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POWER

DESIREE COOPER

With faith, miracles can still happen

BY DESIREE COOPER • FREE PRESS COLUMNIST • JUNE 17, 2009

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For a decade now, I've been writing about the lives of ordinary Detroiters.

During that time, I've learned that there are mostly two kinds of people: those who have faith, and those who have yet to find it.

When I wrote about Edward Collins two years ago, he had spent a total of 33 years in prison while battling drug addiction. For him, faith had been elusive after his mother died when he was only 14.

But at age 58, the three-time felon finally turned his life around with the help of Capuchin monks. Through them, he professionalized a skill he'd learned in prison -- baking.

I remember an editor who read that column observing: "It'll be a better story if he really stays clean."

That's the kind of cynicism that can easily eat away at a journalist's heart. When you traffic in stories of degradation day after day, the only faith you have is in humanity's darker side.

Believe in miracles

Last week, I went to find Ed Collins. He's now a supervisor in the Capuchin Soup Kitchen's On the Rise Bakery at 6110 McClellan on Detroit's east side. The muscular grandfather and convicted armed robber greeted me with his hair in a bonnet and his uniform clean white.

"The Capuchins took a chance on me," said Collins, for whom baking provides a connection to his beloved mother. He has been drug-free since the early '80s. "I meditate. I have respect for my body. I know now to live within my means. I don't need to take from others."

This month, he was able to buy his granddaughter a laptop to take to Howard University in the fall.

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As I move into a new phase of life beyond the Free Press, I carry with me the sentiment posted on the sign outside the bakery door: "Miracles Still Happen."

Keep the faith

Not everyone I've written about has had to grow into faith. Some have always had it, even when others didn't.

I met Paris-Lapazelle Moore four years ago when she was a freshman at Michigan State University -- at age 14. Even back then, her brilliance was undeniable, although she was still a little girl writing short stories and hoping to become a veterinarian.

There were those who doubted that a child from Detroit could really hold her own at a big university. On May 9, Moore graduated with honors from MSU and is on her way to graduate school at the University of Southern California.

"I want to study screenwriting," said Moore, who switched in her junior year to her second love, writing. "I'm interested in writing films with good themes that can inspire people."

Each person I have met these past 10 years has reminded me that faith is the bedrock of change and miracles are the currency of hope.

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The chance to tell their stories has never been a job, but always an honor and a blessing.

To find out more about On the Rise Bakery, go to www.cskdetroit.org/bakery/. or www.descooper.com

Contact DESIREE COOPER: talk2desiree@aol.com.

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**PaulHue** wrote:

Replying to DetroitMark:

If a journalist (who I presume wants to be taken seriously as a writer) honestly believes that "faith is the bedrock of change and miracles is the currency" ... then I'm glad she's leaving because she's a rube.

I've only casually read Ms. Cooper's stuff. It's been mostly fluffy garbage. Perhaps this mystical view on life hinging on delusion has something to do with it. Good riddance.

Hopefully the Freep will replace her with someone serious, honest, and who gets off their @ss and finds a story.

Bravo. But she was good in hammering on Kwame. But this article was just embarrassing.

06/18/2009 3:21:37 a.m. EDT

[Recommend](#)[New post](#)[Reply to this Post](#)[Report Abuse](#)**PaulHue** wrote:

"Faith is the bedrock of change and miracles are the currency of hope." I nominate this as the year's stupidist statement. It contains at least two sources of stupidity.

"Faith" certainly is not a requirement of "change", much less "the bedrock" of change. Those convict bakers, they probably had "faith" when they were robbing people, that unlike all the countless other robbers that they'd ever seen, by some "miracle", their criminal behavior would lead to a stable and affluent life. Meanwhile, their "change" -- to obeying the law, learning a trade, showing up for work, living within their means -- required no faith.

Shall we consider the phrase, "miracles are the currency of hope"? One way to demonstrate its idiocy is to recognize that transposing it changes its meaning (lessness) not at all: "hope is the currency of miracles". Can anybody explain what either phrase means? No.

06/18/2009 2:46:12 a.m. EDT

[Recommend](#)[New post](#)[Reply to this Post](#)[Report Abuse](#)**PaulHue** wrote:

These stories contain no miracles or faith, just focused, productive work, and the very predictable, dependable results. Let that be a lesson for the kids and adult criminals out there: focused, productive work, respect for self and others, developing skills, etc., will dependably lead you to a self-sufficient and rewarding life... provided, of course, that a voting majority hasn't permitted the hitherto rewards of a free society to be socialized away.

On that point, I have only FAITH that it won't happen, though it increasingly looks like we might need a miracle.

06/18/2009 2:22:02 a.m. EDT

[Recommend](#)[New post](#)[Reply to this Post](#)[Report Abuse](#)**PaulHue** wrote:

What do these three stories of people working hard have to do with "faith"? Makes no sense at all. The obvious theme: hard work and focus, in two cases finally applied late in life, in the other case, early on.

But "faith"? Makes no sense.
06/18/2009 2:15:19 a.m. EDT

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LaMancha wrote:

I'm surprised that so few here enjoy a story about people overcoming incredible odds and being able to change their lives for the better. They're inspirational and entertaining and I'm sure the editor recognizes they are not hard news. Despite the abundance of anti-God rhetoric here, I know that the vast majority of people have Faith. If that Faith helps them change their lives and those around them in a good way, what's the harm? Why should they be ridiculed here? What's your real problem? Perhaps you are troubled by being in such a small minority?

06/18/2009 1:17:22 a.m. EDT

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