



GREG JAYNE

Commentary

Brown's journey is really just beginning

It is a story about hope, really. A story about dedication and perseverance and having enough people believe in you so that hope never dies, like cultivating a rose in the middle of a hurricane.

There was the alcoholic and abusive father. And the attack that ended with 16 bullet holes in Markeith Brown's car. And the five high schools he attended. And the two months he spent selling marijuana and crack cocaine. And the time he flunked out of college, only to work his way back.

There were moments, many of them, that could have left Brown as a forgotten bystander on the fringe of society. But hope, somehow, always intervened.

"He's done well," said Mike Arnold, the basketball coach at Clark College who has mentored Brown the past four years. "He has earned his spot; he has my respect. I'm pretty humbled to be a little part of it, but he's the one doing it."

Sure, the journey is far from over. There are finals next week, and then three summer classes standing between Brown and an Associate's Degree.

But the fact that he has arrived at this point — preparing to move on to Greenville College in Greenville, Ill., and play basketball — means that Brown

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has traveled farther in his 25 years than most people do in a lifetime.

"If I never went to Clark, I would be lost somewhere," Brown said. "I wouldn't know what's next, I wouldn't be happy. I'm happy now.

"I've got goals. I've got things I want to accomplish."



Yet we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's start with the beginning of Brown's story, which was first chronicled by *The Columbian* in 2007.

Brown grew up in north Portland in a family with eight kids, raised by a single mom and a grandmother. It's the kind of place and the kind of situation where hope often goes to die.

"It's a violent neighborhood, a lot of shootings going on," he said. "I was driving home at night and got shot at. You can't really avoid it; I would say you have to be lucky. I could have fallen to the streets a long time ago."

Instead, when he was three years out of high school, Brown started showing up for open gym sessions at Clark. He caught the attention of the

coaches; he eventually enrolled in school.

Brown made the team for the 2006-07 season, playing sparingly for the Penguins. After the season, his grades slipped, and he was dismissed from school for one quarter. When he wanted to return, his financial aid had been eliminated because of his poor grades.

Which brings us to the turning point in the journey of Markeith Brown. Because the funny thing about tales of hope is that there's often an angel involved, and for Brown that angel was Nancy Heidrick.

"We get to make a personal impact on people," said Heidrick, an assistant director of financial aid at Clark. "We are really on the front line; if they don't have money, they aren't going to be here.

"I told Markeith, 'You need to go to college. You have to show your family it can be done. You're a trailblazer for them.'"

Heidrick found some financial aid for Brown. She helped set out an academic plan for him. She helped nurture him



Markeith Brown

through two years as a part-time student while he bolstered his grades.

"He did everything I asked him to do," Heidrick said. "He put himself in my hands. He did the things he had to do, and he took responsibility for it. He's a wonderful role model for his family."

Brown said: "I thought I was done; I thought it was over. But I had somebody who was helping me — that was Nancy.

"Nancy, man, I couldn't do it without her. She not only helped me find the money to get through, she also built me up with knowledge. She made me feel like I could get through."



Isn't that the whole point of life? The whole point of college or business or athletics? You try and you struggle and, if you're lucky, somebody has your back when you need it.

Because sometimes hope isn't enough. Sometimes, you need to take a 10-minute car ride to the other side of a river in order for that hope to flourish.

"It's like a whole different side," Brown said of his daily journey from his home to Clark College. "It's changed my life. It's opened my mind up. I feel

lucky."

This year, Brown took a full class load, making him eligible again for basketball. He improved on the court as the season went along, earned a starting spot, and received an offer from Greenville, which competes at the NCAA Division III level.

"I told him, 'Your degree, that's your ticket to get on the train. That can be your ticket to IBM or Nike,'" Arnold said.

Brown, who plans to major in marketing, has even bigger ideas.

"I see myself owning my own business or businesses," he said. "I'm fascinated by the fact that somebody can run something. I would be a good boss, a good manager.

"I got it from my mom. I see her and all the work she put in. She said we don't have to be superstars; she just wants us to be productive citizens."

And, in the end, that is something worth hoping for.

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