

## I Want to Change the World

By Heather

This relentless thought swims through my head; banging back and forth; up and down. Oh my tired head. Another day is bitter, unrelenting. Eyes opening think of God, staring up, brown dull ceiling, A slight whisper, a fan circling around-and-around. I hear metal with wheels. Wondering who they are, who am I, driving by; do they ever wonder, who is in that box, Antenna hanging outside. Mustered up courage, I step outside, pavement filled, broken shadows, dreams nonetheless, piece by piece, just all at once, I throw a smile or just hello, loose change. "How do I say I want to change the world?"

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## Affirming patience, one day at a time

BY KAISA MCCROW  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Between the rush of car traffic and building construction on 26th and Hawthorne, Robert Millhouse sells Street Roots. The corner is near a bank parking lot, not a coffee shop, or a grocery or bookstore, as is typical for most vendors. It is hard to capture the demographic that traverses this part of the well-known Portland street, not quite far enough up the numbered streets to be hipster hangout, not close enough to the river for cross-neighborhood bike traffic. Instead, there is the bustle of bank goers and the noise of the nearby Safeway reconstruction. Maybe not the stereotypical Portland street corner, yet it suits Robert. He doesn't consider himself a true "Portlander" anyway. Robert was born in Alabama, but moved to Oregon with his mother and father at age six. He was raised in Pentecostal home, and his parents were strict; if he wasn't at school he was at church, and he went to both five times a week.

We talked a lot about his parents. He is

### VENDOR PROFILE Robert Millhouse

close with them now, especially his mother, a relationship he describes as "best friends, real tight." Although they were strict on him as a child, and he definitely went through a period of rebellion against the rigid structure of his upbringing, he expresses a faith in the support of his family that has withstood his 36 years. Robert stays with his parents now. It was his mother who gave him the Rose City Resource guide, where he first found Street Roots in March. He had just come home after eight years in prison.

With those years now behind him, Robert is looking forward and working hard to get his life started again. He describes spending eight years thinking on and resolving how he would live his life when he got out, and he has wasted no time getting started. With firmness, he explains the way his mind wrapped around that time and chipped away at it. Although he was never more than a few hours away from his family, he made a deliberate decision to isolate himself from his loved ones. Too much contact with his family, he believed, would be a painful distraction to what he needed to do. He

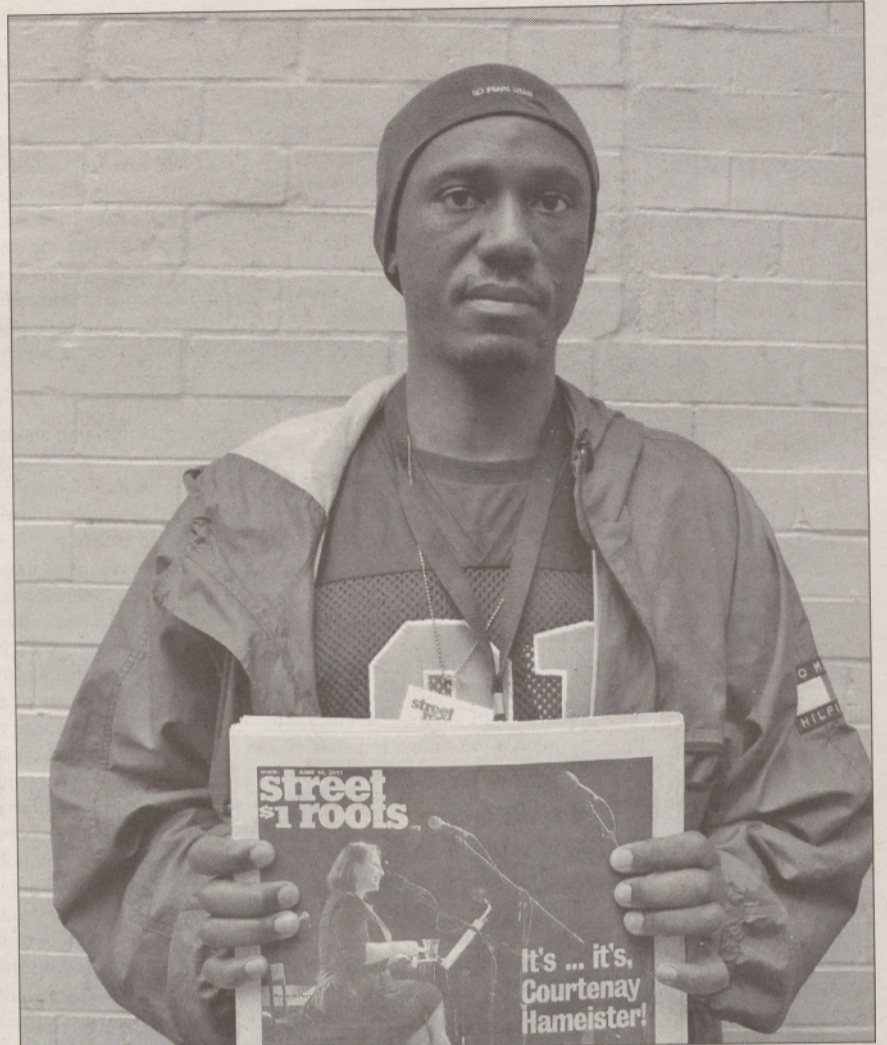


PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

describes mentally just trying to get through the first four years, halfway. If he could make it to the middle, everything else would be easy. And he was determined from day one: he would finish, he would move on, and he would certainly never go back.

Robert is striking in his earnestness. For him, it is time to grow up, to leave behind the naive notions that fast money or quick fixes to problems will make life better. He values the more sustainable result of taking life slowly, deliberately. His reflections are akin to affirmations, "to walk in a straight line is going to take patience," he says. "Don't expect anything to happen overnight. When you walk in a straight line and do everything the right way, you keep going forward." He reminds himself of this every day.

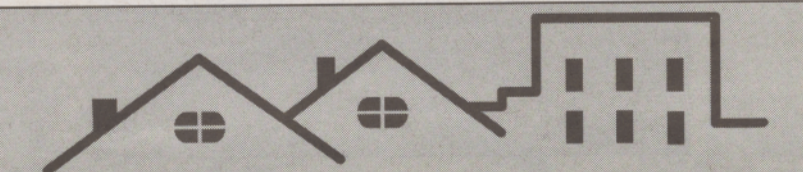
An affirmation of patience is essential finding jobs, getting back into school, all of the more obvious steps that need to take place. It also serves the smaller goals: finding time to work out again, to play basketball. But his paramount goal, the one that will likely take the most time and patience, is to find his daughter, who was just a baby when he left eight years ago. Now almost nine years old, it is Robert wants to be reunited with her. He says it is not a matter of "if" he gets her back in his life, but when and how. Like anything else, it won't happen overnight.

"You have to learn to take responsibility

so you can put those mistakes behind you," he says. "It's nobody's fault but your own. You've got to want to change, to do the right thing."

Robert says he sees too many young people without role models and too many older people stuck on a path where they refuse to grow up and make the right choices. He doesn't believe that a younger generation of men can learn to be the right kind of hardworking adults if their role models are stuck in the same patterns and negative cycles of their youth. He won't be one of those men. Being a role model is another goal of Robert's. As a young teenager he was mentored by a former Trail Blazer, and could see himself getting involved in a similar capacity.

He is also a poet, although reluctant to admit it. He shared some titles of his poems with a little prodding, "Daily Struggles" and "Never Give Up," among others. Asked whether he intends to submit them to Street Roots, he pauses and muses for a while. He appreciates Street Roots for the opportunity it is providing to get his goals jump-started, but it doesn't seem as if he has yet considered it as a space for poetry and expression. Or maybe he has not fully considered the value of his own artistic and emotional expression. He looks at the paper he is holding for a moment, "Submit poetry? Yea, you know, I think I will."



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