

Creating Success **from the** **Inside Out**

**DEVELOP THE FOCUS
AND STRATEGY
TO UNCOVER THE
LIFE YOU WANT**

EPHREN W. TAYLOR II
with
W. EMERSON BRANTLEY III



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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This book is dedicated to my loving wife and number one supporter MeShelle Taylor, my two wonderful children Ephren and Madison, and my parents Ephren and Diane Taylor, whose encouragement, guidance, and love helped me to find my own path to success. A special thanks is due to our church family at the Johnson County Church of Christ, who loved us before and after our successes; when we had little and when we were blessed with plenty. And to the City Capital Team and to all those who have supported, invested, encouraged, mentored, and loved us along this road, may all the work we do continue to bring glory unto His name.

Preface

W. Emerson Brantley III

In October 2005 I received an e-mail from somebody who'd developed a real estate concept and wanted me to help him market the concept. That wasn't that remarkable, but 15 minutes later a second e-mail popped up from the same sender. He told me a little more about who he was and what he had accomplished, and finished by saying he wanted to retain me for the next 15 months to create a national marketing program. What made this e-mail especially unique was that I had never spoken to, or communicated with this individual before, yet there it was: "I'd like to retain you through the end of 2006." This caught my attention. I wanted to talk to this guy. He was either crazy, or trying to impress with his audacity . . . or he was an incredibly intuitive and decisive individual.

Within the first 10 minutes of our first call, I knew he wasn't crazy, and he wasn't trying to impress me . . . but he was extremely intuitive and decisive. He was very articulate about his goals and showed a higher level of business acumen than many multimillionaires I've known and worked with over the past 30 years. And he was also one of the most genuine people I had ever talked with in my entire marketing career.

Ephren was black and had just turned 23, I was white and 48. None of that mattered to him, or to me. Based solely on his visit to my web site, Ephren Taylor felt I was the person he wanted, and had made a business decision to retain me. Extraordinary qualities for someone about the same age as

my daughters. I saw immediately the potential of his vision, and more importantly, that here was a man who would commit the effort, find the funding, and do whatever else it took to reach his goals. Extraordinary. I signed on, and within a few short months “fired” other long-term marketing clients to come onto the board and into the company.

So what makes Ephren Taylor tick? By almost any yardstick you care to use, Ephren Taylor is an unqualified success. He started his first successful company, Flame Software, at age 12 to develop 3D video games. At 16, Ephren won the Teen TechFest Challenge, sponsored by Microsoft, and used \$1,000 savings to start a job search engine for teens. He then won a scholarship from the Kauffman Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership that allowed him to develop and hone his business skills. He personally raised over \$250,000 in private funding and his web site grew into the highly successful GoFerretGo.com, ranked by *YoungBiz* magazine as number 4 of the “100 Top Companies Run by Teens” nationwide.

Ephren then turned his attention toward creating profitable investments for churches. Using his father’s church as a model, he began investing their endowment monies into the community around them, originally in pretty conventional real estate rehabs. He earned returns that in some cases matched a decade of money market or bank interest on church accounts. He was 19.

He began speaking at churches, teaching stewardship, financial concepts, and more, helping them learn to grow their money within the community by giving rather than taking. Congregations would give their money or use their credit so their church could purchase a property and earn cash flow and equity. Several civic leaders in various cities took notice and began to offer him surplus properties that needed rehabbing for urban families, homes other investors

were passing up in favor of big dollar developments. About the same time, people began to say, “I like using my money and credit to help my church, but can I get some of those returns for my retirement account, too?” That was the beginning of the investment programs that continue to be developed in today’s City Capital Corporation.

Expanding on these concepts, four short years later, in the spring of 2006, Ephren became CEO of a multimillion-dollar public corporation: (City Capital Corporation: CCCN) with business interests throughout the United States and overseas. At age 23, he is the youngest African American CEO of any public company in history. He has earned a wall full of accolades and recognitions including State Champion and then National Champion of the Future Business Leaders of America in 1999, and Kansas Entrepreneur of the Year award in 2002. He has been asked to serve on national panels on housing issues, financial self-sufficiency within urban communities, national market conditions.

Ephren Taylor has an aggressive, proactive approach to everything he does and believes in surrounding himself with extremely high-quality individuals to form a strong team, to make the vision a reality. Today that team represents over 225 years of expertise in finance, marketing, development, management, and much more.

As of the writing of this book, Ephren Taylor is still only 24, yet his companies manage millions of dollars in assets including biofuels research, community development, and investment programs.

City Capital’s mission of **“Socially-Conscious Investing to Empower Urban Communities,”** which originally focused on providing affordable homes for working class families, now has expanded its vision to include renewable resources and empowering people in other nations as well. While the company is a for-profit corporation, its roots are in

the charitable sector, and it continues to plow significant portions of corporate profits back into local communities, in some cases as much as 40 percent. City Capital does this through partnerships with local, state and federal governments, community organizations, churches, and colleges.

Ephren Taylor's story, and his companies' socially conscious agenda, have made him extremely attractive to local and national media. He is often invited as a guest expert on hundreds of local and national television and radio shows including CNBC's *Big Idea*, Tom Joyner's morning show on Fox News *Bulls & Bears*, and many more. He has served as keynote speaker for dozens of colleges and business organizations, and is regularly asked to address prestigious groups such as the Wall Street Economic Summit and the Congressional Black Caucus and others.

He never completed college, yet he is in top demand as a speaker in college business classes, high schools, Boys and Girls Clubs, and other youth organizations nationwide. Ephren Taylor has spoken before tens of thousands of all ages; from large auditoriums at national conventions, to small classrooms of children and teens, to national panels on housing and economic growth in our nation's capital and on Wall Street.

Ephren Taylor has spearheaded private summits that have included investors, boards of directors of major corporations, economic development group committees, government and community leaders, and even heads of state. His Urban Wealth Tour will visit 15 cities in 2007, where he will present his economic empowerment message to hundreds of thousands across America, and bring together educational, nonprofit, and government forces to create positive change in urban communities.

In April 2007, Ephren presented the largest donation ever to Cheyney University, the oldest historically black university in America, establishing the Ephren W. Taylor II Entrepreneurship Academy to bring real-world entrepreneurial skills to urban youth.

Ephren Taylor is especially interested in reaching young men and women and helping them find their own keys to success. For these, our future leaders, business owners, and employees, as well as those of us already in the business world, he offers this collection of the thoughts and insights that have driven this world-class entrepreneur and businessman.

Though still a young man, Ephren Taylor is a person who is admired and respected throughout the business community. Yet, what sets Taylor apart from most wealthy and successful businesspeople is his fierce commitment to improving communities and enhancing the lives of the less fortunate. Giving back to the community and supporting charitable projects is as much a part of his business plan as the quarterly profit and loss statements. In fact, those who know him best would say that this focus, backed by his deep faith and conviction, is how Ephren Taylor is *“Creating Success from the Inside Out.”*

Introduction

Who Am I, and Why Should You Care about What I Have to Share?

There are really two introductions in order: one for this book, and one for me. I realize most Americans have never heard of me, and that's okay because you have now! I've been working since I was 12, not for publicity or fame, but to build businesses; businesses that have been successful, profitable, and have improved peoples' lives. This book shares the business and life philosophies I've developed along the way, and have repeatedly proven to be true in my own life. Principles that will change your life, if you're up to the challenge, and help you reach your goals.

Different people will find different areas of inspiration and education here. Your background will have a direct effect on how much this book influences you because we filter everything through our mind and our life experiences. I have learned that, in the end, **our perceptions truly are our reality**. I would like you to think about this for a few moments before going on. We'll talk more about it later, but right now ask yourself, "How have my perceptions created the realities of my life up until now, and how are they filtering everything around me today?"

So, who am I to be telling you all of this? I'm just a man. And a young man at that. I'm Ephren White Taylor II. I'm the son of Ephren Taylor Sr. and Diane Taylor. I'm the brother of Marcquest and Kedron Taylor, my two brothers, each of us four years apart. I'm the husband of MeShelle Taylor. And

I'm the father of Ephren III and Madison Elise Taylor. As this book is being written, I've just turned 24.

People have called me a lot of things over the years: Dumb kid, nerd, dreamer, wunderkind, genius, smart guy, lucky. I've been given nicknames by the media such as "E-Money" and "E-Billions." I've been referred to as a wealth engineer, activist mogul, a "high-performance visionary with the ability to make things happen, when nobody else can," "the Warren Buffett of the hip hop generation," and "Living Black History," among many others. I've also been accused of not being "authentic" or "genuine" because of my successes, like being black and smart or successful is somehow not "keeping it real." I've had my share of some other names that have been pretty derogatory, but I tend to let most of those roll off my back. I also don't let all this praise affect me or go to my head.

I've been a preacher, a teacher, an entrepreneur, a business owner, a CEO, and a chairman, a fundraiser, a developer, a public speaker, and more. I've been featured as a guest panelist and keynote speaker for conferences, and appeared on countless radio and television broadcasts nationwide. Hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles, maybe thousands by now, have been written about me and my meteoric rise in the business world, not to mention tens of thousands of Web page articles.

Since about age 19, most of my focus, and that of my companies, has been on connecting individuals, corporations, and churches to wealth. I have clients in Wall Street boardrooms; in South Central Los Angeles; in Anchorage, Alaska; Wichita, Kansas; Macon, Georgia; and in other cities and towns all across the United States. I've worked closely with Hip Hop icons such as Snoop Dogg and others. Along the way, I've made—and lost—millions of

dollars, and I've helped change the face of entire communities.

Why Business?

I figured out pretty early that I couldn't dance too well, I couldn't hold a note to sing, and even though I was pretty good at football, a diagnosis of scoliosis ended my chances of becoming an NFL pro. For most black teenagers, that pretty much eliminates all the obvious legal options to make it big.

But I didn't buy into the notion that I had to do any of those things to succeed. **I refused to be a victim.** I didn't want to go to work for someone else, and I wasn't raised to think that the government owed me or my family anything. Because of my incredible parents, I knew I could achieve whatever I set my sights on, and I didn't listen to the clowns, the politicians, and the media personalities who tried to tell me anything different.

Motivational speakers like to say, "If I can do it, you can do it, too!" There's a lot of truth in that. The real core, the part that's often missed, is that while we may be able to do pretty much *anything* we set our minds to, consciously or subconsciously *we choose not to do most things*, including those that will lead us to success in life. In this book, I'll prove this to you: our minds literally keep us from success. Or make it all possible.

Sometimes these choices are simply our preferences, like I never wanted to flip hamburgers for a living. Other times there is something inside us that keeps us back, and that something—the things we like to avoid within ourselves—is what keeps success just outside our grasp.

True success begins when we simply find that inner spark, that talent, that passion in our lives, and go after it to the exclusion of all the other things.

God gave us all a living spirit, one in his likeness. He didn't create junk, or make you superior or inferior to anyone else. He did, however, give us certain talents. It's up to us to make up our minds to use the talents we have, and go for it!

A Disclaimer

Before we get into this any more, I want to be really clear about one point: I'm not here to give you a "How-To" guide to riches and fame. Anybody who tries to offer you his or her step-by-step "E-Z Guide" to achieving wealth is usually selling something of little value. In fact, the value is almost the inverse of the cost of the information: in other words, the more expensive the course, the less real-world value it often has.

On the other hand, there are loads of real information resources available, most of them inexpensive or even free. Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich*, Conrad Hilton's *Be My Guest*, Michael Gerber's *The E-Myth*, former GM head Alfred Sloan's book, *My Years with General Motors*, Kenneth Blanchard's *The One Minute Manager*, Collins and Porras *Good to Great*, and Dan Peña's *Building Your Own Guthrie* are just a few examples. If I were teaching a college course on success, I'd make them all required reading. One more I rely on constantly is the *Bible*. In it I've found the true keys to success, which are all based on *giving*. It has never failed to give me the guidance I've needed, even through some of the roughest, bleakest times I've faced.

I've found the Bible to be an incredible "user's manual" in my life. For example, in "I Samuel," this kid David had to take lunch to his brothers. He was around 14 or so, and had acne. (Yeah, I know, you never knew the Bible talked about stuff like that!) His brothers were soldiers, and they happened to be in a standoff with the giant, Goliath. David hears the soldiers talking about what the person gets who kills Goliath, and he was blown away. King Saul was giving away money, his daughter's hand in marriage . . . he'd even

eliminate the champion's taxes for life. David jumps in and asks them to repeat the prizes, "WHAT!? What does the man get who kills the giant?" But his brothers get angry and tell him to go back to his sheep. Go home! Get outta here! This stuff ain't for kids!

The next moment is so rich, so real. I think of it every time I get dissed or someone tells me I can't do something. All the Bible says is, **"And he turned from him to another . . ."** Wow. Just like that. He didn't listen to those clowns . . . he just tuned them out and kept his eyes on the prize. He turned away and ignored them, and asked someone else for the information he needed. And you know the rest of the story.

So many times in our lives we are willing to listen to all the voices telling us why we "can't" do something. Why we're not smart enough, fast enough, rich enough, or whatever. We listen to all the Conventional Wisdom about how our age, or our race, or gender is a handicap. And more often than not the first key step toward our dreams hinges on this one moment: **Do we listen? Or do we turn from them to another?** I've done both. In every case, the turning away from the negative and toward my dreams and goals *always* led me to the information and resources I needed to succeed.

As we'll see, however, just having the right knowledge, experience, and other resources in your hands isn't enough. If it were that simple, everybody would be living in mansions on Easy Street driving BMWs and Hummers. There are other steps and strategies to keep us on track to success. If you'll let me, I'd like to spend the next few pages sharing my insights into "what true success is," and some of my life experiences, as well as some specific ways to get your mind—and your life—aimed in the right direction. And then, how

to follow through and stay on track until you reach your own dreams and goals in life.

What Makes Someone a Success?

First, let's talk about what you see as success and what I see as success. I find this is easier by first looking at the things I DON'T consider success, despite Conventional Wisdom (which as we'll see is almost always wrong anyway). To me it isn't wearing certain clothes, reading the right books, or going to a certain school that lifts a man or woman up in the world, it's his or her way of thinking. Many young people lose sight of this. They think that if they just had a cool car and a great house, everything would work out great and they'd have the kind of respect they deserve. Maybe if they had a brand new pair of \$200 sneakers or a lot of gold and platinum bling to show off, they'd be on top of the world.

So they set off pursuing these things—begging, borrowing, stealing, whatever—and no matter how many things they're able to collect, sooner or later they discover that *things* are not the answer. They are empty goals. Even when you get them, *if* you get them, you really have nothing. And often, after all their efforts *getting*, many people lose it all anyway. For some, that's what it takes to understand that it's not stuff that makes us somebody. It's the giving we do more than the getting. And some people never get it.

To me, your way of thinking is what ultimately makes you successful in life. That eight inches between your ears is all the ammunition, motivation, and creativity you need to make it. It controls whether you are a giver, or a taker; someone who's out for Number One only, or someone who's a team builder. What I would like to do is give you an idea of how I think and how other successful people think.

The way I look at it is this: I can't give you the road map for your life, but I can sure give you a compass and some powerful travel tips. A compass can't tell you which road to take but it will always tell you if you're headed in the right direction. And having a guide, someone who's been there, done that before you is always a big help. But ultimately, acting on the information and using the compass is all up to us, individually. Fair enough?

SECTION I

Begin Where You Are Now

Robert Schuller famously said, “Bloom where you are planted!” You have to start where you are right now, not where you’d like to be or where you think you will be whenever, but right now. We have no promises about tomorrow, and we’ve already lost every minute in our life up until now. Even spiritually speaking, we are told, “Today is the day of salvation.” Well, today is the day to start following your dream, too.

I wasn’t born rich and I didn’t inherit wealth. I didn’t begin life as some super-successful business mogul. My family wasn’t wealthy, but I grew where I was planted. We don’t get to pick things like who our parents are or where we’re born, but we do get to decide what we do with what we have been given to work with.

Two Parents and True Commitment

When I started out, I probably wasn’t much different from you. I wasn’t a dummy, but trust me, I was no Einstein, either. In high school I averaged a 2.9 GPA. Even though my family wasn’t well-to-do, I did have the advantage of growing up in a loving and supportive two-parent household. I had loving parents who raised me to believe in myself, and in my own abilities to accomplish whatever I set out to do. If you also had this advantage but you don’t appreciate the value of it, this next section is for you. If you

feel you were handicapped because you didn't have a positive childhood or uplifting parenting, or you came from a broken home, there's a good lesson for you as well.

We all have certain strengths and weaknesses, but coming from a single-parent home almost always creates a more difficult path through life. You don't have to believe this if you don't want to, but the facts are so overwhelming they can't be ignored. In this section, you'll see clearly, perhaps for the first time, what you need to do to overcome the parental decisions that created that broken home, and how to break the cycle for your children as well. Your legacy is the thing that really matters, and after achieving your own success, it becomes almost *all* that matters.

I was born in Port Gibson, Mississippi, the son of Ephren Taylor Sr. and Diane Taylor. I was the oldest of three brothers. When I was born, we lived in my grandmother's house in Carlisle, Mississippi. It sat up on cinder blocks and had a tin roof and no hot water. That only lasted about a year. My dad had gotten an honorable discharge from the army and was working on a two-year degree at the local junior college. His father had died when Dad was only 12, but he remembered how Granddad had repeatedly told him, "Go to school, get a job! Go to school, get a job!" So that's what he did. My father was not an entrepreneur. When he graduated, he hooked up with an engineering company that contracted with nuclear power plants around the country. Dad's new job meant big changes in our lives in a lot of ways.

Dad landed a job in Homestead, Florida, so we moved to an apartment there. By the time my brothers came along, we were living in pretty decent houses in pretty decent neighborhoods. All the while, Dad kept plugging away at his electrical engineering degree. It took him 10 years to get his bachelor's degree, mixing and matching course credits at

different schools, wherever we happened to live at the time. Dad's job caused us to move around a lot, and before sixth grade we had moved from Homestead to Plymouth, Massachusetts; Decatur, Alabama; Evans, Georgia; back to Decatur; and finally to Overland Park, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City. He eventually finished his master's degree in Overland Park, and began working in the main office in Kansas City instead of out in the field in the actual nuclear power plants.

I don't remember much from each of those places because early childhood memories all kind of fuzz together. I just remember I was the new kid in school a lot, and a shyness crept in that could have taken over my life if God hadn't been at work. I was about halfway through sixth grade when we moved to Kansas. Overland Park is located in Johnson County, the second wealthiest county in the country. In 2007, *Money* magazine ranked Overland Park the sixth best city to live in the United States. I had no idea how important all this would be in my life. The quality of education I received, and the community and lifestyle I became a part of, elevated me in so many ways. But it sure didn't seem that way my first day in school in Overland Park.

There's no way of telling my story without touching on race issues as part of it. I don't focus on it or even think about it much, but from the time I was in school, I've been aware that I was different. Not just black, but unique in other ways, too. Most kids don't want to be unique, they don't want to stand out from the crowd too much. They want to be accepted by their peers. Kids want to fit in, especially when they're moving every year or so to a new school. I was the same way.

When I was in Alabama, I was in the gifted program. When we moved to Overland Park and I started middle school,

they never even tested me. My parents chose to send me to the Blue Valley School District, which is in a predominately white suburb. I guess the counselors figured, “Black kid, Alabama . . . regular classes.” They never did put me back into the gifted program. Yet now they have my posters at the school and all that, and colleges and high schools around the country are standing in line for me to come “inspire” their students. So did I let it hold me back? Use it as some kind of excuse or grudge? No.

I tell people it’s sort of like Thomas Edison, whose teacher thought he was “addled” and so he only had three months of school. Guess he didn’t care much for excuses, either!

Anyway, the first day at this clean little white suburban school all the kids were asking me, “Can you play basketball? Do you play basketball?” It’s like, is that all black kids are supposed to do? Play basketball? I did play football, but nobody asked that. I’m thinking, what is wrong with these kids? They’d ask me other weird stuff like, “How does your hair stay there?” As dumb as some of the questions were, I realized they were just ignorant kids who’d never been around many African Americans before.

The worst thing of all was that there were only seven black kids total, in the whole school. And I was the only “black nerd.” So, even with the other black kids—in some cases, *especially* with the other black kids—I was hard up against some of the worst black stereotypes that exist within the black community. These are stereotypes that equate to “authentic blackness,” and “knowing your roots,” “keepin’ it real,” and the kinds of things that keep people in lives of mediocrity.

Anyway, as far as the school was concerned, I wasn’t considered gifted or technically any smarter than the other kids in the school. My grades dropped to around 2.9 GPA largely because I was bored, but I know too that part of it

was that “not sticking out” thing. Looking back it’s funny because I was already “sticking out” and didn’t realize how much! I was already working on my first company, Flame Software. But at the time, I just wanted a different video game to play because I had already top-leveled-out on the couple of game cartridges I had.

Fortunately, at home I never had those kinds of problems. My life at home promoted self-awareness, excellence, and brains. My parents had no issues with their “blackness” or “being authentic” or anything like that.

The most important advantage I had growing up was something I never really thought too much about. Something that for me was just part of normal life.

As difficult as it may be for many to accept, growing up in a two-parent home with a stay-at-home mom and a dad who came home from work every night was the one major advantage I had over many of my classmates. My mom had stopped working outside the home and stayed home with me when I was real small. She was there for all of us, including my two brothers—Marcquest, who came along when I was four, and Kedron four years later.

My home life was pretty normal. I figured it was a typical household, like all kids do. Only years later would I realize how fortunate I was. For instance, Mom was a stickler about dinner. Dinner was at 5:30 every day and we all ate together. My dad got off at 5 and Mom had dinner on the table when he walked in the door. We didn’t dare miss dinner. I figured every family did breakfast and dinner together, and lunch too, on weekends.

Having Mom’s influence at home really takes us right to the point: When do most teenagers get in trouble? When do most teenage pregnancies happen? Between the hours of 3:00 PM and 6:00 PM, when they’re out of school with no

one around to supervise, no one around to care. There are pretty dramatic differences between the way I was brought up and the way my wife MeShelle was raised. I had two happily married parents . . . and *still* have two happily married parents. There was no domestic violence, and both were very, very good role models.

I'm not pretending it was all like some TV family, but it was a very secure, loving environment. My wife grew up with parents who had separated. When you're a kid, you only know what you know. Living in a broken home creates all sorts of emotional baggage to wrestle with, especially issues of fear and trust. On the other hand, when you come out of a household with two loving parents, you have an invaluable head start in life right off the bat, despite whatever other negative influences outside of the household pull at you.

Now someone may say, "But what if you have a two-parent home where there's strife and abuse? Surely a single-parent home with love is better than that!" That's a hard question, and there is no reason why any person—man, woman, or child—should have to stay in an abusive situation. But my point isn't to debate the "whys" that may or may not justify a broken home. Regardless of the reason that created it, a single-parent home has distinct disadvantages when it comes to creating the environment that fosters success. I know of no study that has ever disputed this, and sadly, roughly half of the children in America are living in this reality.

MeShelle

I've already mentioned my wife's experience. She grew up in the inner city of Kansas City, Missouri. MeShelle had two

older sisters. There was violence in the home, but her parents kept most of their problems out of sight of the kids, especially MeShelle, the baby. MeShelle was an exceptional kid by anyone's standards. Before she was one year old, she would fuss until her mom dressed her up all pretty before her daddy got home. She showed all sorts of talent for music and dance, well before she was in kindergarten. Fortunately, her parents saw her potential and enrolled her in special classes to encourage it.

By the time MeShelle was nine, her parents were separated. She saw her father only on weekends and holidays. He had a separate life, with a separate family. Seeing your father on weekends is better than having a father who abandons you, but all that doesn't matter when you're a kid and you scrape your knee. Mom's there to kiss it, but you want Daddy to, too. By the time you see Daddy the next weekend, it's all healed, and it's just not the same. When you ace a test, telling him over the phone isn't as good as if he was right there.

Her mom Marcy was there to support her daughters. Marcy struggled sometimes working three jobs, but always managed to earn enough to keep her daughters in clothes and food, and the mortgage paid. Eventually she turned to gambling on the nearby riverboats to supplement her meager salary. Sometimes she would earn more on a single night than her month's pay. But she realized increasingly, as she looked at the losers straggling off in the early morning hours, that she was looking at herself, if she kept on that path.

Marcy turned her back on gambling, stopped looking for the easy way out, and put herself back on a solid financial track. She was determined to make sure MeShelle knew how to carry herself and be a lady, so Marcy put MeShelle

through her own “School of Etiquette,” as she called it. It sure paid off!

The first time I saw MeShelle, I saw this polished young woman, never knowing the scars of her background or what she had overcome in her life up to that point. I first met her when I tagged along with a friend to a roller skating rink, and saw MeShelle gliding around the floor. We met and talked, and talked.

Pretty soon I figured out she was the one for me. The first time I went to pick her up, her mom eyed me up and down and said, “What do you think you’re looking for, coming over to the hood for my daughter?” I guess I passed the test because she accepted that I was interested in her daughter for real.

I give a lot of credit to her mom’s commitment to let MeShelle develop her inner talents, at considerable expense. It’s not a path many inner city, single moms can afford, or take time to develop in their kids.

At one point, Marcy had to make the tough choice to take MeShelle out of a primarily black dance school because she felt they were holding her daughter back. She anguished over the decision, eventually enrolling MeShelle in a dance school that was primarily white, where there was more exposure to the art, and additional opportunities for her competitively.

MeShelle was really fortunate. After growing up in a single-parent home, MeShelle is doubly committed to working with me to keep our home together. (Which isn’t always easy, especially with the kind of schedule I keep!) And she shares with other young people and couples from her own experiences, about the value of commitment to each other, and to providing that quality of environment for our family.