

THEY CALL ME

A Dreamer

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Chardo Richardson

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Contents

Acknowledgments.....	11
Prologue	13
“Peace” of Cake.....	15
Simply Believe	17
Student of Life	19
Inspiration	22
Forgiveness.....	25
Love	28
No Fear.....	30
Enough.....	33
Fun Questions to Ask Yourself	36
Romantic Relationships	38
Rejection	39
My Favorite Name is Daddy	43
The Other Crayon.....	46
Loyalty	49
Your Goals	51
Motivation.....	53
Final Thoughts	59
Author Bio.....	61
Index	63

For Isabella

*If you have never been told how special you truly
are, let me be the first to say you are amazing and
I believe in you; you add to this beautiful collage
we call life.*

Acknowledgments

I would argue that this portion of this book, and any book for that matter, is the most important. Remaining thankful for the small things in life to the big things is the essence of true happiness. I am so thankful to God for seeing me through all the hardest times in my life and continuing to give me courage when I can't find it within myself. The words in these pages are a product of a path that God chose for me to walk, and for that, I am eternally thankful.

To my family and friends that made an impact on me and shaped my life, thank you for opening your hearts and your homes to me, particularly my grandmother.

“Even in your darkest hours there is always something to be thankful for. You just may have to dig a little deeper, but it's there.”

Prologue

Like our late moral leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I also have a dream. My dream is not so different from King's. I like many others in this world would love nothing more than peace—peace from war, conflict, genocide, racism, injustice, and tyranny. Our world seems to be eating itself alive, and I have trouble understanding why. We are all the same. We are breathing the same air, walking on the same ground, and feeling the same sun. When I look up at the night sky and count the stars I see, I know there is a boy in Guatemala looking at and counting the same exact stars.

Inside this book you are going to find brief yet entertaining chapters about life. These chapters are written from my heart as a person who has overcome many obstacles and trials, yet still has the ability to stand firm and smile at all of humanity and nature's beauty. My hope is that you will interact with this book, ask and answer the questions provided, and at the very least take one positive thing or idea from it.

"Peace" of Cake

I am but a man in search of a dream of peace.

I am writing to you with one goal in mind: PEACE. When I say the word "peace," I mean peace between neighbors, peace within the family, peace between religions, peace among states and provinces, and peace among other countries. No, I do not mean "hippie" peace; I mean genuine peace where we come together as a world community and decide to end the bloodshed, hatred, envy, and jealousy between human beings. We have hurt each other long enough, and it is now time we love one another as brothers and sisters.

It is far time we begin to look at ourselves in the mirror and examine what we are doing to this world and one another. I have been to many places and sat at the steps of many elders and children alike. The one true thing they all have in common is love. Love has the power to change all circumstances once we stop hiding it from each other. When a child is born all the way through adolescence, they are seeking love. They want their parents, peers, and teachers to simply love them and approve who they are more than anything else. As they mature, distractions come into play, which turn this genuine love into hatred for a

particular group, peoples, culture, religion, etc. This then creates what we have today: war, judgment, and hostility. I'm here to tell you that all the animosities you may hold are pointless. They do nothing more than tear you further away from your family, your country, and most of all, the world.

The elders I have had the pleasure of speaking to all want to return to that place of love, but the fear that we have allowed to rule us for most of our lives has now become a real and tangible thing. Though we might want to ask the young man in line at the grocery store for help getting to our car, we fear he will take advantage of us in some way. We might want to have someone keep an eye on our things while we run to the bathroom, but fear that they will steal from us purely based on their attire.

I am not naive to the fact that some individuals have ill intentions. Some males and females alike are exactly what you think they are. But we must do our best to find the good in the world if we are going to be happy.

Simply Believe

Let me start by saying I am not here to sell you a book. My purpose is to give you the cut and dry key to happiness, love, and peace that I have found. I have read many of the popular books on success, self-love, happiness, and freedom. There are a number of them that have impacted my life in a positive way, and I recommend them to everyone in search of balance, joy, and prosperity. I have also read the not-so mainstream publications as well. In all my reading and study, I have found that there is one simple word common to all these attributes you should keep in your mind's eye: BELIEF.

Some call it faith, others call it trust, but I call it belief.

It is a belief in your heart that you are unique and special, with gifts and talents that are all your own. The belief that despite your upbringing, in the face of your past hurts, and even with your current pain you may be feeling, you are still special. You are still important. You are still a contributing member to society and the world.

Once you believe something of yourself, you are setting in motion an energy that will make that belief come to pass. Many of us have been told who we are. The world can sometimes wrap us in chains by placing us into a particular box or category.

When we start to become comfortable in

that box, we stop growing. And a lot of the time, we start to give up on our childhood dreams and our futures. To break free from the cardboard box you may be in, you must learn to listen to that little voice inside. We all have this voice though we may call it something different. Some call it God or another entity, our conscience, id, ego, or superego. Whatever you choose to call it, it is within our hearts; and it, he, or she speaks words to use that we must learn to listen to. This voice screams we are worthy. It begs us to change our negative thoughts.

I learned through the help of God at a very young age to look myself square in the eyes while in the mirror and speak encouragement to myself, in spite of the bloody noses, tears, and black eyes. I spoke the words that were in my head and heart. These were words like “you are smart,” “you are handsome,” “you’re gonna be great,” “don’t ever give up,” “I love you,” “God loves you.” These words gave me comfort when no one could protect me from the stings of a belt, the snap of a punch, or the words of hate hurled at me on a daily basis during my youth.

You may call this stoic, but it is not. It is allowing yourself to make the decision of who you are regardless of what others say, do, plot, or plan against you. I promise you, once you believe in who you are and who you are going to be, life will change your circumstances and help you to fulfill your dreams, aspirations, destiny, and future.

1. What or who do you believe in?
2. Who are you inside?

Student of Life

*You can learn from everyone you meet. Do not
ever be afraid to ask a question.*

By now you may have heard the phrase “Don’t forget the little people.” I, on the other hand, count the individuals I meet or have the pleasure to share a conversation with as big people. Each person that enters my life on a daily basis has the possibility to teach me something. It can be something as large as one of Socrates’s theories or as small as an easier way to remember the months that have thirty-one days in them.

This little way of approaching life has taught me many lessons. I learn from both young and old alike. I believe that once you’re open to learning and willing to accept individuals for who they are, a whole new world is revealed to you. Most individuals have no problem explaining to you who they are and why or how they chose to be a particular way. Just be ready to hear their story free of judgment.

You can even learn from the people who hurt you in some way. When you are hurt, it is the perfect time to do some self-reflection and try to figure out why that person or situation hurt you. It is easy for us as human beings to reward

hurt with hurt. It is a bit harder task to extinguish the flame of pain. The next time you are hurt by someone's words or actions aimed at you, ask yourself or consider the following:

Did I truly do, say, or intend something to cause this person to treat me this way?

Consider their personal situation (if you know them on a personal level).

Am I taking this personally?

How is my situation affecting this scenario?

Once you have taken the time to reflect if this individual or situation is still a source of stress for you, it is time for you to move on. Do your best to find the lesson in the scenario and learn from it. Use the hurts you experienced in life to make you stronger as opposed to letting them keep you from smiling.

Life is a continuous process. Stepping outside your door every day is a new journey waiting to be traveled. Every fabric of this world is begging for your attention. I can remember a time when I sat behind the yoke of a KC-10. The pilot was letting me feel what it felt like to fly. He was giving me great instructions, and I was loving every minute of it. After a few turns and climbs, he must have noticed that my eyeballs were glued to the instruments in front of me when he said, "Chardo, look outside, you're flying."

He was right. I was so focused on keeping the aircraft level and not making a mistake that I forgot the fact that I was flying a five-hundred-thousand-pound jet at a crazy, fast speed. We all become so engulfed in the routine of our daily lives that we forget to “stop and smell the roses.” Living your life as a student or even looking through the eyes of a child will teach you so much more about happiness and your true self than you could possibly dream.

Do not be afraid to ask questions either. There truly is no stupid question. How else will you learn something unless you ask or are motivated enough to research it? Booker T. Washington said it best when he stated, “Never get to the point where you will be ashamed to ask anybody for information. The ignorant man will always be ignorant if he fears that by asking another for information he will display ignorance. Better once display your ignorance of a certain subject than always know nothing of it.”

Inspiration

No one ever said life was easy, but it is easy to inspire yourself and others. During those moments when life is giving you its best ass kicking, you must find your comfortable place and reenergize. To do this, find out what makes your heart smile. What are the little things that bring you pleasure? It's not the same for everyone.

To figure this out for yourself, you could take the time to reconnect with your inner child. That little boy or girl is still inside all of us and would love to play. Go back to the ages or times when you were most happy with life. In my case, this was between the ages of eight and sixteen, despite the abuses I suffered during that time frame. The age isn't as important as remembering what used to make you happy. When we are children, the world has yet to steal our dreams, and our worries are few. It is my belief that those are the times when we as human beings are experiencing the true essence of being alive. For most of us, our worries were few, and central to our lives were play.

When I was a boy, music, basketball, reading, and making people laugh were the times when I was at my happiest. Today at the age of thirty-two, I have found that by going back to those moments or recreating them fills my heart with joy, and I feel invincible. I like to think of it as stopping

time. When I am sad or disappointed, I can put a good song on and dance in my living room, and all my worries and problems melt away for a moment. When I'm tense about a situation, I need only pick up my basketball and dribble it or pretend to shoot jump shots, and I am at ease. When I am in a situation that is uncomfortable, I need only find something to laugh about or hear the laughter of someone else, and I begin to feel better.

Once you can learn to bring back your own inspiration or happiness, don't keep it all to yourself. Share it with someone. I like sharing my happiness with complete strangers. Strangers are only strangers because they haven't related to you yet. We are all human, and we all experience very similar situations. Situations like getting lost, asking for directions, standing in line at the DMV, or grocery shopping are situations and circumstances that most of us all experience. Use those experiences to connect to humanity and share with a complete stranger. You may just learn something new about yourself.

Finally, do not be afraid of who you are. Who you are is beautiful and adds to the collective consciousness. All our differences make up a magnificent tapestry of the human condition. Do not be afraid to share your little bit of light with someone new. Of course, they'll be the individuals who think you're crazy or weird, but understand you are exactly the opposite. You are alive, and I for one like your uniqueness.

What makes you smile?

What word makes you laugh?

If you had one extra hour in the day, how would you spend it?

How many times did you smile yesterday? Today?

How many times do you want to smile tomorrow?

Forgiveness

Forgiveness and patience are two traits I have struggled with, but through meditation and a lot of prayer, I have been able to overcome these barriers. There are many books and teachings on forgiveness. But until your heart is truly ready to forgive, reading a book and attending seminars on forgiveness is not going to have the results you seek, though they will get you closer to that goal. In my opinion, forgiveness begins with you. You must forgive yourself first before you can forgive someone else. We have all done things we judge ourselves for. Once you can forgive yourself of those hurts that are of your own doing, then you will be ready to forgive someone else and be forgiven.

My struggle with forgiveness rested with my mother, my father, and my stepfather. These three individuals hurt me the most, and I had to learn to forgive them if I was to move forward into manhood. I wasn't able to do it alone. I had some help along the way in the form of aunts, therapists, friends, and God.

Here's the short version!

My mother had me when she was only eighteen years of age. My biological father was an older man that owned an

auto body shop a few miles down the road in Long Beach, Mississippi. I do not know the particulars of how they got to the point of sleeping with each other, but I do know that he was married at the time, and my mother lived at home with her seven siblings. My mother did her best to hide the pregnancy and succeeded. Once my grandmother found out, she demanded an abortion. When they arrived at the clinic to have the procedure done, the doctor noticed she was too far along for an abortion to take place. Like it or not, I was coming into this world.

Once I was born, my father disappeared. Our relationship throughout my life span has never been a healthy one. It was always me making the effort to establish some sort of relationship. He really didn't want a child, and I can't fault him for not wanting another child. I did fault him, however, for making false promises to me as a boy. As a result, my mother was left to be a single parent who luckily ended up getting a GED. With so many aunts in my family, I was never left alone as an infant or small boy. This fact definitely helped a teenager raising an infant. I was cared for and loved in those early years.

Then came my stepfather. He was very abusive to my mother and I. I used to get hit in the back of the head so much, my nose would bleed at random times during the day. Even to this day, my nose will bleed occasionally. I got called stupid at every turn and learned to stay in my room so as not to be a burden and to avoid the abuse. I witnessed the abuse of my mother for many years and endured the physical and emotional abuse for most of my adolescent years. One scenario that I remember as vivid as yesterday was what I like to call the day I met God.

I was about six or seven years old. My mother worked and left me at home with my stepfather, who we will refer

to as “the monster.” Bath time came and he drew me a bath. I can remember getting into the tub and washing myself. When I was done, he came into the bathroom and said in a loud voice, “You’re not done.” He then began to hold me under the water in an attempt to drown me. This occurred about four times with my little body fighting his strong hands away from my chest and my head. After the water torture was complete, he was determined to make me pay for hitting him during my struggle for air. He took me into my bedroom and held my naked body upside down and began beating me with a leather belt.

I call this the day I met God because when the abuse was over, I wasn’t sad as I ought to have been. I was calm. Something was in the room with me while I lay there alone—hugging me, holding me tighter than any of the people who were supposed to hold me ever did, wiping my tears.

This sort of abuse went on for many, many years. “The monster” was very creative in his torture. Even through all that, I found a way to forgive him. I found a way to forgive my biological father for not coming to my rescue, whilst knowing what was happening to me. I found a way to forgive the woman who was supposed to love me first, for keeping me in that scenario and oftentimes participating in it.

Forgiveness is power. Do your best to forgive. It’s not going to happen overnight. I have lived the journey of forgiveness, but you must make an effort. People will hurt you in this world, most times unknowingly, in my opinion. You have to use forgiveness as a tool for dusting yourself off and moving forward. Otherwise you are remaining trapped in your past. You will continue to relive the hurts and block your future.

What can you forgive yourself for today?

Love

*“Your heart is going to be broken. What you do
with the pieces is the real lesson.”*

I have found that love is purely a feeling. It's not an action, although actions signify love for a person, a child, or even a group. When love is truly unconditional, it is a feeling. The best way I can describe it is love makes your heart smile. The reason I chose to explain love more as a feeling as opposed to an action is because we all have our “moments”: bad days at work, the kids getting on your nerves, the person who cut you off on your way home, and so on. When your love for your partner is explained or defined as, or by, an action, then there is no room for your partner to love themselves.

All of us have had struggles. I have learned that no matter what stranger you may come across in this life, we are all dealing with some sort of struggle or fear or adversity. Though our adversities vary from person to person, it is in no way minimized for that individual. My struggles may be different from yours, but I am coping with them in relatively the same manner as you.

When times get hard, we seek love and security. For example, when the teenager has an accident in the family car, they may feel overwhelmed and afraid. This is not a foreign feeling or emotion than that of the adult who has lost a credit card to collection or the toddler who is lost in the mall. We all have different triggers, but we all feel the same emotions. These emotions remind us we are alive.

Every human being experiences love. Yes, even the murderers and rapists have experienced love at some point in their lives. Love is an emotion that is part of our human makeup. We all express and receive love differently, but make no mistake, love is as real to you as it is to me. The beauty of love is that it can be expressed and received differently. Some individuals thrive on hearing loving words while others need to physically feel a person love them. Others fill up on love by witnessing love, as in seeing a father twirl his little girl around in a busy airport, or watching a young couple stroll through the mall with their hands locked together. This is how I fill up on love. Of course, I enjoy when someone loves me and shares sweet and encouraging words with me, but what really brings a smile to my face is seeing others love each other. I love watching parents buy their kiddos “one more scoop of ice cream and that’s it.” I love watching a husband and wife share their food at a restaurant. I love seeing a coach put more responsibility on a particular player. I love watching a brother and sister hand each other presents on Christmas morning. I love seeing a friend carry another friend out of the bar even though that friend is slurring the words “party pooper.” I genuinely love witnessing beauty in the world. It is the way my heart fills up with love.

What fills your heart up with love?

No Fear

*The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid,
but he who conquers that fear.*

—Nelson Mandela

I am not immune to fear. I have had many fears across my life span and still struggle with some new and old fears today. Fear can be used in two ways: it can become a motivator or debilitating. It is simply a choice of how you want to use your own fears.

I never used to fear flying. I joined the military and selected a career that would give me the opportunity to achieve one of my boyhood dreams: to see the world. By the age of twenty-one, I was fortunate enough to have traveled to many countries I had only imagined seeing in my youth. It was amazing for me to know that contrasting cultures and people were so different yet so similar.

This unique opportunity also came with a downside. I was involved in terrifying scenarios (at least for me). Flight is no mystery. It is simply physics and Bernoulli's principle at work. Lift must overcome drag, but what do you do when there is no lift and you're only one thousand feet above the terrain? I prayed.

At the completion of one of my first flights during Operation Enduring Freedom, my crew and I came very close to losing our lives. I was a newlywed of only six months and can remember thinking to myself after the incident, "That was almost the fastest four hundred thousand dollars my wife would've ever made." We were on final, and all crew members had the runway in sight. It was a clear night, approximately 0245 local time, and the copilots turn to land.

Like me, it was his first deployment, and we both probably totaled five hundred hours of flight time together. The pilot and the engineer were experienced crew members with far more hours of flight time. As we were approaching the runway, the copilot looked at the pilot and said, "Did you do that?" The pilot responded, "No. Did you?" The aircraft then started to fall straight down. The pilot grabbed the yoke and began pulling up. The copilot froze. The flight engineer grabbed the throttles and firewalled them (pushed all three engines to max power) while giving instruction to the pilot. I grabbed my harness and the side of the window and began to pray. Luckily, we survived. I later found out we experienced a very dangerous weather phenomenon called a microburst.

I carried that fear of microburst with me for a long time. I became a student of it. I even learned how to spot them in the distance. I flew with a lot of great aviators, but I never got over that fear. Instead I chose to use it as a teaching tool to new aviators in the hopes that they would never have to experience it in their career, and if they did, they would know how to react to it.

I am a very social individual. I pride myself on the ability to hold a conversation with many different walks of life. From elders to teenagers, white to black, gay to straight,

and man to woman, I usually can relate to them in some way and have a meaningful and fun conversation.

In my talks and interactions with different individuals, I have learned that people tend to fear the same things. We fear death. We fear losing a loved one. We fear infidelity. We fear not being good enough. We fear judgment, and a lot of Americans nowadays fear the future. All these fears are valid and have their roots in fact, but we must not let these fears limit us. The best way to conquer fear is to embrace it, accept it, question it, and meet it head on.

Enough

*When the power of love overcomes the love of
power the world will know peace.*

—Jimi Hendrix

I am a US veteran of OIF, OEF, and OND, and the one thing I've learned in my travels with the military is that we are all the same. Humanity, with its flaws and awes, is the same no matter what country you visit. We all have families both traditional and nontraditional that we love. War and conflict rip these families apart.

I can remember my first deployment and my very first mission over Afghanistan. I was shaken and confused. We took off, and the flight was as normal as a standard training mission stateside with a few minor "safety precautions." We arrived at our designated spot in the area of responsibility and waited for our first activity (receiver aircraft) to show up for refueling. After a short wait, the first of two F-16s arrived. He was loaded to the hilt with munitions. We offload somewhere between two thousand to four thousand pounds of fuel to each receiver. The first air refueling was complete, and I thought to myself, "This isn't what my grandpa talked about. This is simple." Then

the call came over the radio that the same receivers we just refueled would be returning for fuel.

This was different. It was not even an hour before they filled their tanks. I will never forget the feeling of seeing the same receivers return with little to no munitions on their wings. I just contributed to the death of some unlucky men that day. I was indirectly involved in the destruction of some building. I was part of the reason a little girl or boy wouldn't be able to hug their father again. This shook me to the core, and I kept that feeling for the remainder of my tour.

I never got used to those missions despite numerous deployments. I never got used to the thought of helping another human being end the life of someone I have never looked in the eye. That's war, right? You're either on the good guys' side or the bad guys' side, and that fact is up for interpretation. What then if there isn't a good guy side or a bad guy side? What if there's just a difference in belief or need for more money? What if all the fighting in the world were to end? Can you imagine? I can and I have.

I was just a boy then from Mississippi. I came from a large low-income family. I had no father growing up, so my grandfather, a Vietnam veteran, often filled the role of father. I used to love his stories of the military and his laughter. I don't know much about Vietnam besides what I have heard from the veterans at my VFW post. I did not fight in that war. I did not lose any friends or relatives to that war, but I can tell you that I have felt the sting of that war through my encounters with those veterans.

Veterans are funny people. They don't like to take credit for their sacrifice to America, but they love to reminisce. I personally love to hear their stories. For me, it is awesome to see their faces light up when they are remembering a

shitty platoon commander, or a buddy who smoked a lot of pot. I take pleasure in knowing that I can count myself among the great warriors of Vietnam, the Korean War, and WWII.

As a veteran, I have had the unique opportunity to experience many different cultures, customs, and religions. I have come to understand one fact: war, hate, and envy are tearing us apart as a world community. In this day and age, we have the ability to communicate with each other across time zones, miles, and languages. We have become closer to each other by way of advancements in communication.

In all my travels and interactions, I have found there are two things that transcend our differences and connect us on a human level. We all love and cherish our families and our countries, so much so that we are willing to die for both. Yet I offer an alternative. Let us all live for the two and take every opportunity to look our brothers and sisters in the eye and offer a handshake rather than a fist.

Fun Questions to Ask Yourself

If you could change one thing about your country, what would it be?

Let's say reincarnation is real. What or who would you want to come back to earth as? An animal, insect, plant, or human? Which one and why?

If you only had one week to live, how would you spend it? Money is no object in this scenario.

Are you happy in your current relationship or friendships? If not, how can you repair them?

Who inspires you or has inspired you? Why?

No matter what age we are, we as human beings are continuously growing. What do you want to be when you grow up?

If you had one “do over,” what would you use it on?

Which dinosaur would you have been? Why?

What’s your favorite smell?

What’s your favorite thing or person to look at?

What’s your favorite thing or person to touch?

What’s your favorite sound?

What’s your favorite food?

When was the last time you lost your breath laughing? What or who caused it?

Romantic Relationships

I still haven't figured this one out. Of course I've been in love, but haven't been able to hold on to it. I am sure the women I have shared my heart with could tell you why (insert smiley face).

Feel free to write in the space provided what true romantic love and a romantic relationship means to you. I would love to read your thoughts if you don't mind sharing them with me. Visit theycallmeadreamer.com to share your story of what a romantic relationship is. In my opinion, love is a feeling not an action.

Rejection

Rejection or the word “no” is a normal part of life. I, like you, have been rejected and heard the word “no” many times. The key to learning from rejection, as you may already know, is dusting yourself off and getting right back on the horse. This is sometimes easier said than done.

Rejection comes in many forms. No matter how it is received, it always stings a little bit. You must always remember that you are a remarkable individual. You have a purpose in this lifetime, and when you find it, not even the word “no” can stop you.

I could tell you a million stories of how I didn’t get what I wanted or how a door was slammed in my face, but I would prefer to tell you just one. I love the law particularly the United States’ founding documents: Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights, and the Constitution of the United States. I have read these documents and listened to them by way of audio programs numerous times. Every time I hear them or read a portion of them, I am inspired. Personally, I swore to uphold the constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic, by way of military service on three occasions.

I am amazed by our Founding Fathers and the level of rebellion needed to begin a new country separate from King

George III. These documents are living words to me that, in my opinion, transcend time and apply today as much as they did in the eighteenth century. This love of America and its law inspired me to attend law school.

My first step was research. Fortunately, the one man in my life that saved me from drowning in abuse during my youth, my uncle, was a lawyer. So I started there. I asked him all the questions I could about law school and what it means to be a lawyer. From there, I branched out into reading about the profession. Once I had a grasp on what a lawyer is, I decided to begin the process of getting into law school.

As most individuals already know, you must sit for the LSAT (Law School Admission Test). I was still in the military at the time, and my service took priority over my educational goals, but I didn't let that deter me. I studied at every opportunity. I didn't have much extra money for prep courses or tutors, so every paycheck I took a little bit of money and bought study materials and practice exams. I used every bit of free study material I could get my hands on as well. When I was done with the materials, I gave them to another individual to help him get on his way to his dream of sitting for the LSAT in the future.

My first test was scheduled for the day after my birthday. So like anyone with a passion and a goal, I celebrated it to a limit—dinner with friends. I took the test and thought it went well. I was wrong. My score was low. This hurt me because I thought for sure I was ready for the exam. I didn't allow this to stop me though. I tried another way and began studying all over again.

The second test went better than the first, but my score was still lower than I expected and lower than the practice exams I previously took. I decided not to let this limit me. In my mind, surely there must be a school that would accept

someone who gives their all to the study of law regardless of my score. I kept telling myself, “Someone will give me a chance.” I was mistaken again. I didn’t get accepted to the schools I applied to. One school did accept me, but later withdrew my acceptance before I made it through orientation.

I felt defeated. I gave everything up to attend law school. I moved miles away from my daughter, my family, and my friends. I separated from the air force after twelve years of service. I was completely out of my comfort zone, and the only school that accepted me was turning me away. It was one of the low points in my life. I didn’t know what else I could’ve done. At the brink of depression, I decided to stop feeling sorry for myself and do the only thing I knew how to do—stand up again, look myself square in the eyes, and try again. Law school was a dream for me—a way to continue serving my country, a way to protect the rights of every human being without a voice, a way to give back to my brothers and sisters in arms.

I moved back home to the south and slept on relatives’ couches. I read everything I could about the law. All the courseware I purchased to attend law school became my best friend. In theory, I was in law school—a law school with one student, me. I took what I learned from teaching recruits in the military and applied it to teaching myself law. I studied cases. I learned how to read like a lawyer. I studied history. I used the law books at the public library. I taught myself how to write case briefs. I listened to law school podcasts. I watched lectures on YouTube. I read the fine print of everything. I improved my logical reasoning. I used everything around me to teach me how to be a lawyer.

I used the rejection letters as ammunition to power me to becoming the best law student I could without a classroom or a professor. I took the negative feelings of rejection and turned them into steam. As soon as I was grounded and my wounds healed, I applied to different law schools. One said no, but three said yes. One even offered me a scholarship.

Rejection and the word “no” are not always bad things. Learn how to learn from the experience of being told you can’t do something and use it to empower yourself. My aunt Samantha always said, “The worst they can tell you is no.” This statement is very true. For every “no” you meet with, there are probably three yeses waiting for you to ask or act. Do not ever give up on a dream because of a two-letter word. Stay encouraged.

Dreamers can never be tamed.

—Paulo Coehlo

Daddy Is My Favorite Name

I would be remiss if I did not write about the most important role in my life and my source of motivation. Being a father is the greatest gift I have ever received. It has grown me into a man and taught me how to love miles beyond what I thought I was capable of. Like most other fathers, I feel a deep connection to my daughter. We are so very similar, and I fret the day she leaves me in search of her independence. Not because I want to shelter her, but because when she does strike out on her own, as she should, a piece of my heart will go with her.

As a man, I have rarely exposed my soul or just how big my heart truly is to many people. I have always kept my heart under lock and key, and if you got any of it, it was just enough to keep me from being heartbroken again. That all changed on the day my daughter was born. For the first time, I cried in public. I wept because her cry was like angels singing just for me.

I am a father who is divorced. My ex-wife and I were headed down the road to divorce far before my daughter was born, but didn't actually divorce until after she was born. My reasoning for the divorce was because I didn't want my little girl to grow up in a household that lacked love. Of course, her mother and I loved her very much, and

she is the center of both our universes, but the love between us faded, and we became live-in roommates. I felt it in my daughter's best interest, as well as both my ex-wife's and my sanity, to divorce. It was another one of those hard decisions that shape your future.

Shortly after my daughter was born, my ex-wife and I were back to the same routine. Caring for our child was my only priority, and I was unhappy in the relationship. I was stuck at a crossroad. I could stay for eighteen years and force my daughter to live in a household that lacked love, or I could file for divorce. I settled for staying in hopes that the love would change and that someday I would fall in love again until I had one of the worst feelings I've ever experienced.

I was driving home one night from a mission (local training flight). It was about 3:00 a.m. when the overwhelming urge struck me to drive my car into a telephone pole. I calculated how fast I would have to go to do the most damage and hopefully cause my death. I took off my seat belt, and every pole I passed looked more appetizing than the last. I then began to cry. A flood of tears ran down my face because I knew my daughter would never know the real me. Everything she would learn of me would be stories, and she would never feel me hold her. She would never get to dance with me. She would never have me to whisper pretty words into her ear. She would never have me to read to her Aristotle's philosophies or poems by Langston Hughes.

Through a vale of tears, I saw her sitting next to me in that car. I saw her at age fourteen and how angry she was that I left her in this world all alone. It broke my heart, and I knew the only thing I could do to be there for her was to divorce her mother. It was a very difficult situation, and I am glad I made the better choice for both of us.

Today she is my everything. We are best friends, and though she is only five, I feel like she understands me better than any other person in this world. My love for her is so strong, I'm even afraid to have another child out of fear that my love for her would change, as ignorant as that sounds.

I know there are many good fathers in this world. I see you in line at the gas stations. I see you at restaurants sitting with your kiddos making small talk. I see you at the pools pretending to lose the race with your little boy. I want to tell you to stay encouraged. No matter what you have to go through to spend just a sliver of time with your child, do it. They need you just as much as you need them.

Being a father is a gift; it is not a burden. Your son or daughter has the possibility to teach you things about yourself that you could never imagine. I have been called many names in my lifetime by all sorts of people, but being called daddy by my daughter is my favorite.

The Other Crayon

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

Like many other Americans, my family are immigrants. My grandmother and her six children migrated to this country from Bermuda in the seventies. This was possible only because my grandmother married a navy seaman. It's a tall order for a single man to take on a widow with six children, but he did it. Being in his shoes, I don't know if I could've made the same decision, but I like to believe that he loved her just that much.

I was born the first male grandson in this country on Keesler AFB in 1980. I spent most of my childhood in southern Mississippi. My complexion didn't win me many friends in Mississippi. My mother is Bermudian with very fair skin, and my father is African American with a reddish complexion. As a result, I came out with a light complexion and blond hair.

Most people to this day do not know my nationality or race. I have had friends for years who are surprised to find out my ethnicity. I like to count this toward the beauty of friendship—that even though you don’t know where someone comes from, the love of friendship extinguishes bias.

Growing up in Gulfport, Mississippi, I faced racism and hate from both sides of the racial divide. I wasn’t black enough for the black kids because I had white friends. I spoke properly, and my skin wasn’t dark enough. I wasn’t white enough for the white kids because I had black friends. I was poor, and my skin wasn’t white enough. Imagine what this can do to a child who already doesn’t have a father at home to guide him. I faced racism at every turn from both sides. I kept the racism I experienced during my school years hidden from my family. It was a constant struggle, and I always felt like I was in the middle.

As I grew into adulthood, I noticed that this divide or struggle didn’t stop. I have been met with confusion from other races even till this day. I have dated black women who think I’m trying to be white, and I’ve dated white women who have called me nigger.

I do remember one individual whose words soothed my soul when it came to the color of my skin. I just graduated high school and entered the workforce before my first semester in college was to begin. I cannot remember her name, but she was a thirty-something brunette. There were these three girls that I worked with who constantly felt it necessary to berate me because of my skin color. They did this by way of jokes and sarcasm. One day it got to be just too much. I was outside smoking with the “thirty-something,” and she could tell I was upset. She then said the sweetest words to me I have ever heard pertaining to my skin color.

She said, “Don’t worry about what they think of you. One day we may all look like you.”

Racism, ignorance, bias—whatever you choose to call it—separates us. We unknowingly continue to add to the divide by defining and pigeonholing groups of people based solely on their appearance. None of us are free from this behavior. It is handed down to us. The challenge is to recognize when you may be stereotyping individuals based solely on their appearance, and changing your thought pattern in that moment. Instead look at that individual as a piece in the puzzle of the world. Though their shape is a bit more jagged than the other pieces, they still belong in the puzzle and will add to its beauty when it is complete.

Loyalty

If I could choose one character trait that has the possibility to change every aspect of our lives and those around you, it would be loyalty. I am sometimes loyal to a fault, but it never stops me from being loyal to the next individual once I have decided to keep that person in my life.

What does the word “loyalty” mean to you?

How do you express your loyalty?

My friends and I have joked about this often; but I truly believe that if you can remain loyal to your God, yourself, your friends, your spouse, and everything else in between, you can become happier than you can conceive. I look for this trait in new friends. It is a tough trait to cultivate and maintain, there’s no argument about that, but if anything, you must try. Try to look for the good in people instead of the bad. Offer your loyalty to that individual or party before you expect their loyalty to you, and you’ll be surprised at how loyal they will be in return.

When you are truly loyal to your friends, you would do anything for them and they would do anything for you. Of course barring you from bodily harm and asking for a body bag at 3:00 a.m. As a member of the US Air Force, I was separated from my family for many years. My friends

became my family, and I treated them as such. In return, they loved and respected me back.

I have built friendships the same as all of us. Friends that I know I can depend on when I need them most, and in return I would do the same. Every friend you have is different. Sometimes they are different in small ways, and sometimes the differences are large. If all your friends had the same interests, likes, and dislikes, it could make for a boring circle of friends in my opinion.

Your Goals

It is my opinion that goals are necessary to achievement both in your professional and personal life. I began writing my goals on paper during early adolescence. Below you will find the template I have used and continue to use to this day as taught to me by my uncle. It was one of the first things my uncle taught me about. I was fourteen at the time, and like most neglected children, I had very little to believe in. This simple task of sitting down with my own thoughts and daydreaming for a bit gave me the hope that my future could be better than my past.

When writing your goals, remember to make them realistic and attainable. Do not confuse realistic and attainable with any limitations. Dream big! Henry Ford was a “big dreamer.” His words inspire me when I write my goals: “Whether you think you can or think you can’t, you’re right.”

PS: Remember to keep them somewhere you can see them either daily or every now and then. Do not just write them, use them.

Goals

Today's Date: _____

6 Months

Date: _____

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

1 Year

Date: _____

2 Years

Date: _____

5 Years

Date: _____

10 Years

Date: _____

Motivation

Here is a collection of quotes meant to encourage you. I hope that you find them as motivational as I did. Words can be used to harm or to heal. Always try to use yours to heal.

If one of the following individuals are foreign to you, I challenge you to research them. Read about them and their life. You will find that their life isn't or wasn't very different from yours.

The brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. Because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people.

(Randy Pausch)

What would you attempt to do if you knew you couldn't fail?

(Unknown)

I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed.

(Booker T. Washington)

Whatever you are, be a good one.

(Abraham Lincoln)

Today is only one day in all the days that will ever be. But what will happen in all the other days that ever come can depend on what you do today.

(Ernest Hemingway)

One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life:
That word is love.

(Sophocles)

You should live everyday like it's your birthday.

(Paris Hilton)

Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world.

(Harriet Tubman)

It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up.

(Vincent Lombardi)

Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.

(Buddha)

One man cannot hold another man down in the ditch without remaining down in the ditch with him.

(Booker T. Washington)

Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible.

(Dalai Lama)

I am an example of what is possible when girls from the very beginning of their lives are loved and nurtured by people around them. I was surrounded by extraordinary women in my life who taught me about quiet strength and dignity.

(Michelle Obama)

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men.

John F. Kennedy

Be a yardstick of quality. Some people aren't used to an environment where excellence is expected.

(Steve Jobs)

Never interrupt someone doing what you said couldn't be done.

(Amelia Earhart)

Hold fast to your dreams, for without them life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly.

(Langston Hughes)

Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute experience.

(Paulo Coelho)

Do the one thing you think you cannot do. Fail at it. Try again. Do better the second time. The only people who never tumble are those who never mount the high wire. This is your moment. Own it.

(Oprah Winfrey)

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

(Nelson Mandela)

This life is a process of learning.

(Lauryn Hill)

Let him that would move the world first move himself.

(Socrates)

Be courteous to all, but intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence.

(George Washington)

An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.

(Martin Luther King Jr.)

Don't give in to your fears. If you do, you won't be able to talk to your heart.

(Paulo Coelho)

I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him.

(Galileo Galilei)

I like to think of life in relation to football. Your ultimate goal is a touchdown. You obtain this goal by achieving first-downs until the goal line is reached. Sometimes you lose yards and even turn the ball over; but you still go out the next series and try for the touchdown.

(Chardo Richardson)

Be the change you wish to see in the world.

(Mahatma Gandhi)

We are all connected: To each other, biologically. To the earth, chemically. To the rest of the universe atomically.

(Neil deGrasse Tyson)

Final Thoughts

Take every opportunity to learn something new about the world around you and yourself. When you do this, you are growing yourself into the person you want to be and becoming more of a contributor to the human experience.

Do not be afraid to help your neighbor. Even the smallest of actions has a ripple effect. A kind gesture to a complete stranger is contagious, and they may just remember it when they are faced with the same scenario.

Never give up on your dreams. For some, their dreams will appear to have just happened, whereas yours are taking much longer to fulfill. Remember that we are not all the same. Sure we have commonalities as being part of the human existence, but we all have our own situations and scenarios that contribute to our makeup. Hold on to your dream, whatever it may be. Do not be shaken from it, and when you fail at a particular moment of capturing your dream, remember the words of Flavia Weedn: “If one dream should fall and break into a thousand pieces, never be afraid to pick one of those pieces up and begin again.”

As in *Chicken Little*, the sky will always be falling. Do your best to be one of the individuals who grabs a cloud and uses it to your benefit. There will always be individuals who don't believe in you or your dreams. You will see them

in your family, your friends, your coworkers, and your neighbors. These individuals may have given up on their own dreams and, as such, want you to give up on yours. Don't listen. Find the truth and use their words as fuel. Not fuel to say "I told you so," but fuel to empower yourself inwardly. Most of the giants of history and success were met with many challenges and many obstacles. If they were able to overcome, so will you.

Don't be afraid to LOL (laugh out loud), literally. Laughter is fun and contagious. Those that have forgotten how to laugh will be reminded of what it felt like. Finally, remember to offer a handshake before offering a fist. Peace is always better than war. War takes away from all parties involved. It is not only financially draining, but emotionally draining as well.

If this short book helped you or touched your soul in any way, please encourage someone else to read it. Let's share all the positivity we can with the world. Visit theycallmeadreamer.com to connect with me and other positive dreamers like you.

Author Bio

Chardo Richardson is a twelve-year veteran of the United States armed forces. As a world traveler, he has visited many countries and interacted with many cultures. A freethinker, he believes everyone possesses the ability to find true happiness of mind, body, and spirit. He is an avid supporter of America's veterans and youth alike. He has acted as a motivational speaker for teens and young adults.

Chardo was born to an immigrant single mother and raised by his extended family. He has overcome a number of obstacles in his short life span, and in his first book shares some of the stories of his trials in an effort to magnify the lessons of love, forgiveness, and positive thinking in spite of adversity.

Index

B

belief, 17
Buddha, 55

C

Coelho, Paulo, 56-57

D

Dalai Lama, 55
dreams, 59

E

Earhart, Amelia, 55

F

father, 43, 45
fear, 30, 32
Ford, Henry, 51
forgiveness, 25, 27
friends, 50

G

Galileo Galilei, 57
Gandhi, Mahatma. See
Mahatma Gandhi
goals, 51, 57

H

Hemingway, Ernest, 54
Hill, Lauryn, 56
Hilton, Paris, 54
Hughes, Langston, 56

I

inspiration, 22-23

J

Jobs, Steve, 55

K

Kennedy, John F., 55

kindness, 59

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 13, 46,
56

L

laughter, 60

learner, lifelong, 19, 21, 59

Lincoln, Abraham, 54

Lombardi, Vincent, 54

love, 15, 28-29. *See also*
relationships, romantic

loyalty, 49

M

Mahatma Gandhi, 57

Mandela, Nelson, 30, 56

N

“no”. *See* rejection

O

Obama, Michelle, 55

P

Pausch, Randy, 53

peace, 13, 15, 60

Q

questions, fun, 36

quotes, motivational, 53

R

racism, 47-48

rejection, 39, 42

relationships, romantic, 38.

See also love

Richardson, Chardo, 3-4, 16,
18, 20, 24, 26, 32, 34, 40,
42, 44, 48, 50, 56-57, 60-
61

first deployment, 33

first flight, 31

God, on the day he met,
26-27

LSAT (Law School

Admissions Test), on
taking the, 40

V

Mississippi, growing up in,
25-26, 34, 46-47

veterans, 33-35

W

S

war, 33, 60

Socrates (Greek philosopher),
19, 56

Washington, Booker T., 21,
54-55

Sophocles (Greek playwright),
54

Washington, George, 56

Weedn, Flavia, 59

Winfrey, Oprah, 56

T

Tubman, Harriet, 54

Tyson, Neil deGrasse, 57