

The Art of Caring, A Memoir
By Marla Jacobson, in collaboration
with Kenneth Lamb.

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Although this is a memoir, many names have been changed for privacy purposes.

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DEDICATION

For Ed: This is dedicated to the man I choose to call Father. - K.L.

For Mark Jacobson: simply the best Dad and my favorite person of all time. I miss you every day. - M.J.

FOREWORD

The title illustrates the unique meaning of this memoir. It's an account of two men from vastly different circumstances, who gave each other the gift of healing. One, a thriving artist with a home and family in an affluent suburb. The other, homeless, alienated from family, barely surviving each day. The memoir is his story, masterfully told in his own voice by author Marla Jacobson. As he describes his childhood, it's as if we are sitting with him and hearing the emotion. We feel his pain, sadness and isolation, growing up in the projects on the North Side of Chicago. We come to realize the significance of belonging to a gang, when a person has been marginalized in other aspects of their lives.

We feel the struggle to redeem himself, and become someone of value. Throughout the painful circumstances of his life, a caring heart continued to beat. A chance meeting with a successful artist, someone who saw him as a person equally as valuable as himself, changed everything for **both** of them. This extraordinary memoir will touch hearts, and perhaps even change how we view each other. No matter our economic state, social status, cultural background or skin color, we are all valuable and deserving of love by practicing the art of caring for each other.

J.G. Holtrop, Author, “Wall of Fire”
and coming soon, **“The Revelation”**

There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.

Albert Einstein

An upper middle-class suburban artist stopping at the same Starbucks each morning, en route to his Chicago studio isn't a coincidence. The artist giving the same African-American StreetWise vendor a two-dollar bill when this man stood in front of the coffee house isn't a coincidence. The artist opting, after a year of greetings and countless tips, to welcome a virtual stranger into his heart, home and family, transforming his life, is nothing short of divine intervention.

PROLOGUE

I sat in my van, rolling, then smoking a blunt (I call them cigarettes) and thinking about my life.

My mother died when I was nine years old. My older brother and sister were out ice skating, but I couldn't go because I was being punished. I was sitting on the couch next to my auntie in our rented house in Chicago Heights, and my mother was sitting in the worn, puke green chair across from me. The next thing I knew, my mother started jumping and shaking; an ambulance came and they rushed her out of the house to the hospital. The next time I saw my mother she was in a casket, and that is when my life changed for the worse.

I was so hysterical, my Uncle Tony had to physically pick me up and carry me away from the casket. Some people say everything happens for a reason, but I can't think of one good reason why my mother was taken from me. My older sister is Daretta, and my older brother is named Johnny, after our father. I'm the baby, and growing up I was a spoiled little brat. I threw temper tantrums, and I always wanted my way. When my mother got mad at me, there were times she gave me a good ass-whooping. She was the best mother in the world, though. Everything I wanted, I got. One time I saw a racetrack set with a stopwatch and two cars in a toy store window. I said "Mommy, I want that." and, when I got back from school, it was there and all set up.

I don't know who set it up, because my father died when I was exactly one month old, and it was just my mother taking care of the three of us. She worked at the post office, and I would go with her in the afternoons after school; she would cover me with mailbags, so I wouldn't be seen. She wasn't a mail thrower, her job was picking up the mail from the boxes and bringing it back to be sorted. She had to take me with her, because she couldn't afford a babysitter. I got anything I wanted when I was hiding in her mail truck. She gave me treats, and told me not to move until she came back. I can't tell you exactly how often it happened, but I spent a whole lotta afternoons in that mail truck, and it was good memories. I never found out why, but her co-workers called her Sister, instead of Audrienne.

CHILDHOOD

For a few months after my mother died, my cousin Boo moved in to take care of us kids. I learned many years later that my mother's former boyfriend was trying to hit on her, so we needed to get away from there. In 1970, Boo took us to our mother's brother Percy's house on Crystal Avenue on the North side of Chicago. He bought the house with the insurance money he received from my mother's death. Georgia Mae was the name of my uncle's wife, and they were recently married. She had a son, Jerome from a previous marriage, who wasn't around much. Georgia Mae was a tall, sturdy woman who never smiled. She always had her mouth twisted up like she had just eaten a lemon. She wasn't ugly, just kind of homely. Uncle Percy had three kids from a previous marriage,

named Percy Jr, Laticia and Sharice.

My Uncle Percy wasn't as tall as his wife, but he was a good looking man with one shiny gold tooth, but I could never figure out why he picked that woman. Georgia Mae beat the shit out of me on a daily basis. She was just a witch, and she beat everyone except my sister. It wasn't easy, going from being happy and living with my mama, to living in a place where someone hated me, and beat me for no reason. I wasn't perfect, but I was just a nappy-headed kid, hanging out with my two siblings and my cousins. I was with my alleged auntie. I didn't call her auntie, because she was nothing but an abuser. I had a bike handed down to me from Johnny, and I wanted the little decorations you can put on the spokes, and one morning, my uncle left me the money to get them.

Georgia Mae decided she would keep the money, but I was a resourceful kid, so I figured out a way to get them. She beat the hell outta me, and I asked her why she was slapping me for something I took care of myself; I didn't steal it or anything. I made a trade with a friend. She said "If I wanted you to have it, I would have given you the money." She was just plain hateful and mean. I didn't even have clean underwear, so I would sneak and wash her son's underwear and cut the legs, so they weren't so tight on me. My brother, sister and I were entitled to Social Security checks, so Percy and Georgia Mae were getting money for keeping us, but they weren't using it to buy us clothes or shoes. The checks would come in little brown envelopes, and I was old enough to understand that there was

money, but I had no shoes. There was a shop nearby on Milwaukee Avenue called Ben's, with shoes for five dollars, and all I wanted was one pair that fit. Percy's daughter would ask my uncle for something, and he would give it to her. The three of us slept on couches or the floor, and we lived that way for a couple of years. Sometimes, we would put two kitchen chairs together to make a bed. There was only one bedroom; it was in the basement, and of course that's where my Percy and Georgia Mae slept. There was an incident when we were in the house and there was a glass of water an arm's length away from Georgia Mae, but she made me get up and walk across the room to hand it to her. After she drank some, she saw something floating in it, she got mad and made me drink the rest of it.

There were so many evil things that lady did to me. In my head, I called her “The Beast.” Once she gave me a whooping just because I had wet hair. I went to the YMCA one day and she had told me not to swim, and she started beating the hell outta me when I got home. I got my ass whooped just for being sweaty from playing with my friends. She would hit me with anything, not just her fists. She really had me so fucked up in the head, that every week I had to see the school psychiatrist instead of going to class. I don’t know why she beat me, maybe because she had just gotten married, and had to take us in, and her husband had his kids, so there were six of us to raise. Georgia Mae had a grandson, Orlandis. After school, I had to change out of my school clothes, and she gave them to her grandson to play in.

That messes a kid up, and she was always verbally and physically beating me up so tough. I still have scars on my legs from whoopings she gave me with a spark plug wire. Georgia is dead and gone, but she left her mark on me to carry on. In our neighborhood in Chicago, there was a chain store called Saxons, and Johnny would steal from there, because that was the only way we could survive with the rules and restrictions. Johnny left the house for good when he was fourteen, after Georgia Mae hit him with a toilet plunger stick. He was sick and tired of the beatings and the rules, but he always snuck back to look out for me. He would knock on the window at night, ask me if she beat me that day, and if I had eaten. He would slip me a few ten dollar bills, or tell me when and where to meet him, and he would buy me clothes and food.

He had to grow up fast, and he is only two years older than me. Sometimes instead of going home from school, I would go to my uncle's work, until he told me "this has got to stop, you can't keep coming to my job." When Georgia Mae died, my uncle came home from the hospital and woke us all up. He called me over to him because I was the youngest. He grabbed me and held me between his knees, and he said Georgia died. These six kids and him, and out of all six of us, not one of us shed a tear. After she died, it wasn't much better, because my uncle started drinking more. We would be in a public park, and he was laid out drunk. I would steal money he kept in a sock so I could eat. Uncle Percy was also very strict. I wasn't allowed to take nothing from the refrigerator - everything had to go through him, but it wasn't that way for

his daughters. In the morning, they would eat sausage and eggs, and I had to eat a bowl of cereal, even though I wanted sausage and eggs, too. When I was a bit older, I found out where my Godmother Lucy lived, and I got myself over to her house, because it was so bad at my uncle's. She had been my mother's best friend, and she called her Carrie, but I knew her as Lucy, and she saved me. She rescued me from that life, not being able to eat when I wanted to, not having shoes that fit, even skipping school because I had no clean clothes-it was really shitty. When I first stayed with Lucy my stomach hurt, because I wasn't used to having enough food. She worked from 2:00 p.m.-10:00 p.m., and one night after I had been with her for two weeks, she came home from work and said "Sit down and tell me what's going on."

I told her what my living conditions with my uncle were, and she told me, “You don't have to go back. Just stay here with me, baby.” We went through a kind of a custody thing, and Percy had to go down to the Social Security office. When they were switching the money to Lucy, the people at the Social Security board wanted us to sign so many papers, and Lucy signed every single one of them, but man, she still put me out of the house when her boyfriend came around. Lucy tried to put me back in school in her neighborhood, but that didn't last long. This one kid thought he was tough because he sucker-punched me, and my mouth swole up. The next time I saw him, I hit him, and got sent to the office. Me and Lucy were sitting with the principal. The principal kicked me out and said “You can leave right now.”

In 1973, Lucy and I and her kids Morris, Cynthia, Curtis and Martez moved from Chicago Heights to Cabrini Green. Everyone had to deal with cockroaches in the projects, and I was always worried they were going to crawl up on me, but living with Lucy was so much better than my uncle, because I was able to go into the refrigerator and eat. She let me do that even before she started getting money for me. After she started getting Social Security checks to care for me, she bought me a car. It was a 1964 Impala, and after getting stopped many times, the police took the car from me, because I didn't have a license. Lucy put me out frequently, and one time was because she didn't want this guy in her house, and I told her "Mama he ain't up here with me, he is here to see your daughter, Cynthia."

She verbally abused me in front of everybody, and told me to get my shit and get out. When she put me out, I would stay with my cousin Bobby, who worked in construction. He would give me forty or fifty bucks, and tell me to stay and shower or whatever. We were so close that I named my youngest son after him. Other times, I would stay with my neighbor Melvin Mumford and his parents. Melvin's father was a preacher, and his mom Gertrude was just an absolute angel. One of the nights that I was hanging out on the street, the chief of the Vice Lords came up and said "Man, what is up with you all?" He and I sat about 15-20 minutes, he handed me \$300, and told me to get something to eat, and keep the rest. After that, we gathered some drugs and such, and from then on if I needed anything, I could go to him.

GANG LIFE/PRISON

The gang was my touchstone now, and whatever they wore, I wore. I was a soldier, we had what we called VPs, and our own private room, and the residents of the building knew not to come into that apartment. I was never a punk, but if the chief said a certain nigger needs to be dead, I took care of it. I didn't have a mother or a father, so they were my family. We were all finding our own way to survive, and none of us had a rock solid foundation. I had a whole lot of fun in that gang, but it cost me so much. The gangbangs messed up my next car, a Cadillac. When I got into a fight, they beat the car with bottles and bricks, so when that happens you get another car the next day with money from the chief. That showed those niggers that they didn't do anything to hurt me.

I went from being a foot soldier to calling the shots. I climbed the ladder as far as I could. Mine was a household name among gang bangers. Pretty Kenny, Kenwood and Captain Save a Lord were all names they called me. The other gangbangers were all about the same age, including the Chief; between 14-19. When Miz Mumford would see me outside the building sleeping standing up, she would tell me to come in and get some food and sleep. Me and Melvin were tight, but Miz Mumford started calling me Demon, instead of Ken, because she knew what I did, like running the streets. I was wrapped up real deep in that shit. Since Melvin's father was a preacher, Mel got put out a lot also, mostly for stealing the church van; sometimes he drove, and sometimes I did.

We were two of the two biggest crooks and sinners in the city of Chicago, but after a while, me and Melvin drifted apart. He started hanging with niggers that were stealing, and I was more into selling drugs, not breaking into houses and shit. Shortly after that, I met Lewis, who became my best friend, and still is to this day. He lived on the ninth floor, and I lived on the tenth. I met my baby mama Cheri there; she lived on the first floor. We met when I was 18 and she was 16. She was in high school, and I fell hard for her. She was real cute, and had a big, wide gap-toothed smile. She was very petite, and fit perfectly under my arm. I became a father for the first time when I was nineteen, and all five of my children are by Cheri. When we found out she was pregnant the first time, I was staying with Lucy and Cheri lived with

her parents. I'm not afraid of many people, but I had to tell her father, and I was scared he might shoot me. We lived together in the projects of Chicago, and had our kids back to back to back, but we never got married. I was a gangbanger, and Cheri dropped out of high school to take care of the kids. I sold weed, and my headquarters were in the Cabrini Green Row Houses. I was content, and I loved Cheri, but I wasn't faithful to her. I did all kinds of wrong things, and I didn't get caught. I knew this hooker named Sheba, and she was out working, and stole five thousand dollars from a customer. She handed the cash to me, and asked me what we should do with it, so we gassed up my Cadillac and went on a road trip. We went to Michigan for a week after I made Chief status.

I'm walking around with thousands of dollars in my pocket. I'm in Chicago one day, the next day I'm in Detroit, taking the whore around. When I first saw Ken Jr. after he was born, I was the proudest man in the world. I had Cheri, a Cadillac and a hooker at the same time. When he was born, we were living in the Disciple building, even though I was a Vice Lord. Things were good for a while, and this isn't an excuse, but we were young, and we had a bunch of kids. Cheri and I started doing cocaine, and it was a big mess. Ken Jr. was eight when Cheri took off with Calvin, our drug dealer, her cousin Janice's man. One night, I came home, and she was gone. She took off to Beloit, Wisconsin, to her sister's place, and left the kids with her parents in Chicago.

She came back four months later to get them. Now, I knew that previously Calvin had beat up Janice's kid, so it wasn't a secret he was a child abuser. The next time I saw my kids, my youngest son Bobby was bruised, and I just knew Calvin had done it. My mind won't even go there as to why anyone would want to punch my fourteen-month-old kid. He hurt my son, so I tried to hurt him. I went to prison for assault and attempted murder, because Calvin, Cheri, and Cheri's mom lied to the police. I was sentenced to nine years, and served five. The first time I was ever locked up, it was for pandering (like pimping) and I did all of my time in Cook County jail. I wasn't scared, because I knew I wouldn't be gone that long. They gave me a year, and I did six months.

I wound up being a Five-star universal elite, which is as high as you can get in the Vice Lords. I spent about 18 total years in prison. The difference in prison between rival gang members is tattoos. I don't have any, but I didn't need them. They all knew who I was, I had a whole nation in prison because of my status, brothers that I didn't even know. When a Chief comes out of his cell, it's like he was the President. Even the Disciples knew me, and nobody messed with me. I was never a little bitty dude, anyway. Prison life could be a real bitch, but I went in there with no fear. You fuck with me, and I'm going to kill you. The street gangs controlled from prison are set up just like a business where Willie Lloyd was the Leader, or "King of Kings", as he called himself. It was like the mafia basically; it's organized crime.

Even the guards catered to us. They started running the chow line at 4:00 a.m., powdered eggs, but if you didn't want to eat, you could stay in your cell. Inmates with family or friends sending money to their commissary accounts didn't usually eat prison food. They ate whatever they ordered, anything they wanted. I had a deep fryer in my cell, and me and my buddies would sit around and cook, eat and talk. Lunch started at 9:30 or 10:00 a.m., and man, you can tell if a guy has been in prison, because they eat so fast. After chow, you could go to the yard and work out, if you wanted to. My longest sentence was nine years, for beating Calvin, who abused Bobby, and I had to do most of it, because I was an asshole. My cellmate kept waking me because I was snoring, which I couldn't do anything about.

I got real sick of it, so one night I got up, took out my little shank and woke **him** up. I asked him if he was ready to die, because if he woke me one more time, that's what was happening. My last arrest and prison sentence, I was standing on the corner near this dude, who was a bona fide crackhead. The police came up in a squad car, asked me where I lived, and I told them. They told me to start walking home, and the cops said that I stole ten bags of heroin from someone, but they planted it. I never sold that shit, only weed. I was sentenced for six years, and did three. I got out early due to prison overcrowding. Nowadays, prisoners are controlled by the prison officers. That's a total change from being incarcerated in the late 80s and early 90s, because back in those days, there was nothing you couldn't do in prison, if you had a

little money. It was just like being on the street. We'd shoot the shit, and sit around all day long picking up drugs from whoever brought them in, giving out orders, depending on what my role was; it wasn't the same every day. We sold all kinds of drugs, usually weed and cocaine to other prisoners. There were even times you could get transferred to another prison, if you wanted. You aren't allowed to do that anymore. Today you are actually locked in, unless you are going to chow, or you're in the yard. They won't let you outside if it's cold, or the guards don't feel like going. Now, inmates are locked up 23 and one. Out of your cell one hour a day, at least that's how the prisons are run in Illinois. That doesn't keep anyone out, though. I've been in some of the roughest prisons in the state of Illinois, and also Wisconsin.

I went to jail in Minnesota for writing bad checks. In prison, if you couldn't pass a basic equivalency test, and score over 6.0, you had to go to school. I only completed grammar school, but I passed the Grand Avenue 8th grade equivalency test to go to high school. I was always able to do enough to get by, and if you put a paper in front of me, it might take me a couple of times, but I'm able to understand it. I could have worked on getting my GED when I was in prison, but I just wanted to hang out, because we were in charge. I actually started to like country music, since there was only one radio station in prison in Wisconsin. I was transferred a few times that wasn't by choice, due to gang affiliations. Once to Joliet, and from there to Stateville Prison. An average day was getting up and doing grunt work that a gang soldier would do.

When I was a poobah (a piece of shit) I walked around with a shank on me to do security. That meant I needed to make sure the guys I was protecting didn't get killed. After a few years, I taught a class at Stateville, and there could be up to 40 prisoners in the class. I would recite something, and they would recite it back. I read from the prison library bible from Isaiah 48:17, Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go.” and other verses. The class was 30 minutes long, and met in the chow hall. When we were in for the night, me and my cellie would take the drugs off our bodies and place them back in their hiding spots. There was a guy from a rival gang who got a broomstick shoved up his ass.

This dude was lying on the floor in a hallway, with an industrial broomstick shoved up his rectum, and the inmates just stepped over him politely and kept walking, because they didn't want to mess with that. When I finally got out of prison, the bus came and got me, and I went back to Lucy's house. I stayed with her until my parole officer said I can't stay there anymore, which is how I got back out on the streets. I don't stay in touch with anyone I met in prison with, nor do I go to the 'hood. I have nothing in common with them anymore, but back then I was stuck. I put a pistol on in the morning like I was putting my drawers on. When I was young and gangbangin', we would shoot people just for wearing the color blue.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of StreetWise is “possessing the skills and attitudes necessary to survive in a difficult or dangerous situation or environment.”

The mission of the StreetWise paper is to empower those facing homelessness or at risk of homelessness by providing immediate economic and employment opportunities so individuals can work. Over 150 active vendors buy and resell StreetWise each month, with over 350 vendors who sell the magazine each year. Vendors purchase the magazine for \$0.35 and resell for \$1.00, keeping the profit and any tips. Selling the magazine is an opportunity to earn an income to meet immediate and basic needs. We offer a "hand up, not a hand out." StreetWise vendors are investing in their future as they seek a pathway out of homelessness and poverty.

I started selling StreetWise magazines in Chicago; I paid thirty-five cents per magazine, and I sold it for a dollar. I had sleeping bags and blankets, and most nights I slept with other homeless people on lower Wacker, and thankfully there were these big vents that threw out heat, so you would try and get a spot by them. Once you get inside a cardboard box and start breathing, your body heat warms you up. People from a nearby church used to come by the underpass and feed us, and once they brought hot chili, but it was hard and crunchy. We were glad to have something to eat, but we were laughing and making fun, since chili isn't supposed to be crunchy. Everything I owned, I carried in a backpack, and I broke into cars to survive. If I needed a shower, I went to the Pacific Garden Mission on South Canal Street.

You could sleep there, but if you spent the night, you had to get up at 5:00 a.m., eat breakfast, and leave. I never really had enough to eat, so now it is hard for me not to overeat. I was depressed, fucked up in the head, with no family that was speaking to me. Washington and Peoria streets used to be called Skid Row; there was Haymarket House for recovering addicts, but what really changed the neighborhood was Oprah Winfrey moving her studio into the area. I got up real early to start selling the magazines, and most people pretended I didn't exist. "Poor ain't contagious," I said to some snooty people. A few gave me some change, but wouldn't look me in the eye. Occasionally, there was the exception, and some had kind words, or offered food. Some days I watched people's dogs while they went in to get their coffee.

They would come around the corner and say “Would you watch Lincoln?” or whatever the dog’s name was, so that’s what I did. I stood on that spot for more than seven years, so I knew just about everybody, and they knew me. I would see former Chicago Bulls basketball players Dennis Rodman and Scottie Pippen at a cigar lounge next to Starbucks. I would also see the radio deejay Michele Michaels There were guys I called the grumpy old men. I called this one guy “trench coat” because he always wore a black trench coat and a fedora. He never spoke to me, but he would smile and keep going. StreetWise wrote a whole article on me in December of 2005. I was on the front page; they did a whole spread on me. Another old guy came to get coffee, and I said “I know you want to get the paper today, because I’m

on the cover.” He just smiled and went inside.

Another time he came out and gave me a \$100 bill without saying a word. I had been seeing him for two or three years, and when I talked to people about him, they said he ran a company. To look at him, you wouldn't think he had a big advertising company. Another guy, Sam, was a pilot and contractor, who was overseeing the construction of Harpo Studios. I guess he flew Oprah Winfrey to Africa a bunch to start that girl's school. I don't know if this is true or not, but the story was that during the construction, something from the side of the building fell and hit his head, and he wasn't able to fly airplanes anymore. Several times, he would give me two tickets to Chicago events, and I sold them, because I'm not a sports person. Maybe once or twice a month, he gave me \$20.

One time it was really nasty outside, and he said, “Hey Ken, here man, go somewhere and get out of this cold,” and gave me a fifty-dollar bill, and then I could leave for the day. After a while, I switched to selling the paper in front of the Starbucks at Franklin and Chicago Avenue, and this one white guy, who walked kind of stooped over, with a full head of white hair stopped to talk to me everyday. He introduced himself as Ed Rosen; he was an artist, living in Glencoe. (A small, affluent suburb 18 miles north of Chicago.) He had a studio downtown, where he painted. He would give me a \$2 bill, but he wouldn’t take the paper, which was a blessing. A month or so later, he asked me if I wanted to help him out with an art show. He said he had sciatica, and he couldn’t do the set up and takedown anymore, and his sons were busy.

By that time, I was renting a room at \$125.00 per week. I had access to a kitchen and the bathroom. If I was helping Ed, and not selling the papers, I might not have enough money leftover for food. Ed said, "I'll make sure you have enough money for your room, and have some extra in your pocket." After that first time, he would pick me up in the city, and allow me to drive his car while he was doing business with customers at the art fairs. StreetWise started charging me \$.90 an issue, and I wasn't making much, and I was doing a lot of work for Ed. At one point, Ed said "I'm telling you, kid, you're bigger than this. You don't need to stand on the street and sell the paper anymore. Now Ed was cool and all, but after several months, he invited me to his house, and I figured that's why he had been so nice, he was building up to

something that I didn't care for. He saw my hesitation and smiled. He said, "My wife and my grown kids would like to meet you, and have you come to our house for dinner." Well, to say it was a relief that he wasn't some kind of pervert would be an understatement. I thought I was a pretty good judge of character, and I didn't like to be proven wrong. When I met Ed's wife, Elise, and their three grown children Deborah, Scott and Jaime, they were so welcoming. They immediately "adopted" me into their family, in fact my name for Elise is "Mamalise." Calling someone Mama for black people is a big deal. The first time I met Elise, she was sitting on a couch in a little sitting room off their kitchen doing crochet. She was wearing a string of pearls and small diamond earrings; real classy. She had short gray hair, and

glasses shaped like Harry Potter's. Their oldest son, Scott, didn't warm up to me right away, but when I was around, it freed him up to attend to his business, and skip the work at the art shows. I'm very close with all three now, but at first I felt like I was some kind of project. I had a run-in at one of the shows with a guy who said I ran over his foot with Ed's car. I wanted to beat his ass for making that up. He tried to sue us, and every year he tried again. Ed hired a lawyer, who told me not to worry, the guy never tells the same story twice. Jaime, Ed and Elise's younger son, would often do the art show setup and takedown. One day, he asked me to take a ride with him, and he really opened up to me, and from that day on, we were cool. Ed and Elise would invite me to family functions, and they taught me to live life on life's

terms, and have respect for myself. Ed turned everything around with his generosity, he showed me life lessons, he didn't sugarcoat shit, and I learned so much. You never hear me talk about anyone being close to me as a father figure except Ed. He was the first and the only man to say I love you. In my whole life, there was never anyone I would consider calling Pops or Dad. I learned so much from him, and I just received genuine love. At first it shook me, and I kind of shied away and I didn't know how to take it. He told me he wouldn't say it anymore if it bothered me, so I explained that he was the first one to say it to me, and it just scared me. I never lived full-time with Ed and Elise, but I stayed there as long as a few weeks at a time. My grandson came to the house in Lake Forest one day, and he sat in their rocking chair,

and after that he wanted one, so Mamalise bought him one, she is so cool. Because of their generosity, I even bought a beat up old van. They gave me a house key, but I never took advantage. One time, I must have been sleeping real good in my van in their driveway, and Mamalise came out in her robe, and told me never to do that again, and that I should have come into the house. Mamalise always wanted to make sure that I was treated fairly. She always made sure that I was comfortable and taken care of, and had enough money to get gas. When she got sick, I stayed with her and took care of her. I gave her medication, made sure she walked around, and took her to doctor appointments. We had great one-on-ones, and she doesn't pull any punches with me. She worries about **my** health all the time, and

about the kinds of food I eat. After I got out of prison for the last time, I still hadn't spoken to my kids, and Elise insisted that I reunite with them. My oldest is Ken Jr., 38. He has 13 kids, and a girlfriend named Amanda. He used to take me out to breakfast five days out of seven; that was our thing. He lets me order what I want, and he isn't strict like the girls, who say, "No matter what he says, don't let him get anything fried." Cantrell is Ken Jr's. oldest. I found out about Cantrell's girl having a baby, and they told me she is giving the baby the last name Lamb, so I'm happy about that. Dyshawn is 37, and has nine kids. Audrienne, 35, has four kids. Her two youngest, China and Mya, are like twins. Cheryl (We call her Woo) is 33, and is married to Jacob, who is white. Jacob makes a good living and he's good to Cheryl.

When she was a baby, I called her my Woogie Woogie Woo. Their kids are Buster and Cherish. Bobby is 32 and has four kids. Between him and Donta, I got two of the best son-in-laws. Donta (pronounced Don-tay) and I have a bond because we were under the same gang umbrella in Chicago. Jacob is so cool, and we are close because I lived with them for a short time. Jacob is Bobby's (my youngest) nephew, and Woo only met him through her brother because he was raised by a white woman named Gail, instead of his mother, my ex. Cheryl used to make me feel bad that I wasn't around when she was growing up, and finally told her she wasn't going to make me feel bad about that anymore, and that her mother ran off and took you away from me. Audrienne has three daughters and a son. She works for the school board, and my

granddaughter Arionna at 16 already met her high school requirements, so she is graduating with the seniors this summer. They live in Beloit, and I moved there to be close to all five, and I talk to them all the time. Arionna works at Birdseye and gets off work at seven in the morning. She'll take me to breakfast sometimes, and we run around all morning. When my kids call me and say, "Hey Pops, I need you to do something," if I can do it, I will. When we first got to know each other after I got out of prison, they called me Sugar Bear, but as we became closer, they started calling me Pops. Names are a big thing with us black people. If you call me Kenwood, I know you know me from the streets. If we're close, you call me Kenny. That's when you know you got the seal of approval. If you call me Kenwood, I'll talk to you about it

once, and if you call me that again, I won't answer. You are going to call me what my mama called me. Lewis and Glen are the only close friends who call me Kenwood. They have known me since I was 13, so they can call me whatever they want. We all have street names: Bobby's is Cadillac, Dyshawn's name is Dirt. The name Pretty Kenny came from my uncle who was called Pretty Tony, and when he died, I just took it over. Sometimes my daughter Audrienne (named after my mama) thinks she's my mother, but she is just like me, stubborn, and she looks out for my health. She graduated from Ora High School in Chicago. I took Donta (Audrienne's boyfriend) with me the last time I went to see friends in Chicago. We saw this policeman who was so fat, his gun was down by his thigh. We were cracking up, because if a

thief were running away, he wouldn't be able to chase him. When I hang out with my kids, or their partners, we are always laughing and giggling. Some lady went into a seizure, and went down. I sent Donta to get help, and I imagine the lady was shocked when she came out of the seizure and saw a big ole black dude standing over her. When me and the kids, the boyfriends, husbands and girlfriends get together it's like the Rainbow Coalition; blacks and whites and Puerto Ricans. I have the most amazing kids in the world. My daughters are like pit bulls; they do not let anyone talk shit about their brothers or their daddy. I have 32 grandbabies. I have a grandchild for every day of the month, and more! I used to live with Audrienne and her kids in Beloit; now I have my own place.

I've learned to live the life I'm living now, and never bite the hand that feeds you. There is something you should know about me, I don't get in nobody's business. I'm telling you upfront, I will always say "I don't know anything about it," if someone asks me questions about your business. I was able to get Social Security benefits due to my mental illness of hearing voices and being real gloomy. I was real close to suicide, and when I had an appointment, this lady she said I was eligible for a program if I saw the psychiatrist. She took me under her wing, and helped me do the paperwork. Ken Jr. and Audrienne were giving me money each month, and all of my kids offered to give me money regularly, but now they don't have to. My kids make sure I have everything I need. In the summer, I open a sno-cone stand to make extra

money. I just have to decide if I'm going to sell them in Chicago or Wisconsin. In Chicago, I pay \$75 for a license, and in Beloit, Audrienne has a nice big house and I can sell them right on her street. Audrienne has every ailment I have ever had, so when she was tested for diabetes, she told them she couldn't have it because her daddy doesn't have it. She is a Daddy's girl; anything happens and she calls me. Woo will call her mama. When she and I go to Burger King, we get an extra sandwich from the dollar menu for this homeless guy. I offered to have him come to my house to shower and I said, "I ain't no better than you, man. I can't give you nowhere to live, but I can give you a place for the night." He always said no, which I understand, because I was the same way when I was on the streets.

The other day, there was a guy hitchhiking, and I felt so bad for not picking him up and all I could think about the whole ride was that I didn't, but you just can't take that chance anymore. My kids and my grandbabies are my focus now, and I'm so grateful to have them in my life. Before I went to prison, I wasn't a fucked-up dad. Every Sunday I took my kids somewhere like Lincoln Park, or out for chicken. They knew who their daddy was, and that he wasn't no dog. At an amusement park, my kids wanted to go on every ride! "Y'all gonna do nothin I can't do," I told them, so I went on every ride with them. Pictures they take while you're on a ride came out with my face looking terrified, but it was proof I did some fun things with my babies. First time I went to Outback steakhouse I went with my kids, my two sons took me, my two

oldest. Ken Jr. and I sat down at the table, and we had a ball, laughing and laughing. There was another time Ken Jr. got so angry because I helped his baby mama move. He said I was getting in his business. I said “You don’t understand; I did it for the kids, and it was the right thing to do.” My kids helped me move into my own place. Courtney is one of Ken Jr.’s exes. He has kids with her, and I keep in touch with her because I love her. Her oldest daughter is not my son’s, but we consider her Ken Jr.’s daughter too, and she gets the same treatment as everybody else. My sister Daretta lives in Calumet City, Indiana, way down south. We went years without talking, because she made me mad. When I was brought up with Lucy, if I wanted to go to someone’s house, I’d just go. Daretta told me I can’t just stop by, I need to call

first, and that made me real angry, because I'm not going to make an appointment with my own sister! Mamalise explained that was the right thing to do.

Elise on Ed's past

Ed's parents died when he was 24 years-old. They passed six weeks apart, and he was left on his own. His uncle took him out of the military service because his mother had died, and his father was dying. He was an only child, and his mother was sick most of his life. She was a pill addict after she had a very serious surgery. His father was a pharmacist, and she would go at night and take pills, so he had to quit being a pharmacist. There was a housekeeper taking care of Ed, then he was moved to another town with his aunt, who was not wonderful to him. He took the train to school every day. They moved to Muncie, Indiana, and Ed's aunt opened a liquor store for Ed's father, and he didn't want that kind of life, but he had no choice.

Ed had a screwed up upbringing also, which is what drew him to Kenny. Ed would never speak about his childhood to his children or anybody. He would never go for therapy, and he needed it desperately.



Street Scene

This is Job Kenneth Lamb changed his life through selling StreetWise on the same block where he had been chronically homeless. He lived under the crawl space behind a restaurant at Franklin and Superior Streets and now sells the paper at the Chicago Avenue and Franklin Street Starbucks, where he said customers treat him li family. (Susanne Hurrey photo)

StreetWise article 2005



On any given night, approximately 80 homeless people sleep on Lower Wacker Drive in Chicago. Picture credit Chicago Tribune



Beautiful sister, Daretta



Brother Johnny with Audrienne



Mama Lucy



Ken and Family



Me and Miss Marla



Youngest daughter Cheryl (Woo)



DyShawn "Dirt" and me



Striking a pose



Me and Drienne



Happy Granddaddy



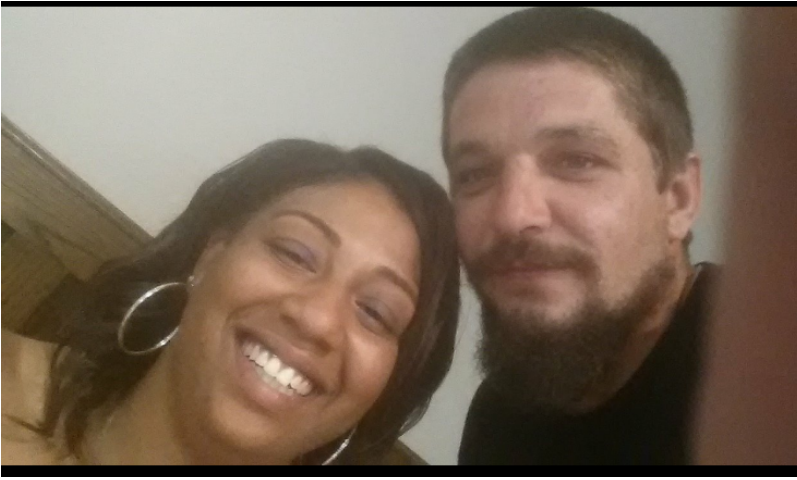
Grandbabies China, Mya and Bobby Jr.



Glen



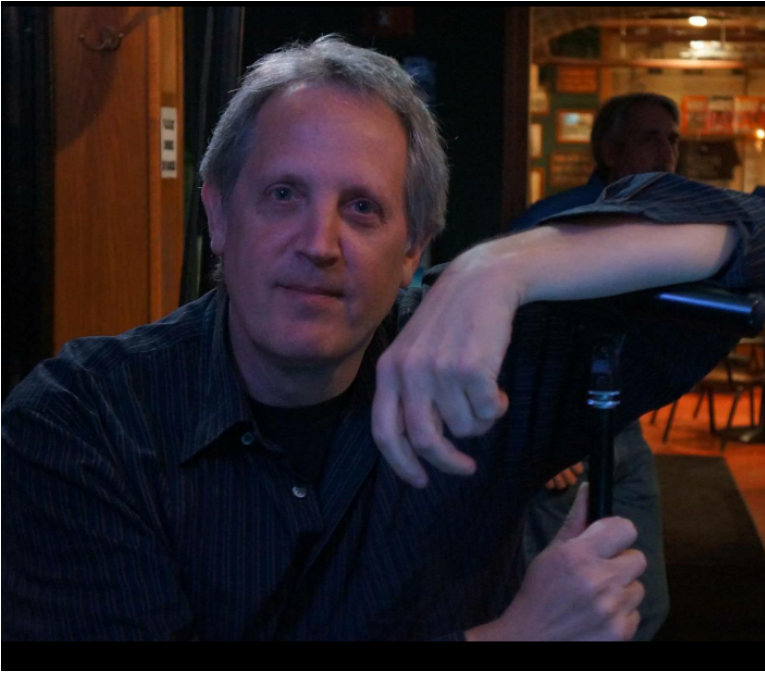
Lewis



Woo and Jacob



Brother Jaime



Brother Scott



Sister Deborah



Audrienne and Cheri



Audrienne and family



Cheri with Bobby, DyShawn and Ken Jr.



Mamalise



Ed's 80th birthday celebration

After prison, living with Lucy could be tough. When I was around people at holidays or family get-togethers, Lucy would order me around and never let me sit and relax like everyone else, even during the holidays. It got so bad, I wouldn't be there for family functions, and she said "Are you too good to come?" I told her it was just that she was always putting me to work. She is now suffering from dementia, and is quite frail. She is 73 and doesn't remember shit. She doesn't even talk anymore, and she has to wear diapers. Her son, Martez, now owns her house in Chicago, so he sometimes asks me to stop by and check on the house once in a while because I have the key. Martez wants Curtis and me to take care of mama Lucy for two weeks, while he goes out of town.

Curtis will put her in bed, and I'll get her up, feed her breakfast and take care of her while Curtis is at work. They asked me, not *told* me so it made all the difference. He asked me to stay with her, and I said I would, but I needed gas money. I stayed with her Friday through Sunday, when Martez's plane was supposed to come in, but he didn't show up until Monday night, and he never gave me any money. I didn't need that shit in my life, that aggravation. Why am I crying about this lady and her family? I did way above the call of duty compared to what she did for me. My real mama is dead. I took care of Lucy for three years, and she has her biological kids. I'm done changing her Pampers. I don't want to do it anymore, and I'm not going to feel bad about it. I'm done wiping her ass.

Her daughter Cynthia lives around the block from her, but she doesn't see her. She won't give her the time of day, due to the way her mother treated her growing up. Lucy could be at her door for hours, and Cynthia wouldn't let her in. When she was young, Lucy would call her a dirty bitch. Cynthia became a probation officer, and one time she was mad at me at a barbecue because she gave me money for something, and I was supposed to give her change back, and I didn't have it right then, so she went off about it. I said this isn't the place for this. If I'm mad at somebody, I don't always know how to calmly say things, so I just won't answer, because I don't want to say something I'll regret. I can't afford to lose anyone right now, because life is too good. I know my brother is going to go soon. Johnny is 58 now, and he has cirrhosis of the liver

and a bad kidney. They won't put him on the transplant list because he smokes weed. He is still my big brother, and I love him. I say he is my big brother **and** my little brother because he is smaller than me. People around me have said that my mother had an affair on my father, and that I had a different father. The only reason that I even entertained the thought of that being true is that my brother and my sister are tiny and I'm big. I was very bitter towards Daretta for years, because she didn't reach out to me, so when I was in jail for the last time, I wrote her and she didn't write back, so then I sent her another angry-ass letter saying you all couldn't take the fucking time or sympathy to write me back, and I finally got a response from that one. She sent me \$35, and a note that said, "Do it for you." After I was out of prison, and I

saw her, I told her that I know I was probably a shitty little brother, and I'm sorry for so many years of being angry, so many years of thinking fuck you, I don't have a sister. She said she was sorry too, you weren't a shitty brother, you just didn't know any better. She didn't know what to do, because she was just a kid herself. She was glad that Lucy took me in, because at least she always knew where I was. Daretta was so square and scared she always did things by the book, God Bless Her. I loved her for that, and I still do. She worked for 38 years for the Westside VA, and then she retired. She worked at McDonald's for a time, and she gave me so much of that food that I don't even want to see the golden arches.

FRIENDS AND GIRLFRIENDS

I don't have a lot of female friends, but Annette and I have 35 years of history. If you're looking for me, and you can't find me, it's a good bet Annette will know where I am. Even if my kids don't know where I am, she probably will. She sent me to jail once, because she falsely claimed I pulled a knife on her, and had me locked up for 14 days. She is cool until you cross her, so I don't let her get that close to me anymore. I met this dude Big Ron about nine years ago, and we became good friends. He's big, like 500, 600 pounds. One morning we went to breakfast, and it was the lousiest service in the world. Ron said "Man I ain't payin' for this shit, Wood." I say "Ron, what you gonna do?"

He got his fat ass up, and was gone out the door before I could even get the words out. I got up also and went to the car, and there was so much snow and ice I slid under the car, and fucked up both my shins. That fat motherfucker moved so fast I couldn't believe it. I rather would have paid the goddamn money than fuck up my legs, but people be surprised how cool Big Ron is. He talks shit, but he is a good individual. Melvin (my friend from Cabrini Green)s brother Blue died in April of 2017, and I went to the funeral. Miss Mumford was 83 and she had eleven kids. She had to bury seven of them. Melvin introduced me to his wife, and I said "I'm going to show you how close me and Melvin are, whatever you do for him, you gotta do for me." She laughed, but when she made a plate for him, I said, "where is my plate?"

And you know what? She brought me one. A lot of my friends from the projects were there, and my ex Cheri was there. We get along fine now, even though I went to prison for years because of her lie. Like my friend Glen says, kill her with kindness, because she is the one who will have to answer to God. I fixed me a plate of fried chicken, so she whipped out her phone, took pictures and said “I’m going to send this to Audrienne”, so I went back and got me a piece of barbecue chicken. Cheri’s sister Lori walked up and asked me if I was home to Beloit after the funeral. I said I was going to Lake Forest, and Cheri told Lori that I had a real nice white family in Lake Forest, so Lori thought Elise was my girlfriend, and we strung her along for a while!

My best friend Lewis, and his wife Glen are like parents to me, but Lewis isn't old enough to be my father, and Glen isn't old enough to be my mother. They have always treated me like I was one of their kids. If they went anywhere, they'd say, "Come on, you wanna go?" I'd say, "I ain't got no money." They'd say, "We didn't ask you about no money." They've always made sure I had a place to stay, and they consider me family. They got me the furniture that's in my little place! There was a time when Lewis and Glen had a fight, and she came after him with a gun, but they have calmed down over the years. They're both retired now. Sometimes I'll call and ask if I can spend the night, and Glen might say, "No, we getting down tonight." About 90% of the time they say yes, and I consider their house a safe haven.

They don't drink, they don't smoke, they don't do shit. We used to smoke together, but Lewis had a heart attack, so they don't do that no more. I was starting to see a woman I met named Sandy in Kenosha with Jaime when we were helping his daughter Kelsey move. Sandy has two kids; one who is graduating high school, and Tyrone, who is twenty-something. Such respectful kids; Sandy acted crazy, but I really liked her. She started talking about moving to Texas, so I backed off because I didn't want to get too involved and get hurt. She made a comment that she is looking for someone to help her out a little, and I told her I'm never going to be that guy. There are women who have always had men take care of them, so they don't want to be with someone that can't. Even if I had money, I would give it to my kids or

grandkids, not to a woman. In a relationship, the woman should have a little money of her own, and the man should have that too. I don't understand relationships where the man just turns over his paycheck. It's cool for them, but not me. Sandy and I had plans to spend a weekend together, and we drove to Chicago to Dave and Buster's for a birthday party for her cousin. On Sunday we were supposed to go to my buddy's house for a party, but her daughter mysteriously got sick when we were doing something for me. My friend told her "Sounds like now that it's Kenny's turn, you don't want any part of it. Why don't you get on the bus home?" Sandy said "I ain't taking no bus home", so I ended up driving her home to Kenosha, and that was the end of that. She never called after that, so I guess she was just using me.

THE WORST NEWS EVER

Ed died of a stroke in 2012, and I was as grief-stricken as if he were my own father, which in many ways he was. We had a very special bond, and talked about everything. I sometimes wonder how my life might have turned out different if my mama hadn't died, but I guess life happens the way it is supposed to, and I wouldn't have met the Rosens, with this loud, crazy, extended family. I'm living my life with my kids and my grandbabies, and my only regret is that my mama didn't get to meet these fine kids. She would have adored them.

I figure I have to just be content with what is, and enjoy the life I have and I'll see her when I get to heaven. I wish I'd have met Ed and Mamalise after Mama died, when I was nine. No telling what might have happened, having someone who really cared and who would take me under their wings. I could have finished college. Shit, I could have been Barack Obama!

Life isn't fair, but it's good. If I can help even one person by sharing my experiences in gang life, it's worth it. I'm a better person now, and it's amazing that I lived through some of these experiences.

Ed was one of the few people that interacted with me everyday until he died. He used to tell me to play fair.

Ed once said "Hang with me, and I'll make sure you're alright."

And he did.

Family Testimonials

Elise

The first time I heard about Kenny was when Ed mentioned this homeless man that was selling newspapers at Starbucks at Franklin and Chicago where he went every morning. It was really cold outside, and I asked if he had warm clothes, and Ed said he didn't have a warm coat. I sent Ed downtown the next day with a large down coat, boots with felt liners, a warm hat, gloves and a scarf. By the time I met Kenny, Ed had given him several odd jobs, so he wasn't living on the streets; he had a room somewhere. He just appeared in our lives, and he became part of our family. I insisted that he reach out to his own family, especially his sister. They hadn't

seen each other for a long time because he liked to drop in on people and his sister didn't like that, she wanted him to call first. He has since learned to call, but it was something that he had to learn. Kenny would stay with us in our Glencoe home for the weekend if Ed had an art show. When I met Kenny, I thought he was nice and very respectful. I was accustomed to strangers coming into our house because Ed always had people, some students or models or others, coming in and out of our house. Kenny told me that he had been in prison, but I didn't care. As time went by, I heard his story about prison, and living on the streets. A few times, he borrowed my car and didn't come back for a few days. I think he spent a night in jail after getting in some trouble with some woman Annette. She called me, and told me where my car was; my sons Jaime and Scott drove

down there, she gave them the keys and they brought it home. Another time, Kenny was with another woman, and she stole the charge card I had given to him for gas; she charged a few thousand dollars on my card. I told Kenny that is not the proper way to act. If I lend you my car, I expect you to bring it back, not cruise around the 'hood in my convertible with the top down, like a big shot. He owned up to it right away, but I wasn't too angry because nobody had ever really taught him anything. At his uncle's house, when anything went wrong it was Kenny's fault, not any of the other five kids, especially not Georgia Mae's kids. They weren't nice to him, and his uncle was an alcoholic, and he just wanted the money from the state. Kenny told me he stopped going to school because he had no clean clothes or underwear, and when he ran away to Lucy's, that is when the gangs

got a hold of him. When we met, he didn't have front teeth, so he covered his mouth when he spoke. It wasn't a hardship for us to get his front teeth taken care of. Ed taught him to eat more than just fast food, and I made him eat vegetables. It was important to me that he reconnect with his family, if he was going to be a part of ours. We helped him get his first apartment where he could cook for himself. We bought vegetables, salad in a bag and asparagus - he was so proud. His friends told him at the beginning we were making him white. He would never say please or thank you, and he never used a fork or knife. He still eats like he ate in prison. They only gave him so many minutes to eat, and when the time was up that was that, whether you were finished or not. Maybe we helped him, but he did so much for us as well.

I don't know what I would do without him. He changed the brakes on my car, and he can fix anything. He shared the story of Cheri's boyfriend beating 14 month-old Bobby; Kenny was working for Cheri's stepfather doing roofing, and after that incident, and Ken going to prison, the older kids got taken away temporarily. Bobby was given to a foster family, and lived with a white family until he was 18. We planned to have a big party in 2010 to celebrate Kenny's 50th birthday, but I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and he didn't want the party anymore, so we canceled it. He was an excellent caregiver to me. He was at the hospital when I had surgery, and when I came home he stayed and helped at our house in Lake Forest. He took me to the bathroom, doctor appointments, chemo and radiation. He made me walk around the cul-de-sac at the end of our block twice a

day, and I never would have recovered as quickly, if it weren't for him. When you have cancer, it is very hard on the family to watch you go through that.

Kenny took the burden off Ed, which was good, so he could continue to work, and to relieve some of the load off our kids. Deborah came in from California and took care of the four drains that had to be changed three times a day. Kenny liked being here, he wasn't working, he had a bed to sleep in, and food on the table. I made a full recovery, and life went back to normal until Ed had a stroke. He was with our oldest son Scott, and he fell in a public bathroom. Ken's best friend Lewis and his wife Glen came to the hospital. It happened on a Thursday, and we were going to take him off the breathing machine on Saturday. Lewis and Kenny insisted he was alive, and we couldn't take him off the machine because they didn't understand that he

was brain dead. If it were up to them, he would still be laying there today! Kenny was devastated. He is family; he is my son. He helped us move from Glencoe to Lake Forest in February 2009, and we couldn't have done it without him. I would like for him to get involved with counseling kids on avoiding drugs and staying in school. I'm sure any place would be thrilled for him to give his time. I know very few Hebrew words, but "mitzvah" comes to mind. The definition of the word is good deed. I remember being in New York in a button store as a customer, and I don't know what it was but there was a lady in the store and she was looking for something and I happened to have it at home, so I mailed it to her. It turns out she was a renowned psychiatrist in New York, living on Fifth avenue, and she sent me a letter about how taken she was that a stranger overheard

her, and took the trouble to send her a button, and that she in turn has always tried to pay it forward. Ed was the first man to tell him that he loves him, and Kenny has never forgotten that. He taught Kenny what love is.

Deborah

Deborah Rosen, the eldest child, and only daughter of Ed and Elise Rosen, lived for many years in San Francisco, where she bought and sold high-tech equipment. She moved back to Illinois when Elise was ill. She is single and loves spending time with close friends. She runs a small business as a professional organizer and pet sitter. “I heard about Kenny from my dad while I was still in California, before I actually met him. My dad told me about him, and how he came out to the house, and started working for dad setting up art shows. When I came home for the holidays, I met him and we hit it off. I was never concerned about his past; I was only concerned about him in the present.”

Scott

Scott runs a company called Human Air Quality, Inc., which wholesales air conditioning supplies and parts from Highland Park, a suburb north of Chicago. Scott is also an actor, and serves on the board of Center Stage in Lake Forest. He has never married, but is very involved with his goddaughter Sara, and his nieces and nephew. “I met Kenny when we were setting up for the Gold Coast art show. I don't remember my first impression, it was so long ago, but I only judge a person on his disposition. I wasn't concerned about his past, because I didn't know his past at the time. I'm cautious by nature. But that said, I deal with Kenny about present actions, not past. Kenny took the pressure off of me by helping my father at the art shows. Before Kenny, it was up to me to sit with

Dad all weekend long until Jaime got there with his family. The other help that Dad arranged never came through, so it was up to me to bail him out. Once Kenny learned how to keep his time commitments, I could relax a little about trying to handle the art shows and my own business. Kenny is family. We chose to make him family; he's earned that right. He is a brother to me, and I know he cares about me and has my back. As for advice, I'd tell him if a mistake is made, learn from it and move forward.”

Jaime

“I was about 46 when I met Kenny. My dad told me that he was bringing him home for the weekend, and that he had a hard life. The first time I met Kenny was at the Gold Coast art fair, and I immediately bonded with him. We didn’t become best friends, but having someone help you set up and break down art shows is always a good thing. We were in the trenches together. He started helping at most of the art shows, so it became comfortable for me. I did not experience him as a threat for my father’s attention or affection in any way. It wasn’t like having another brother right away; that took some time. I was married to my second wife Joyce at that time, and we were living in Highland Park, and trying to start a family.

I have two daughters, Kelsey, 30, and Sydney, 26, both from my first marriage. Other than the art shows, I didn't see Kenny that often. That changed once my parents started inviting him to come to the house for weekends to help with projects around the house. The more he would come by, the better I got to know him. I don't recall when the transition took place from casual acquaintance to brother, from just a guy who helped my parents to the guy who became protective of my father and called my mother Mamalise, but it was comfortable and not threatening. That turning point is when I knew Kenny would be with us until death do us part - he is family. I trust Kenny more than I do anyone on this earth. I knew about his past right away, partially from Kenny and my dad. I wasn't bothered by it at all."

Marla, author and friend

I was born in New Rochelle, New York in November of 1963, one week after JFK was assassinated. My Dad's parents lived on Lake Shore Drive in Chicago, so we moved to Illinois from New York in 1966. My Dad got a job as Executive Vice President of the loan department at Exchange National Bank. Through work, he was introduced to Eddie and Carol Hadesman. Carol is Elise Rosen's cousin, and both families lived in the small town of Glencoe, just north of Downtown Chicago. The Rosens and the Jacobsons became very close. At a party, I was introduced to Kenny as their son, so obviously, I had questions, and heard the story of how Ed and Elise changed

Kenny's life. From then until now, my friendship with Kenny has blossomed, and I consider him one of my closest friends. Kenny stands 5'9" tall at 290 pounds with skin the color of fine polished mahogany. He has a beautiful smile, a contagious laugh, and a twinkle in his eyes. Kenny's single most endearing quality is his loyalty to family and friends. He calls me his "10" or "my dime." He says "I'll kill a brick and drown a cup of water for you, the sky's the limit." He has a saying: "If I want something, and it won't hurt anyone: Mother had it, Mother love it, Mother fuck it." He recorded a personalized ringtone for his cell, and there is funky music and he says, "Pretty Kenny answer the telephone, someone wants to talk to you!" In January of 2017, I moved in with Elise, and was fortunate enough to receive a kidney

transplant in March. Kenny left his home in Beloit, and came to stay with us to nurse me back to health, and drive the 52 miles round-trip twice weekly to the Loyola post-surgical Renal Transplant clinic. He gently but firmly forced me to drink water, walk and eat, three things I didn't want to do the first week at home post transplant. In fact, at one point, tears welled up and I peered at him with my most pathetic puppy dog face, and said "You know, I USED to like you." He laughed, his wonderful deep belly laugh, and said "Come on, my dime. I'm going to lay hands on you and you're going to be just fine." Kenny and I enjoy going to stores as a "couple" because we like to shock conservative Lake Forest residents to see a petite white woman with a large black man.

Kenny helped me move twice, and helped my middle daughter, Melissa move to a house in Charleston, IL. At the last minute, our mover fell through, and I called Kenny in a panic at 11:00 p.m., and he came to our house, loaded up his van and moved her with no questions asked. If I need him anytime of day or night, he is there for me. We were driving home from Loyola Hospital, and Kenny saw a new BMW, and he said when we are rich from the book, you and I are going to get twin cars just like that, and mine will have a horn that plays “Oh, Susanna.” Going to Mount Rushmore is on his bucket list, also seeing the ball drop in New York City on New Year's Eve. Kenny has said many times “I really want to meet Steve Harvey. You know, he was homeless at one time, and now look at him!”

Epilogue

Life goes on, and since this project was started, there has been death, but also miraculous life.

Lucy, Mamalise, my brother Johnny and Jaime's daughter Kelsey have all passed away, but they are always in my heart.

Marilyn D. Jacobson PhD passed away in March of 2020.

My son, Miracle Bruce Lamb was born in 2021.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was only made possible due to Kenny Lamb, who has lived a fascinating life. I'm honored that he entrusted me with his story, and this has been a true labor of love. I want to thank Jaime Rosen for his idea to take Kenny's inspiring story, and put it down on paper. I have so much love and gratitude for my late parents, Mark N. Jacobson and Marilyn D. Jacobson PhD because they made me believe I could do anything. Special thanks to Ed and Elise Rosen for their warm, open hearts, generosity and love. Thanks to my Uncle Lester Jacobson for his initial comments and editing suggestions. I'm incredibly grateful to the family of my kidney donor; I wouldn't be here if it weren't for their loss. Many thanks to Jan Holtrop, author of "Wall of Fire," my neighbor and friend.

I'm blessed to have you in my life, and I'm so honored by your glowing foreword. I'm blessed by, and grateful to my friends for their questions, corrections, faith in me, endless love, support and assistance: Ramona, Maria, Michael, Anne, Alyne, Eden and Liese.

Last, but absolutely **not** least, thank you to my daughters, Holly, Melissa and Hannah; you are my world! The bonus of four grandchildren (AJ, Ryan, Wynn and Cayson) and two granddogs are just icing on the cake.

BACK COVER

The Art of Caring is a memoir about grief, loneliness, hunger and fear. It's a story of survival and violence; of homelessness and perseverance. Mainly, it's a story about love and redemption, transforming a life, and practicing the golden rule of paying it forward.

A portion of any profits will be donated to:

Pacific Garden Mission

<https://www.pgm.org>

SocialWorks (Chance the Rapper charity)

<https://socialworkschi.org>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marla Jacobson was born in New Rochelle, New York. She attended Roosevelt University, majoring in journalism. Her first eBook was a travel guide, titled “Two Months in Central America” about the wonders of Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Panama. She was editor for the book, “Turning the Pyramid Upside Down; A New Leadership Model” by Marilyn D. Jacobson, PhD, published in January 2013. She has three daughters, three grandsons, a granddaughter, and two granddogs.

