

YOUTH OF THE YEAR
Candidate Response
by Charles Carson

In today's society it may seem to many people that there is no hope for the future, or anywhere to start solving the problems which are destroying our community, as well as our world today. Many of us feel helpless, many feel threatened and live in fear, and many just don't care. I must admit that we cannot blame these people for their feelings, for we have all felt this way ourselves.

I have felt this way. I have felt left out, betrayed, abandoned, and vengeful. I once hated my life and all of the people in and around it.

It began when I was a youth of nine. I am the second oldest in a family of four. My family lacked the necessary supports needed to maintain stability. We had no father in the home. I witnessed, on a daily basis, drug abuse and violence. I witnessed beatings and mental abuse as well. I began leaving the home to escape from the dangers that were threatening me. I had already seen my oldest brother be beaten and thrown out of the house before he had even reached twelve years of age, and that I could not understand. I couldn't understand why my friends had such good family lives and I was subjected to a life of turmoil.

The streets became an escape for me. During this time I became quite familiar with drugs. Drugs were used constantly in my home so I had no thought of them being wrong. I started using marijuana at age nine as a result of it being grown right in my back yard. I had it whenever I needed it, not very healthy for a nine year old.

The streets became my home away from home, where I met others with problems just like mine. Acceptance came, along with a feeling of belonging.

School had become a place for me to pretend like my life was just as normal as everyone else's, so I went daily.

Growing into my teens, I had learned lots. My mother, regardless of the wrongs she had done, taught me some very precious lessons. I also had the knowledge of the streets. I started Junior High School with high expectations, but my expectations were soon destroyed. I began stealing.....stealing from anyone. My drug habit had now become virtually uncontrollable. I was using speed, marijuana, drinking, and taking pills. I could not advance with my life, I was too disabled.

With nowhere to turn, I moved in with a friend who dealt in narcotics. I told myself that I would never try it, but soon after my arrival I found myself using daily.

Things got noticeably worse at home. My mother was an alcoholic. Her past problems were always taken out on us kids, the result and symptoms of an alcoholic. Naturally, I myself would sneak her liquor for my own addiction. My personal angers were always displayed, and school became less and less important.

I always fought with my mother, always blaming her for what had gone wrong in my life so far. I would run away from home with nowhere to go just to get away from the mental abuse. Finally I was thrown into a foster home, as uncontrollable. I would run away from foster homes also, I didn't feel that I belonged. I would steal so that I could eat. Eventually I went to jail. I stayed in this cycle from the time I was twelve until I was 15. At age 15 I had already been in 11 foster homes and had been to jail 18 times.

I reached a point in my life when I just didn't care anymore and became suicidal. I was always too scared to do it, not because I would be dead, but because I always wanted to prove everyone wrong. I wanted to prove to those who always said that I was no good and had no hope that I could be something special. To them I would be just another problem child.

With that, I asked myself this question, "Do you want to live, or do you want to die?" I chose my life., even though I knew that it would be a long time for any kind of dramatic change would occur. I told myself that there would be no more jail, no more crime, no more tears and I gave it a try.

I moved back home and shortly after got off probation. Home had not changed at all, and now my younger brother and sister were at risk of experiencing the same type of lifestyle that I had experienced. The drinking never stopped in the home and the yelling and mental abuse also continued. Eventually I was back on the streets, sleeping wherever I could, under houses, in garages, and if I was lucky I could eat.

At this time, my brother was on his way to California. He said I could go with him if I wanted, having no other choice, I agreed. My brother was the only one who I felt cared the most about what would happen to me, and that is what I needed.

Three months later, I returned. My brother could no longer support me.

Upon my return, I moved back home. Three days later I was thrown out for not coming home on time. My drug problem was bad. I was using daily, but that was just the start.

With nowhere to live, I moved in with a friend who dealt in cocaine. I told myself that I would never try it, but soon after my arrival I found myself using daily.

I slowly built a bridge that could only lead to death. I was now involved in one of the most scary things I had ever experienced..... Cocaine.

I witnessed shootings, over-doses, and had been raided by the police three times.

I had no other alternatives.

I began selling the drug, making more than \$500.00 a day. I was using at a growing rate of \$300.00 a day. I could always be found on "K" street, a highly concentrated crime and dope area in Tacoma. Selling all night, I would sometimes be up for four days at a time free-basing cocaine.

Communication with my family had stopped. I spoke to my mother about once every two months. It seemed that any hope of a family was now impossible.

During this time in my life, I had experienced the most dangerous, dirty, evil lifestyles that I have ever lived or seen. Mothers buying dope with the money that should have been used to support their children, wealthy people became criminals in a matter of weeks. Heroin addicts, cocaine addicts, dealers, hit men, and lunatics were my associates, cocaine was my life.

My habit developed into a \$500.00 a day habit. I started robbing homes, forging checks, and robbing friends to support my habit, cocaine had control of me. My brother had already over-dosed, everyone I knew was dying or awaiting a slow death. I had to escape.

One day in the the summer of 87', I was in the rock house using with a friend. I felt hot, and had to leave the room. My friend agreed so we went out of the room. One half hour later a bomb blew out the room that I was previously in. I knew it was either change, or die.

My only choice was to move in with a friend who's family was also involved in heroin and cocaine. I continued to use for months after that time but in December of 87' I finally kicked the cocaine habit, without treatment or support. I finally felt a feeling of self accomplishment.

Although I had made a big change, I still abused most other drugs, leaving myself in helpless situations.

In February of 88' I involved myself in a drug deal in Purdy. I was set up and ended up being beaten by two Hells Angels. I was left in the forest and later hospitalized. That would be my last mistake.

I went home with my mother only to be thrown out a week later , still recovering from my assault.

I was taken in by my best friends mother, Ramona Bennett and her family. I was well received upon my arrival. Parental guidance, proper instruction, and love gave me the willingness to strive for further improvement. I was finally experiencing love, a love that had been absent in my life for 8 years. a love that could have saved me from a childhood life of hell. With a family and proper support now on my side, I made very good decisions. On June 2, 1988, I could finally say that I was a clean and sober human being.

With support and personal motivation, I continued to improve. I became highly and deeply involved in my schooling. I gained a need to improve my life, as well as the life of others.

To this day I have been clean and sober for 1 year and 6 months. I have committed my life to improve the lives of others, as well as my own. I take the time to care, because that is what is needed. I take the time to love, because that is what people need. I never gave up , not once, through all the trials that I have experienced, and I don't plan on stopping now. I will always stand for what I know is right. It is time to face problems head on. It is time to care.

This is not the story of my life, it is merely a few chapters, but I'm sure you can visualize.

My older brother is now in prison, my younger brother is in foster placement, and my little sister is refusing to live at home. Do you see the pattern?

To conclude, I am highly devoted to what I do. All of the things included in this application are things that I am proud of, but most importantly they are needed. If everyone would take just the slightest time out of their day to contribute to this life, all of our lives would glow with smiles.

Thank You,

Charles Lamont Carson