

# Climbing Back from Despair

Jerome Shelton

In the past four years, I've experienced a lot. I'm honestly glad to have had both the good and the bad. Thoughts of my recent past are even now still overwhelming to me. One of my most difficult memories was becoming a "high school drop-out." Family, friends, and teachers all had strong feel-

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ings about me leaving school. I had to deal with all their judgments and the stigma associated with dropping out and getting a GED.

Still, I was glad I dropped out. In high school, I felt constantly behind. All the academics and art

assignments were hanging over my head. It was too much pressure. Honestly, I was losing myself.



Techno Man, "The Inner Me" self-portrait by Jerome Shelton.

I was drowning in despair—so afraid of being exactly what people expected me to be—a young black drop-out. I resented that people could see me as a stereotype. At the same time, I was disappointing even myself.

One of the biggest challenges of leaving high school was realizing that every move had to be self-motivated. No one was going to push me along anymore. In high school, teachers nag you and call your parents to get you to stay on task. In real life, no one does this. It turns out, self-motivation is a very valuable and necessary skill. I desperately needed to be more self-disciplined and organized.

Because of the things people said behind my back after I dropped out, every day was full of doubt. People looked at me differently and certain people became verbal backstabbers. This was fuel for a fire in me. I wanted to succeed and make it into college. Every little triumph brought me closer to a better me.

Dropping out of high school and getting a GED might be the right choice for some people. But a lot comes with that decision, and a person should be thoroughly informed. I've dealt with a little bit of it all—liars, backstabbers, doubting



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friends, and people who don't want to associate with me because of the path I chose.

But getting my GED and applying to college and making it into my school of choice (Massachusetts College of Art) has shown me and everyone around me that I can do this. Lately, I'm stressed but in a good way. Both artistically and academically, I'm over-worked but it feels great. With every assignment that I turn in, I'm a little bit closer to the future they said I couldn't have.

*Jerome Shelton is 20 years old. He was accepted to Massachusetts College of Art, but he has decided to go to The Fashion Institute of Technology in New York. Currently he works as an Artist Alumni Consultant for Artists for Humanity and a Designer for Scope Urban Apparel. He loves to create and evolve. He says, "I don't do art; I am art under inspiration."*



*Jerome (left) pictured here with his family. See the article by his mother, Angel Shelton, on pp. 18-19.*

### Finding Motivation

**Proving others wrong.** Jerome says that the "verbal backstabbers" were "fuel for a fire" in him. Have you ever been motivated by the desire to prove someone wrong?

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**Proving it to himself.** Jerome says, "Every little triumph brought me closer to a better me." What are some "little triumphs" in your life that help you keep going?

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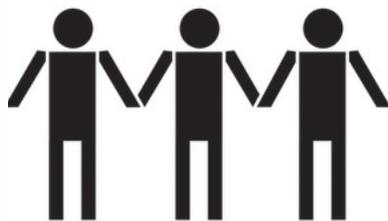


Image courtesy of people-clipart.com



**Which image best symbolizes how you "climb back from despair"?**