



## Donald Lett

HUSBAND. FATHER. LEADER.

“I understand what you were always telling me: ‘Be a soldier for Christ: just shut up and march!’”

BY FLORENCE HARAWAY

Twenty-five years ago, the corner of Howard and Navarro in Pasadena, CA had the highest daytime crime rate in all of Los Angeles. The year before that, a young man was born on that same street, Navarro. His name was Donald Lett. At around the same time, John Perkins planted Harambee Family Center on that very crime-ridden corner, as a prophetic declaration of Christ’s redemption.

Donald’s mother and father were both on drugs and continually in and out of jail. He and his brother Deon soon found themselves in “the system” for awhile until his Auntie got them out when Donald was five. She raised the two boys alongside their cousins, but the scenery didn’t change much as Donald grew. His new guardian also lived on then-blighted Navarro avenue, and Donald described home life as “harsh.” As a young teenager, he had to cope with rules like, ‘Be out of the house by 6am and don’t come back until midnight.’ That’s a lot of time for a boy to be outside.

“Know that they [kids] are listening—and will keep listening—to see if the message and the life portrayed stay in alignment.” --DL

It was Harambee’s well-known weekly basketball tournaments that first attracted Donald to the center. “In order to be on the team you had to go to bible study. And when it was all over they would be taken to McDonald’s to be fed,” Donald laughs, remembering. He also attended the many sleepovers that Derek Perkins held (son of founder John Perkins, and former executive director) at his home. Derek would explain the stories in the bible to them in a way they could understand. “The difference between Harambee and somewhere like the Boys and Girls club was that people cared about me,” notes Donald.

Throughout his teenage years in our community, Donald was surrounded by gangs and drugs. Stealing cars and participating in robberies were the choices he had readily available. He could have easily gotten a street PhD, yet he chose Harambee instead. “They were doing the very opposite of what I saw on the street.”

Donald attended Pasadena High for his first year—and unfortunately spent his remaining school years incarcerated.

He was released when he was 18, and though he came back to Harambee, he was one angry young man. “But I found a community who helped me see my choices and continually told me that every decision I made would have a consequence, good or bad,” he remembers, fondly.

Donald now says that everything he learned about leadership development he is applying to his life right now. “I didn’t realize that all the time I was being molded into a man that would give glory to God.” Part of that was discovering the gifts and talents that were inside of him. “Harambee let me travel and see that the urban poor are not just confined to my neighborhood,” recalls Donald, who met people from many different cultures for the first time through the program. “I found out there that I had passions like video editing, and that I was good at it.” With help from the ministry, Donald was able to go to school and hone his new-found skill.

When he was sick and tired of living in his dismal circumstances, he met Christ. “I knew there was something better,” says Donald. “When I heard the Word of God, it made me happy. The Holy Spirit took over one night and I just sat there. I could clearly see my selfish ways.”

Today, Donald is a 26-year-old, married father of a two-year old girl, Nayana, and a baby boy, Donald junior. He and his wife Jicken live in Sacramento, California. Donald did not know love in the sense of a father or mother figure, so the love he displays today with his own family is made of the seeds planted by what he saw, listened to and received at Harambee.

**“It was important to surround kids like Donald with people who had lots of patience with their choices—most of which were terrible!” --Flo**

Donald has his own pool cleaning business that is slowly building up a clientele, and he has started a youth group called the Gaming Zone, a group of young guys 15 to 18 who meet every Saturday at his house. “It’s a time of just being around one another, listening to where they all are and encouraging each other,” explains Donald. “Plus of course, eating and playing video games!” Recently, he hooked up with Young Life in Sacramento, and is hoping that his boys will be able to attend one of their camps this summer.

His challenges have changed. Now his priority is making sure he has quality time with his wife and family, learning how to balance his ministry with the boys. “Keeping things



simple is not that easy,” he laughs. Donald’s passion is to live and model Christ for these boys who have no father figures in their lives. He wants to be a part of their journey, as others were with him. “I’m also realizing that money is not always the best blessing. But wisdom and understanding of situations and people is priceless.”

**“They must be taken outside of their communities and their comfort zones to increase the capacity in their minds and hearts.” --DL**

Donald advises ministry leaders not to judge young adults by past mistakes, and not to give up on them when their first hurdle crashes. “It really has to take time,” he concedes. “And they may act out,” something Donald remembers well. Donald gives a shout out Fritz Brown, Rudy, Derek, Sam and Jeannette and the whole Harambee community who gave him their time. He is adamant that time is the foundation for rebuilding lives and seeing kids become people who make right decisions.



**FLORENCE HARAWAY** is site director and junior staff director at Harambee Ministries. She recently took her senior girls on a whirlwind ministry/college tour of New York City. Harambee programs include: Prep School, Afterschool Program, Junior Staff, Summer Day Camp, Institute and Pre-School. For info, visit [[harambee.org](http://harambee.org)] or e-mail [info@harambee.org](mailto:info@harambee.org).