My wife and I can go out to dinner, grocery shopping, wherever, and you can see people stop in their tracks and think to themselves, *I know that voice*. And that usually leads to some form of conversation usually about football or sports. It's an

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honor to have people want to hear what you have to say, and I never take them for granted because of what I've been through as a man, a father, an athlete, a Black man, a business owner, a coach. Let's just say, in Green Bay we wear a bunch of hats.

That's why when my wife and I get away, just the two of us, it's so special. I get to treat her like the queen she is without interruptions. Please, this isn't meant to be a rude thing but while in Mexico, I only have eyes for her. We wake up, go to breakfast and enjoy it. Then, we go for a walk on the beach and hold hands, taking in the beauty of that moment, having conversations or not saying a word. After that, we would go find the perfect place where she can get the sun and me the shade. We just chill and talk or sometimes I listen to music or play one of my games and she'll listen to a book on tape. She loves books and podcasts, but we just get lost in each other for seven sweet days and nights. Dinner times are special because for seven nights I get to see her looking incredible in dresses she can wear in Mexico that she couldn't in Green Bay. She's beautiful anywhere, but something about how she looks, maybe it has something to do with the sun, the air, the atmosphere or maybe the fact that I don't have to share her with anyone. She doesn't have to share me with anyone either. This is our selfish time and couples need that because life pulls us in different directions. If we

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don't make our love a priority, it's no one's fault but our own. We won't let that happen because we can control that. Let's just say this last vacation was more than just needed. It was critical, and I have been rejuvenated.

I haven't talked much about our kids or grandkids or the journey from the divorce and our ex's and the drama they created for a reason. They are all a part of the story, but like everyone, it's not what happens to us, but how we handle what happens. All our kids are in a good place. They are all contributing to making our world a better place because they are good people.

People often ask me how in the hell did I find myself here? Here it is 2018, and I'm living in Green Bay, Wisconsin. I say the love of a good woman, but we know that it was more than that. So much more.

Ready to take a little ride with me? I call this the "What if" ride. It's a journey of so many of the events that now bring me to 1463 Main Street, Green Bay, Wisconsin—the new forever home of My Brother's Keeper. For those of you that doubt God's workings or aren't sure that He has a plan, He's convinced me that He does. It's kind of funny, or at least I think it is, the new wave of automobiles that drive themselves. They say you should hold the wheel, but let the car do the work. Isn't that what God's been telling us forever? Well once I got out of my way, God sure did the work, even though I didn't like it or understand it at the time.

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But now I'm sitting in my office gazing at my lovely wife outside my door. Boy, is He good.

This is a journey that I'm glad didn't work out the way I wanted it to but worked out the way He meant for it to. There was a time when I hated that I got cut from the Seattle Seahawks because I could have had a good career with them, maybe played for six to seven years but that didn't happen. And because that didn't happen, I went back to college to get my degree in Criminology and Juvenile Justice from Kansas and worked doing all sorts of temporary jobs to put food on the table. Then I went to Cincinnati where I got cut again. Talk about being humbled. How would I be a professional football player while working washing dishes? God wanted me to stay humble and hungry and patient because it wasn't my time yet. That year, Cincinnati went to the Super Bowl and lost to the 49ers. Then I was playing in the United States Football League. Often times, most of us we use things to motivate us to stay focused on the prize. I never forget where I came from. I don't forget that hard work got me where I am right now. Hard work, a lot of luck and God's grace. I left Denver Gold after my second year and arrived in Memphis, Tennessee the home of the Memphis Showboats. I played under Pepper Rodgers who may be the most unique personality to ever coach grown men. This is how God works. He knew I was frustrated with my football

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career, but He brought me into the world of Reggie White, one of the most incredible men to ever walk on the earth. Again, if I hadn't gotten cut from Seattle this never would have happened. While at Memphis I ripped my groin muscle and had major surgery. I talked earlier in this book about where this injury took me and how I had to fight the devil that was trying to take me where I didn't want to go. I didn't know whether I was getting punished or just bad luck, but for a guy trying to chase his dreams I felt like I was running on a treadmill going nowhere. Still chasing that dream, I went to play in the CFL with Montreal for a half a year just going anywhere that wanted me to play. Then back to Fayetteville, North Carolina, the place I hated, but I had nowhere else to go. Talk about a full circle. I was working the graveyard shift as a forklift driver in a factory. Not what I wanted, or envisioned, but the truth is I was what I was. Like I've said a hell of a journey, right?

Then I went to San Francisco and ended my career in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Faith brought me here. Let me tie it all together. If Bill Walsh hadn't seen me play in 1981 when I was trying out for Seattle Seahawks he never would have answered my letter in 1987. If I hadn't made it in San Francisco in 1987 I never would have played under Mike Holmgren and I came to Green Bay in 1992 because Mike Holmgren wanted me. If I hadn't

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played for him in 1992 he wouldn't have asked me to coach under him from 1994-1999. Mike Holmgren then left for Seattle and didn't take me with him to coach because I believe he didn't want my family to have to make the tough decision of whether or not to go with him and if I did, what would happen with our eight kids. Who stays and who goes? Because of his respect for the family structure, he knew what was best for me before I did, and I respect him for that. What an incredible ride especially from my eyes. But it's not done yet. Hold on, there's more all leading to My Brother's Keeper and to our new home. Because Mike brought me to Green Bay as a player then a coach, I have a home. More than a home.

I realized Green Bay, Wisconsin, yes, I said Green Bay, Wisconsin is living the American Dream. Especially when you are old enough to really understand what that means. And it means different things for different people depending on the age and experiences of that person. For me the American Dream at fifty-nine is a hell of a lot different than it was when I was twenty-six or thirty. If I was a young man ready to discover the world, Green Bay wouldn't be the place I would be looking for. For a younger adult that really doesn't want a lot, Green Bay is perfect. But most of the time the young want more so they leave and come back later in life understanding just how special this place is. If

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you need more than Green Bay, Chicago is three hours away, Milwaukee one hour forty-five minutes. Minnesota and the Twin Cities are four hours away. I know I'm painting this nice picture, but I don't get it twisted; the winters don't play. It gets cold as hell but then again, we are all searching for quality family time. The weather during the winter forces families to be together. It's up to families whether or not they make the best of it. It's a great place for a lot of reasons and none of them have anything to do with the color of my skin.

Okay, I say that, but let me explain. It does but it doesn't, it becomes about the color of my skin when I let it. I want people to respect me as man first then realize I'm Black. I want people to respect me for being a good person. I want people to see me as a man who's earned what I've earned because of how I carry myself, by what I will and won't do. Trust me I know the three Super Bowl rings might get me in the door but the other things about me help me stay.

So that journey that started in Fayetteville, North Carolina ended in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Here's a funny little story. When I was six-years-old and played Pop Warner Football for the DYA, the sports program through the Army, my first team was the Green Bay Packers. The last I played on was the Green Bay Packers in the NFL. Tell me God doesn't work in mysterious ways.

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I've talked about Green Bay and the American Dream. The other part of that, Green Bay is that land of opportunity, but you have to seize that opportunity and grab hold of it when it comes. Sometimes God pushes you to open your eyes.

I'm ready for whatever is next because God has prepared me. I say this because I believe He has given me the tools to control me and He will control everything else. I know that if I make every decision I need to make using what we teach at My Brother's Keeper, I will stay out of my own way. Each decision I make, and I want my clients to make, will be based on the IRS code. Period, plain and simple. I will ask myself if each decision will make me a man of integrity. Integrity means knowing what the right thing to do is and being willing to do it at all times. Really marinate on that definition because it's the foundation that everything else is built upon. That definition is broken down to three parts that must come together.

#1: *Knowing what the right thing to do is* – Once we get through the smoke of any decision we have to respect ourselves and others with that decision.

#2: *And being willing to do it* – means doing it whether we like to or not, whether we feel like it or not.

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#3: *At all times* – that’s the kicker, at all times. Not just when we want to or when it fits our schedule, but at all times.

You see, we can control being people of integrity.

Why am I writing this book? I’m writing this book because for some reason God is letting me live a hell of a life. He never forgot me. He always protected me when I didn’t even think He knew my name. He guided me when I was lost and scared. He saw what I needed and wanted, but He taught me how to sacrifice by not making the road easy to travel. I was stubborn, hard-headed and thought it was about me, not about us.

Those times of falling on my face because I wanted to drive left many scars but with age comes wisdom. Here’s the wisdom I believe I’ve learned. I used to hear “put it on the cross.” I don’t want to put it all on the cross because I believe God wants me to handle the things I can, and He will take care of the rest. He wants me to do my part, He just doesn’t want me to be selfish in my relationship with Him.

He wants me to be a man of integrity. He wants me to respect myself and others. He wants me to establish my standards, who I am, and what I will or won’t stand for. He wants me to be disciplined. Remember the KISS Philosophy? Keep It Simple, Stupid. When

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we say disciplined, we mean disciplined to ask yourself, *does this make me a man of integrity?* Then hold yourself accountable to that answer because that's your responsibility. This enables one to control the one and only thing we can; ourselves. Imagine how much better this world would be if each and every one of us took responsibility of our actions.

While writing this book and revisiting my journey there have been a lot of emotions. It brought me to many tears, tears dealing with my mom's sacrifice, tears of hatred, tears of anger at others as well as myself. This book brought many moments of disbelief, many moments of unbelievable pain. But it also reminded me of how God chose me, and He had to, how else could this story happen? God, even though I thought it was me, took my hand and led me through all the trees, the smoke, the rubble, the heartache and pain of watching my father be anything but what a real man was. He led me through the failures of what I thought a man was, He lead me through the disappointments and still trying to achieve my childhood dreams of making it in the NFL. To being with me when I walked out on the field as one of the Super Bowl captains for the San Francisco 49ers in 1988. He did this, even though I knew God and He knew me, and He knew I wasn't ready for Him yet. But, He was patient and willing to wait for me because He knew what I didn't know. He

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was there through my divorce. He helped me be calm and understand my children were what mattered. He was there in those times when I didn't have a dime to my name, He provided. He punished, He humbled, He loved, and He cherished. He made me look at my life and all that went into Harry F. Sydney III and decided there was more.

I survived until I started living and now my living is for Him. I remember when I was studying to be a minister and I realized I'm a street fighter, so the pulpit wasn't for me. So, God gave me the skills to be an artist and paint the pictures in ways that my clients would see them. They need to be able to see, so they can change. He gave me the power to trust myself by simply trusting Him. He gave me the insight to forgiveness and the power to let go of all that was stopping me from being a better me and allowing His love to guide me. I'm in no way, shape or form close to perfection. I'm a work in progress and the things we teach at My Brother's Keeper only allows us the knowledge to be a better man and what we have to do.

The journey is about changing lives, making better brothers, sons, dads and husbands. Then we have happier daughters, wives, mothers and sisters. One change affects so many. We live in a world where all of a sudden violence has become a norm. The hell with Black Lives Matter. In my world, All Lives Matter, somehow

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that has been forgotten. There is such a lack of communication and because of that lack of communication nobody has respect for each other. Everyone has a different definition of what respect is. One of the reasons My Brother's Keeper goes into schools and the Juvenile Detention Center is so we can at least have the same definition of what respect and integrity are. Then we can start communicating the same way. Then possibilities are endless. Our world's a great place and My Brother's Keeper wants to be part of the solution and not just talk about the problems.

So many times, I used to wonder, *why me?* I used to watch others when my heart wasn't being showered with greatness. I used to wonder why I was watching others excel and yet I felt like I was standing still. But now I get it. God was preparing me for so much more. I didn't know it, but He was. That's the awesomeness of His power. I thought it was me and yet it was always Him. Remember a while back when I talked about the double rainbow when I asked God if He heard me? Now, I know what that answer was. I think He told me it's time for me to share my journey and help others, how He guarded me, and He needed me to become My Brother's Keeper.

The End

