

The Scarlet Letter: Maxwell Brown

[Parts I, II, and III]



I'd seen him out on the Philly networking and event scene quite a few times before this moment. If there's one thing that I've learned just from observing him, he's often the life of the party—the one who, even when dressed professionally, exudes...*life*.

I believe that when you look a person into their eyes, I mean *really* look them in their eyes, you can

sense their story—whether they've been through some things and truly lived, or whether they're just existing in whatever state they've found most comforting.

So when I found myself seated across from him at his desk, recorder placed between us on his cluttered desk full of papers regarding youth-related opportunities, I took one last “real” look in his eyes and prepared myself for his story.

And one hell of a story his life is...

“What you want me tell you?” he asks, looking across his desk at me. He's a little uneasy as he glances at the recorder; the bright red light seems to glare among the sea of white papers on his desk.

“Who are you, what do you do,” I prompt, attempting to relax the atmosphere. His story has never really been told—he's made that clear—especially not like this...with the press and such. I can only imagine how my shadowing him for a few hours may be just enough to cause some nervousness



“I'm Maxwell Brown and I'm the Community Partnership Liaison for the Mayor's Office,” he states.

Community Partnership Liaison?

In short, his position is housed under the Mayor's Office of Community Services. One of the departments' main goals is to help move anyone who's living 125% below the poverty line to sustainability through community services. That means for a household of one, you must make less than 15k annually; for a household of two [combined income] you must make less than 20k annually; and so forth.

“Given my life and my background, I focus primarily on kids. I think that if we put kids in a position to be successful, then they won’t even find themselves in those situations—because we’re talking generational poverty here. In that generational poverty [there’s]: attitude, behavior, demeanor and so forth; those things [also] play a part in it,” he explains. I watch the passion flare up ever so smoothly in his eyes.

Given your life?

About that...

“I was abandoned as a kid. My mom took me to the police station when I was eight-years-old and left me there. I ended up being adopted by the man who owned a gas station across the street from where I lived at. When he found out what happened, he came to the police station and got me,” he says with a hint of a smile on his face.



Well damn, there goes that story I was preparing for.

His smile fades, “the one thing that he couldn’t do—that nobody could do, because only I could: he couldn’t erase the pain.

If my mom didn’t want me, why would anyone else want me?”



That nagging question, buried under a ton of love showered to him by his adoptive father, followed him throughout his life. It wasn’t until he was about 28 or 29 years of age that he really began to confront the question that spawned so many insecurities within him. He served in the military; went in to work every day; never ran the streets or sold drugs, so by all standards he was a responsible, upstanding citizen.

But he was a broken, angry one.

In his mind, he had to constantly prove to people that he *was* somebody because he felt that they had already written him off. He believed that the one thing he *could* control was how people treated him; those moments of anger served as an opportunity to make it clear that he was not to be toyed with. Interestingly enough, the young Maxwell Brown is who and what enables him to relate to youth today. This is in part because of the fact that up until his late twenties, life was much like being in a football game or boxing match in the sense that: you don't really have the time to sit back to digest and analyze your actions or decisions; you're largely reacting to whatever risks comes with your position. This only makes it easier to blame others instead of stopping to examine your actions. It's only when you're taken out the game or get the chance to study the film, do you see what you could have done differently.

I'm not going to lie or front, that's his analogy not mine...but I thought it a good one none-the-less.



However, when your mom has just abandoned you at 8 years-old and you've been adopted by the guy from across the street...none of this is even conceivable. Hell, it may have been hard enough just trying to wrap your mind around the fact that your "new dad" (never mind the fact that you've never met your biological one) is 100%, first-generation Italian...in **1977**.

"He was my hero. He came over here from Italy and worked the railroads for almost 20 years and then he had an injury. He and his business partner bought a gas station—I remember the day it happened: Nov. 26, 1976," Maxwell says smiling, "His name was Salvatore Ciletti and they called it *S & M Gas Station* because his business partners' name was Mario."

"Is he still around?" I ask, wanting to meet him. By this point he's told me of how Salvatore had to drop out of school in the seventh grade back in Italy to help take care of his family; how he'd pay for stranger's lunch if they agreed to sit and chat with them all because he wanted his son to see that color didn't matter due to the fact that "you can always find something in common with a person"; and how he absolutely loved deep sea fishing.

His face drops and a sadness shrouds around him.

"No, no. Unfortunately he passed away October 15th, 1998. Terrible," he says with a shake of the head.

Terrible because not only did his father pass, he did so after suffering a heart attack while on the highway headed to pick up the boat that he commissioned to have built the year prior. He was finally retiring and look forward to spending time on his boat, fishing with all of his family.

He never got to see the boat.



“I was in prison at this time and that was terrible because I use to tell him all the time: *I love you, I love you* and he said to me, *‘when I need you the most you’re not going to be here’*. And it was true. It stung me inside. He never got to enjoy what he wanted to do. So it was kind of tough,” his voice is thick...with guilt.

It was at that point in his life that he had time to really face those tough questions as well as *that* moment...the moment his anger finally struck with a fatal vengeance.

“What was *that* moment like?” I ask knowing it was touchy subject.

His body stiffens some as he slightly cocks his head to the side and stares at me. After a brief pause, he takes a deep breath and his shoulders drop.

“It was SO real. It was so real...because I had already made up my mind—almost like you deciding that you need something to eat—like I’m getting ready to go kill this dude. I called up a couple of my friends and said this is what we need to do. I grab my vest, we grabbed some guns and I went looking for him. It was just that simple,” he says.

“Well damn. How did you get to that point?” I ask.

“Umm,” he starts to nervously chuckle, “long story short, I was dating this girl, he happened to be going with the same girl,” the phone rings, and he answers, “ok be right down. THANK YOU!”

There’s no doubt about this one: he says his last statement with relief. We pack up our things and head to a tinted truck. Our first stop is a local apparel store to pick up giveaway donations and then we’re off to a high school where he mentors youth.

I’ve heard great things about his work and now I finally get to see him in action.

As soon as we get settled in the car, I request that the radio be turned down and turn the recorder on as I lean into the front passenger seat.

“I didn’t know he was dating the same girl. So long story short he found out—I told the girl I didn’t want to mess with her anymore, she then went and told him that I hit her, so he came down there looking for me,” he explains.

After finding Maxwell, the Junior Black Mafia-associated man called Maxwell to his car to talk and immediately threw a blow his way. Once the altercation was broken up, Maxwell found out about the young lady’s apparent lies and where the hostility came from. He then contacted a JBM affiliate to inquire about the entire ordeal in attempt to fix it.



“Moochie called me back like two days later and was like, *He said he goin’ kill you*. I was stopped at a light [later] and he was actually shooting up my car. That’s what made me call my homies and then I sped off and I went looking for him,” he explains.

They found him in his home. Maxwell had a young man knock on the front door and when the guy went to run out the back door, he was greeted with his demise.



Once reality sunk in, Maxwell went on the run to Atlanta.

“My pop being the man that he is—and me being the man that I am—my pop was like ***we don’t run from nothing, whatever the issue is, let’s deal with it***. So, I came back, I got a lawyer and I turned myself in—which was the HARDEST thing to do on the face of the Earth. But I turned myself in and thus the journey began,” he says in slight daze.

He was slapped with reality quickly. He thought he would go to trial in three to four months. HA! After being denied bail in his preliminary hearing, he was forced to “sit” for the next year of his life...at 20 years-old. When it came time for his trial, he was placed in a holding cell with two others: Aaron Jones and Anthony “2 Guns” Fletcher. They waited to receive their verdicts for their respective crimes—both 1st degree murder and both went on to receive the death penalty.

“I didn’t even want to go in the courtroom. Like...I mean literally I couldn’t even walk,” he says shaking his head as he relives them each walking back into the cell after their ruling.

And then his turn came...

“They found me guilty of 3rd degree murder and—this is the first time anyone is ever hearing this EVER—after they found me guilty I asked the sheriff and them to put me in a separate cell. I could not face Aaron and them; I could not go back in that cell and say to them...you know what I mean? I couldn’t do it. I could not do it,” he says shaking his head more forcefully.

After his status hearing and sentencing, the football numbers started rolling in. Meanwhile, all during this time Maxwell is still angry—now more so at the fact that, “this dude was trying to kill me. What was I supposed to do? Somebody tell me what I was supposed to do.” In his mind, he was “keeping true to the streets” and anybody from the streets knows, the cops don’t necessarily get called and a police report damn sure is rarely filed. His mentality when approaching his options were simple: “If this is the work he want, this is the work he goin’ get”.

Well the man definitely “got that work” and then Maxwell “got that work” ...**thirty-four and a half** [34 ½] years worth of it. That included: **3rd degree murder, conspiracy and recklessly endangering another person’s life**—which started to add up since the judge issued this ruling for all **15** people who were present at the time of the crime.



DAMN!

“As he’s sentencing me—that’s what I said,” says Maxwell as the car stops in front of our first destination, “you coming in?”

I shake my head as we get out the car and head in. Minutes later we emerge with the bag full of giveaway items for the high school students and settle into the car once again.

Knowing that this time, we’ll be afforded a longer car ride—which means more time for a sustained amount of questioning and insight into this man’s life, I try to prepare myself yet again.

As we hit I-76, I turn the recorder back on and start again, **“So, 34 ½ years...”**

“Then he says, *‘I’m going to run everything concurrent’*,” Maxwell’s eyes begin to bulge as his voice becomes louder and more pitched. It has a hint of the most airless chuckle I’ve ever heard.

I can only describe it as a laugh of disbelief.

“I said, *‘NOW WAIT A MINUTE, YA HONOR!’*,” he shakes his head vehemently and then quickly mellows some, “so my lawyer leaned over to me and said, *‘that means that you’ll be eligible for parole in 10 years’*.”

His shoulders drop a tad as he straightens up in his seat, “I said: *OKAY, okay...I feel better,*” he glances back at me, **“but I’m still mad!”**

Maxwell was still mad...still **angry**.

He was tired of being in the county jail sitting in what he describes as “obligatory”.

Little did he know, that was just the beginning.

Just a short while later he his anger would serve as admission onto a carousel ride of facility transfers within the [Pennsylvania Department of Corrections](#). For example, not long after starting the “ride”, he was housed at the [Camphill](#) facility in Lower Allen, PA. While there he was asked where he wanted to ultimately be assigned to. He chose the [Rockview](#) facility located in Bellefonte, PA, (more than three hours away from Philadelphia) to which the guards declined due to overcrowding.

“I said: *listen, y’all just gave me all this time to do, if I’ma do time somewhere I’m going to do it somewhere where I can get an education,*” he says in what I imagine to be the same manner as he did back then.

A “Mexican standoff” ensued causing the guard’s superior to intervene and agree to Maxwell’s request **IF** he promised not tell anyone about where he was going during his stay at their prison. If he told, he’d be sent to [Pittsburgh](#). On a good day with the right conditions, [Pittsburgh](#) is a minimum of four hours away (I drive it often). Needless to say, Maxwell agreed.



His anger apparently didn’t give a damn, though.

Two days later, he fought a guard and was thrown in the hole for nine months. This happened yet again when he was finally shipped to Pittsburgh after being kicked out of all places: Rockview.

Now, Rockview was one of the better prisons in the system. At Rockview—which Maxwell describes as being run like a college campus—he was afforded the opportunity to obtain his associates degree in Liberal Arts thanks to the Pell Grant (no longer given to

prisoners). He was also an avid boxer which enabled him to be able to travel from jail to jail to fight.

Unfortunately, while at Rockview he “got into it” with the “Muslim community”, which ultimately resulted in him stabbing a man.

Cue the transfer to Pittsburgh.

When he arrived, Maxwell unknowingly stumbled into an experience that captured a reality most prisoners from Philadelphia are faced with when sent west: Pittsburgh and Philly **DO NOT** get along.

“Pittsburgh dudes couldn’t stand Philly dudes because Philly dudes was taking all of Pittsburgh’s girls,” he turns and looks me square in my eye with a smug look and smirk, “that’s probably why **you** can’t go back to Pittsburgh because if **you** go back to Pittsburgh and tell them **you** was living in Philly...” he laughs as he says this to me.

When he attempts to go on I interject and dismiss his lame ass joke.

I say that last statement with utter and complete bias.

I forgot to mention that Maxwell can have the most sarcastic sense of humor—which I can appreciate because it keeps you on your toes.

Three hours of shadowing him showed me that.

Anywho, he also apparently didn’t know about the difference in **fighting** styles between the two cities either.



“Pittsburgh dudes have a reputation for taking you to the twelfth floor, right: they’ll slam you. The ‘Pittsburgh Jack’...I DON’T KNOW THIS,” he explains.

One day during a Pittsburgh vs. Philly basketball game, a huge fight erupted. That incident ended with Maxwell stabbing a man in the shoulder after being “jack hammered”.

He was sentenced to **two years** in the hole for it.

“The turning point for me was when I was standing in front of the hearing examiner and the hearing examiner said, ‘do you have anything to say?’ I said, ‘*yea if this dude would of never had opened his mouth...*’ and I stopped because when I got found guilty for my homicide and I was getting sentenced on my homicide, I was saying the same thing. It was at that point that I realized the issue wasn’t with anybody but myself,” he says with a look as if the light bulb went off all over again.

When he reached his cell in the hole, he took a long stare in the plastic mirror.

“I asked myself, who are you? And I didn’t have an answer. I was embarrassed to keep my face in the mirror,” he says with a piercing stare.

From that point on Maxwell began to change his life.



During his time in the hole he finally faced his demons. He began using writing as a form of therapy and healing. He vented all of his feelings into a seven page letter to his mom. Although he never sent it, he revisited the letter days after writing it and when he felt no emotion as he read it, he accepted the healing that had come. He also released his emotions physically; he cried until he couldn’t anymore (he says he was in his own cell so he was “good”). He began to analyze his life based off of experiences that were both controllable and

uncontrollable, and his subsequent reactions to them. He stripped himself to his most vulnerable state in an attempt to “figure himself out”. By the end of it all, he finally got to the root of his issues: he was suffering from **insecurity** and **low-self esteem**.

The time and transformation in the hole resulted in him emerging from it more focused than ever before in life. He also emerged with the hand written blueprint for what would become his five-step self awareness program, “**It Works for Me**”.

In 1999, at the age of 29, he set a new goal in life: he wanted to be a motivational speaker. In order to do this, he knew that he needed to better understand people and human interaction. He decided to become a peer counselor so that he could “learn how to deal with folks”.

He turns in his seat and asks me if I’ve ever heard of Nathan McCall. It sounds vaguely familiar. He explains that McCall is a man who was once in prison and eventually went on to become an award-winning author, professor, and [former] Washington Post newspaper reporter. After reading his book, **Make Me Want to Holler**, Maxwell felt that he could “do this”—that change was possible.

His change in attitude enabled him to make the most of his time as a peer counselor. His time in that position caused him to reexamine the educational system, specifically the classroom setting. It taught him how to identify roles within group dynamics—the same roles that can be identified in the classrooms. You have: **(a)** people who want to be there **(b)** people who are there because they have to be **(c)** people who don’t want to be there at all and **(d)** people who are there just to laugh at others. If at any moment you start to lose control of anyone of these roles/personalities within the group [class], you lose the



message [lesson].

“Even the folks who are trying to get something, you’ve lost them because they see that you can’t even handle these other parts. [Their thought is] *So why should I listen to you?* Once the kid sees a teacher doesn’t have control of the room...”he explains with a shake of the head as his voice trails off.

With his new-found purpose and attitude, Maxwell eventually went before the parole board and was denied. He wasn’t surprised; he knew he wasn’t going home because he had 38 misconducts. On top of that, he was a violent offender who’d been kicked out of **two** jails. However, he thought it’d be more like *6-9 months*, not **two years**. But instead of using that as an opportunity to respond out of anger, he took it and used it to “go harder”.

When he went before them a second time, he took yet *another* hit: **one more year**.

“Now I’m **mad**,” he says. His noes flares some as he relives the frustration.

He had smartened up though; yet again, he went harder. The third time, he went before the panel, he finally saw his homicide in a different light:

*“I said: well listen, I don’t mean to be rude or anything but I’ma tell you straight up, once I made the decision that one of us had to go, it did not make sense to shoot him in the leg. I **had** to kill him because it felt as though my life was in jeopardy, so it had to be either **me or him**. That’s what it came down to. Now fast forward to today- if you were to ask me if that was the right thing to do: **No**. I didn’t trust the system and now I understand why I’m standing here being punished’,”* he looks at me almost if we’re back in that room, as if he’s back in the moment of fighting for his freedom.



He wasn’t asked to leave the room when the time came for them to make their decision. He was addressed on the spot:

“Either you really have changed, or you just pulled the biggest wool over our eyes that we’ve ever seen. You’re going home.”

Maxwell was finally granted parole. Six months later, in 2003, at **34 years-old**, he was released. As he sat in a Grey Hound bus station waiting for his brother to come pick him up he began to grow impatient with how long his brother was taking. He attempted to call him on the pay phone but the call wouldn’t go through. He kept trying, and kept trying, and kept trying. A young woman noticed and attempted to help by dialing it for

him, subsequently asking for the area code.

“I was like, it’s a local call, you don’t need the area code. She was like, yes you do,” he says.

At the time that Maxwell had gotten “locked” up, area codes weren’t needed to dial locally. **Damn.** When his brother finally arrived, the young woman stopped him and asked him how he didn’t know that he needed an area code.

“I told her I was locked up for 14 years. This girl didn’t know my name or anything...she looked at me and said, ***I bet you got some good dick.*** I hauled ass away from her,” he says with a look of honest ignorance and fear.

The entire car erupts into a barrage of responses and laughter. He continues on with his stories of readjusting to a new world. A few days after that incident he was at a store with his sister when a woman approached the two.

“She said: *damn you look good, I’m tryna holla at you.* Now by this time, I’m shook; I don’t want to talk to NOBODY. I say to her, *I’m chillin’ with my sister, I ain’t trying to holla at anybody.* She said: ***I’m talking to your sister.*** I was like...WOOOOWWW,” he says with his brows raised and eyes bulged.

As time went on, Maxwell went through a **rub down** [my terminology]—the period that he identifies as the one to two years that it takes for the “jailhouse residue” to “rub off of you”. Professionals would describe it as part of the critical readjustment phase that prisoners go through when re-entering society.

“Even though I [was] free, I [was] still thinking from a jail perspective. I use to get up at six o’clock in the morning even though I didn’t have to...it was hard,” he explains.

“I knew I wasn’t going back to jail. Did I know that I’d be the things that I’m doing on the scale that I’m doing them? No. I’m living a dream...I’m humbled,” he says with a raw honesty.

We pull up to the school as he finishes his sentence.

I finally get to see him in action.

I watch the man, who I have now gained a completely new perspective of within the last 45 minutes, prepare the giveaway items for the kids and usher us briskly to the school. His excitement to see them oozes into his feet, giving him a pep in his step.

He greets the security staff as we go through our checks, and then proceeds to walk around it as if he’s at home...like he’s right where he belongs. When we near the classroom, he stops and glances at me as if to ask if I’m ready, and then turns the knob.

“Maaannnnn, where you been?” a student asks him with a playful attitude as we enter the room.

He’s been missed.





I would say he “entered” the room, but it was more of an explosion.

Within ten minutes of arriving, he’s engaged the students in a recap of his previous visit, and he’s essentially morphed into the likes of a 10 year-old kid.

“C’mon, you ready?” he asks a female student standing beside him at the front of the classroom.

She shakes her head yes as she laughs.



After a small countdown, their hands slap each other ferociously as they attempt to go round for round in a hand-game. Two rounds into the match, Maxwell takes another win. He stops and looks at the class with a huge smile, “alright, let’s get started.”

Over the next hour or so, he addresses the students dreams and how they can develop the characteristics required to reach each of them. He focuses on the basics of what’s needed for each of the careers and jobs that the kids share: self discipline, patience, compassion—all things that can be developed and mastered **now**.

“The future depends on what we do in the present.” – MB

He points out that these characteristics are also greatly influenced by the stage of life that one may find themselves in and the mindsets that accompany those stages.

If you’re able to recognize the stage that you’re in, you can then tweak what’s needed within yourself to ensure you’re in the optimal position for success.

“If you can’t successfully get a high school diploma—the basics—how can an employer think to hire you and give you a more important task or job?”- MB

This brought us to the core of his lesson: the three stages of life and the mindsets that accompany them.

Stage 1: Birth-18 years-old

- “Boy they’re stupid!”; “Why are they doing things that way?”; “I know what I’m doing!”; “I’ll show you!”
- Life is easy. People don’t get it. You’re better than them.

Stage 2: 18-28 years-old

- “It’s not as easy as it looks.”; “They’re not as dumb as we thought they were.”
- The world could care less about you or your problems. You don’t have all the answers.

Stage 3: 28-35 years-old

- Re-examine your beliefs, your behaviors, your actions.
- You become a student of life → this separates the mature from the immature.
- At this point, your willingness to hold yourself accountable for your actions is what will shape the rest of your life.

The students scribble away in their notebooks and sheets of paper as they listen intently, sometimes chiming in to add their thoughts and receive one of the giveaways from the local apparel store headquarters that we visited.

Maxwell details some of his life experiences and places them within context of the three stages of life:

Stage 1: Abandonment; Anger; Frustration

Stage 2: Prison; Fighting; Confined; Isolation; Acceptance and change finally set in.

Stage 3: Travel; Money; Celebrity;

I almost feel compelled to yell out “freedom” after he writes ‘celebrity’ on the board.



As he assists a young man at the board on part of the lesson, a signal for the end of our time comes. The students are visibly disappointed and immediately move to secure Maxwell’s next visit by telling him that they **will** see him next time.

These kids are not playing about the time he spends with them.

Once we return to the car, Maxwell chats with me about the experience and gives his analysis of the field that he’s in.

“If you’re doing it and you’re results oriented, you’re going to drive yourself to drink. You don’t know the effects [of what you’re doing]. The person that you think is getting it might be the one to end up dead or hurt or in jail. And the person that you think was not paying one bit of attention to you will come up to you years later and be like, ‘yo you saved my life. Like, I got it.’ It’s interesting...it’s different,” he explains on our car ride.



He looks at me and asks if I’m hungry.

I don’t know why but I thought he knew this about me by now. Am I hungry? It’s a damn free meal. If I wasn’t I will be just because of that alone. Haha!

As our route is redirected...

I steer the conversation back to the past—when he started his reentry into society.

“The first thing I did was got a job. I had to put money in my pocket...I had to feel like...like I mattered again—like I was contributing. What was embarrassing to me was having to depend on my family all those years, especially after how I was raised,” he says with brutal honesty.

Maxwell’s first job was stacking hams off of one cart and into another at Dietz and Watson. The carts looked exactly the same which caused Maxwell to think that management would eventually realize this

and have no use for his position. He began to fear being fired which only further fueled him to take on as many overtime hours as possible.

Management eventually took notice.

The same supervisor who first noticed his work ethic eventually connected him with a staffing agency who placed him in shipping and receiving position at Elmar Windows in Willow Grove. While there, Maxwell realized that the shipping process was inefficient...and costly.

“A company might order three books. They would send the books out separately instead of looking at the order in its totality,” he explains.



Maxwell took initiative and started shipping in bulk. It only required an additional day or two of waiting for all orders to come in but it proved to be worth it. Not long after his new process, his supervisor approached him as he reviewed the numbers. Maxwell had saved them \$3,000 in shipping costs. His supervisor immediately implemented Maxwell's process and took him in to meet the owner.

They hired him as an assistant manager on the spot.

Sometime after working there, the company was sold which resulted in Maxwell being laid off and sent back to the staffing company for a new job.

There proved to be no need for worry: the staffing company was so impressed with his hard work, they decided to hire him in-house.

One day a request came in from a pharmaceutical company who had a large pill order to fill. Maxwell and the staffing owner decided to fill the positions by selecting men from a black-owned organization that worked to help males reintegrate back into society after being in prison. He loved the place and the work they represented. He immediately wanted to work there.

He told the owner of the organization that he would do him a favor by letting them hire him.

Blank stare.

Who in the hell does he think he is????

After a few words were exchanged, the owner agreed to take his resume. He then went back to the staffing company and quit. From that day forward he visited the organization every day for 30 days straight until the owner finally called him into his office and asked him what he wanted. Maxwell told him that he had a beautiful place; that he loved what the organization was doing; and that he'd never seen a all-black run business before.

He believed he could help the organization become self-sufficient.

Talk about the “Pursuit of Happiness”...

“I said, ‘I’ll tell you what I’ll do: give me a desk and a phone. I’ll work for you for free for 30 days. If you don’t like my work then we can part ways, but if you like my work, we can talk employment’,” he says with the same look I think he had that day.

It was one that captured the, “I’m not going any damn where” sentiment.

He got the desk and the phone. Fifteen days later, Maxwell was called in and received \$10,000 more than what they agreed upon for his employment pay.



The day his life changed [again], he was on assignment for the organization. He had been walking down the street when he saw a gentleman whose face looked familiar.

“I said, I listened to your speech yesterday and you had a great one...but you have two problems. He said, ‘what are my problems?’. I told him his problems. He said, ‘what do I do?’. I was like, ‘call me—if you’re serious about this, call me and we’ll make something happen’,” Maxwell explains.

The call eventually came which led to the two going to lunch to discuss things further. Over lunch, Maxwell received an employment offer from the gentleman. Maxwell wanted to be as honest as possible so explained that he was on parole for murder and how he arrived at his current point in life.



“He was like, ‘I have one question for you: Are you done with the dumb stuff?’. I said, yeah. He took me back to his office and he told his staff: ‘from this day forward, he’s working with us. He’s going to go everywhere that I go’,” says Maxwell as we pull up to the restaurant.

He turns around and looks at me.

“That was Michael Nutter the day after he announced that he was running for mayor,” he says with a chuckle and exits the car.



While working for the City of Philadelphia, Maxwell has impacted the lives of Philadelphians of various generations. When asked about how the Mayor has

influenced his life, he looks at me and raises his brow as he leans in a little closer over the table.

“One of the things I’ve taken from him is to stand my ground—if I believe that this is the way it’s supposed to be then this is the way it’s supposed to be. I respect your opinion on it, but as far as I’m concerned, this is how it’s supposed to be. Since I’m the one making the decisions, taking the chances, doing the work—then this is how it’s going to be,” he says with a stone face as he picks his fork back up.

In addition to his work for the Mayor, Maxwell took the entire two years worth of writing while he sat in the hole and turned that into the “**It Works for Me**”, a five-step self-awareness program.

“My program is not anything unique or anything that you really have to do other than become comfortable with who you are as a person and then grow from there. I’m basically telling people that your success is determined by you. And it starts with knowing yourself. Once you know your make-up, nobody can ever pull you off your square because you’re comfortable,” he says.



He also received one of the greatest moments of redemption possible just last year: the moment he was selected along with 249 others [most of whom were of celebrity and high-level status] to meet President Barack Obama.

Apparently Maxwell had a one minute conversation with President Obama which now entitles him to be able to call him by his first name.

“I look at my life coming home in the likeness of the **Scarlet Letter**. But instead of the letter **A for Adultery** sewn on my chest, it was the letter **C for Convict**. That moment when I got to meet the president of the United States, the C went away,” he says with a sobering sentiment, “because if I can get clearance to be in the same room with Barack...I’m back. **I was MJ that night**,” he adds with a mega-watt smile.

I take a hard look across the table at this 43 year-old man who has one of the most unimaginable stories I’ve ever encountered. The only thing I can think to ask him, is if he has any regrets.

He stops eating, looks away long and hard and then fixes his eyes on mine...

“The politically correct answer would be I regret committing a murder. But no I don’t have any regrets because I wouldn’t be where I am today. I would not have learned the lessons that I learned and I would not be on the journey that I am. Am I sorry? Absolutely—especially now at 43, I understand that life is such a privilege. It’s an honor to wake up every morning and get up and



experience everything that's going on around you. But regrets? No. My philosophy has been that, God tried to talk to me...and so when I wouldn't listen—metaphorically—he sat me down. Prison was my sit down. When I still didn't get what he was trying to say, he locked me down. And only after he took away everything humanly possible that could distract me did I begin to do the work that was necessary for me to become the man that my father always said that I would be, that people who knew me knew I always had the potential to become...So no I don't."



If you would like to connect with Maxwell to request him as a guest speaker or lecturer, or to find out more about his "It Works for Me" Program, you can email him at:

Maxwell.Brown536@gmail.com.

In closing, I'll leave you with the five rules to success that Maxwell built his program—and his life changing attitude—on. I encourage you to take heed to them:

- 1. Know Yourself**
- 2. Be honest with yourself and accept responsibility**
- 3. Respect yourself**
- 4. Be Aware of Your Environment**
- 5. Have Patience and Discipline**

- Sincerely Syreeta