

Chapter 1

From Pillar to Post

I am a born in the 50's baby boomer. Of course, there were no laptops, iPads, or cell phones in the 50's. Instead, it was a time of childhood adventures. A time of block parties, catching lightning bugs in jars just for the fun of it and playing outside until dark with no fears of street gangs, rapes, murders or drive-bys. And this was in a black community, well, Negro, or colored as we were referred to back then. And in the late 50's early 60's, it was also a time for television and big screen movies.

There was no profanity or perversion on TV. Just nice white all American families like Leave it to Beaver, My Three Sons, Father Knows Best and the Donna Reed Show. Models of good clean family living. They even portrayed mom and dad sleeping in separate beds, like on the I Love Lucy Show. Yes, without a doubt, in my formative years television was one of my favorite past times. I would watch and dream that one-day we would have a nice house with a white picket fence and all the amenities that went along with it.

Wait, let me back up, and start from the beginning.

As the story goes, I was a happy baby. I use to laugh and play by myself for hours. Then shortly after the adorable baby period, I morphed into a cute kid with chubby cheeks and long pigtails that the adults loved to pinch and pull.

I was three when my mother and I moved to Norfolk Virginia, and while there, my sister was born.

However, before my sister was one, my mother left me in Virginia with my great aunt and uncle, and she moved back to Cleveland with my baby sister. Then after some time, I was shipped back to Cleveland. However, not very long after I returned, my mother left me in Cleveland while she and my little sister went back to Virginia for a

while. And with my mother out of the picture, I was shuffled around from my paternal grandparents to my great Aunt Bea's house.

Except for my grandfather, I hated staying at my father's parents' house. On the one hand, my grandfather was the sweetest, kindness person I'd ever met. He always had time for me. The one feature of his that stood out most to me were his long thick bushy eyebrows. When I think back, in a way, he resembled President Harry Truman. Funny, when I was little I didn't care that he was a white man. All I knew for certain, he loved me. And he showed me in a hundred little ways.

His wife, my grandmother, on the other hand, didn't have much to say to me. I can't recall a time when she didn't have drooping jowls and intimidating eyes. And she always looked at me with a scowl. For years, I didn't understand why she showed so much love for my cousin, who was only a year older, and so much disdain for me. But as it turns out, she was, what we called, color struck. My cousin's complexion is a few shades lighter than mine. It also didn't help that her baby boy married my mother without her approval. And as a result, when it came to me, she'd always imply mama's baby, daddy's maybe; even though everyone said I looked just like my father.

While I was staying with my grandparents, I was sexually molested by some older female cousins; but I was too afraid to tell anyone for fear I'd get in trouble. I thought for sure my grandmother would blame me.

Almost Five

I was happy when my mother came back. Although it seems that not long after her return, I ended up in the hospital. I went from a sore throat to my tonsils and adenoids having to be removed.

I remember my mother taking me to this big building called a hospital. Inside the hospital, there was a funny smell, and all the people there were white. I remember the doctor bending down and explaining to me what would happen. I didn't understand and I didn't really care. I just wanted my mother to take me home. But that didn't happen. Instead, they put a gown on me and rolled me into a cold room with a lot of shiny silver things that resembled kitchen utensils. And even though I knew my

mother was on the other side of the door, I felt all alone and afraid. All the people in the room were dressed in white with masks on their faces. Then they put this rubber thing that had a weird smell on my face. And in spite of myself, I felt myself going to sleep.

When I woke up, I was in another room. And it seemed like I was in that room for a while. Then finally, I was allowed to get dressed. I thought that now I would get to go home. I remember the doctor bending down to speak to me again. He asked me to say something. But when I opened my mouth, there was nothing but blood. Something had gone wrong and I wouldn't be able to go home.

Next, I remember them putting me in a large room with a lot of baby cribs. In spite of my tears of protest, they put me in one of those baby cribs, even though I was almost five. I heard the doctor tell my mother that I would have to stay in the hospital for a few days. I thought my mother would stay with me, but soon after, she left. And I was alone.

There weren't many kids in the other cribs, at least as far as I could see, but occasionally, I would hear one of them scream or cry. And I thought that someone was hurting them and maybe they'd come and hurt me too. But at night, as I lay in the crib staring out through the bars, I cried and cried, but no one came.

At first, my mother would visit and stay for a little while; but after a couple of days her visits seemed to grow shorter. At least it seemed that way to me. And I wondered what I had done wrong.

And when I was finally able to go home, I went back to my paternal grandparents' home instead. The first face I remember seeing was my father's mother staring down at me with disgust. So I made sure not to say or do anything to make her mad at me. At least I found comfort with my grandfather.

Then after a few days, I went from my grandparents to my Aunt Bea's to live.

From my point of view, my great Aunt Bea was a forever-old person. When I was five, she was close to sixty. She had mischievous dark eyes with large bags under them. And from my vantage point, she was really tall.

Aunt Bea was once a well-known black dancer. The newspaper headlines, she had stashed away in photo albums, revealed her stage name was Bea Foot. She hobnobbed with the likes of Diana Washington and other black celebrities in her day. I would also later learn that it was Aunt Bea who raised my mother.

As I got older, I had to stay with Aunt Bea every day after school because my mother had to work. While there, I often felt like a servant. I had to pick up after her. And my other duties as assigned included picking her toes, scratching her head, and letting her cheat me in card games.

And boy, could she spin a tale! By the time she was through, I was terrified! Especially the tales she told about men. They were rapists, murderers, pedophiles and the like. They were also uncaring, unloving, and untrustworthy monsters. Not to mention for her proof text, she would read to me from the likes of such magazines as National Enquire. And she would remind me time and again that she had been raped. I was so indoctrinated on the evils of men that on my way to elementary school, I would cross the street just about every time a man came towards me or spoke to me.

I use to envy my sister. Her babysitters were an older couple who loved her and treated her like a precious doll, while I was stuck with Aunt Bea.

The Best Part of My Day

When I was around seven, I couldn't wait to get to school, because there was a teacher there that I loved to see. I had a handsome male teacher, with dark curly locks. The girls in my class envied me because I got to stay and clap erasures for him after school. But he wasn't the one I wanted to see, it was his fiancée. She was also a teacher at the school. After classes were dismissed for the day, she always came to my classroom. To me she was the prettiest lady I'd ever seen. She had a cute little pug nose and smiling eyes. Her shoulder length hair was always styled and her clothing fit the times. And the second I saw her at the door I was overjoyed! On occasion, they would greet each other with a quick kiss. Then after their greeting, she would usual turn her attention to me. She always had something kind to say and she never seemed

to mind my being there. She was always nice to me and she made me smile. She never stayed long, but it was still the best part of my day.

Years later, it dawned on me that except for her mustache, she looked a lot like my mother.

The Bulldagger

It was also right around this time that my mother, sister, and I moved in with Aunt Bea and Uncle Oscar, Aunt Bea's husband. There were a lot of connected apartment buildings right off 100 Street in Cleveland at the time. We stayed in one and in the next building down was a real nice girl who occasionally came by to say "Hi." She was a teenager, but she always made time for me.

Sad to say, she was brutally raped. And as told by Aunt Bea, the rapist tied up her father and brother and made them watch while he raped her. She was never the same after that. And before long, my friend and her family moved.

A few years later, she stopped by to say "Hi" to the family and I almost didn't recognize her. She dressed and looked like a man. But when she smiled, I could still see that sweet teenage girl. But after she left, they called her a bulldagger. I didn't understand what that meant, but I got the impression it wasn't a good thing.

A Long Time Coming

I recall another terrible thing that happened while we lived in those apartments. Our next-door neighbor was a nice man. He lived alone with his huge German shepherd. Luckily, the dog was really friendly and I was never afraid of him. Then after not seeing our neighbor for a few days, we started noticing this awful smell coming from his apartment. We thought he was out of town and had left garbage lying around. Then someone noticed that it looked like someone had broken in. So the police were called to come and check it out. When the police got there, they stayed in his apartment for a long time. And later even more came.

I heard the adults talking about what happened to him. It seems someone broke into his apartment and stabbed him to death. They found his dog inside with him. Apparently, the dog had gotten so hungry that it started eating our neighbor. I was terrified by what I heard. But that was nothing compared to what I saw.

About an hour later, the coroner's truck came to pick up the body. The adults told me not to look but I felt compelled to do so. I wanted to see. I couldn't imagine anything like that happening in real life and to someone I knew. So I waited inside our apartment until I heard them open his door. And there stretched out on a gurney, in a see through plastic body bag, was what was left of my neighbor. It looked like his body had started melting in the summer heat and parts of his body was missing. I stood there traumatized by what I saw. And in the background I heard Sam Cooke singing "it's been a long time coming, but I know a change gone come, oh yes it will." For years, every time I heard that song I cried and I would see flashbacks of my neighbor being carried out.