

Born into Bondage
A true life story

By

Barry Larsen

Born into Bondage

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DEDICATION

To my immediate family whom I love and cherish and to those who are of the Jewish and Christian faith who took the time to help me be free from my bondage; especially Walter Maker, a special friend.

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PREFACE

In the early years, when the sweetness of life unfolds adding splendor to the beauty of nature, there is much freedom, like that of a blooming rose. But for me, life was like a desolate and unproductive barren land; I spent my life in a world of rejection and torment. My name is Barry, born in bondage is my story.

Throughout my early childhood I was like other boy not knowing I was in the early stages of being in bondage. As the years pass it was evident something was wrong, It was only when I entered my early teenage I was behaving strange, at night time as I lay in bed I would start fantasies about being someone else would always cloud my thoughts. In addition, when I woke up the next morning, mysteries unexplainable overshadowed me as hair pulled from my head filled my bed like a newly harvested stack of grain. Oh! I must have pulled my hair out of my head while I was sleeping. I thought having sex with women would make me feel loved, but on the contrary, the feeling of love only lasted for a mere moment of time. No matter what I resorted to, it did not alleviate my pain.

It was not until I was in my late 30s that I summoned up the courage to rid myself of the pain I felt.

I struggled with this life of bondage thinking I was stupid and ugly, but to make matters worse, I became obsessed and desperate in my

encounters with women! I even traveled nearly six thousand miles to Israel to escape my pain and suffering, but nothing changed. From the outside, my appearance was normal, but on the inside, I was in psychological bondage. The bondage I am

Referring to is none other than that of the mind and emotions. Regardless of how smart or skillful you are, you can neither outrun nor hide from your thoughts and feelings as I am sure, you are well aware.

In Proverbs 18:21, the Bible and the Torah state, "*There is death and life in the tongue.*" These two words put me in bondage and imprisoned me. People called me *dumb and stupid* and as a young child, I believed it. As if that was not bad enough, my mother's continuous joke about my nose being BIG kept me locked within the prison walls of my mind. These comments may seem harmless, but they were not. During my youth, I heard of a man who helped people like me and since I had tried so many ways to get rid of my pain, I sought him out. Upon meeting him, he freed me from my bondage.

He paid a great price, financially, and physically to help me, and I will always be indebted to him. I never realized this until I was free from bondage and understood that the quest for happiness and contentment is insatiable in the history of humanity. Until we understand this, life will remain meaningless. Ironically, in spite of the strife and toil of humans trying to attain the desired target through well-conceived plans, their best efforts always end up being futile. For centuries unending, mankind is still trying to achieve the ultimate goal of life to have love, peace, joy, health, long life and happiness. This has prompted the writing of books by various authors with diverse opinions about the secrets of life and how to live happily.

You have to exercise control over the cravings that give you “happiness,” creams that makes you look good, vitamins to assist your immune system, eating the proper food, meditation, exercising and countless other things that promise to be the secret to happiness. I am not implying that there is anything wrong with any of the above; the only problem is they address the symptom, not the root cause of the problem of being in bondage.

When I mention the word “bondage,” undoubtedly, the first impression that comes to mind is the image or thought of a person or people held against their will, cuffed or shackled, put in prison and being subjected to their master. As true as this is, the bondage I am referring to goes beyond the common understanding of bondage, for there is more to it. This bondage is applicable to every human being, and it has nothing to do with the physical. Instead, it centers in the “*MIND OF MANKIND.*” There have been many cases where people who were held physically captive or in some instances, put into prison were released. However, the state of prison or captivity stayed in their minds and kept them in bondage.

The purpose of writing this book was not to create just another account of someone’s unfortunate experiences. Rather, to enlighten others of the sure hope in store for us. Regardless of the abuse we may have endured, whether physical, sexual, or verbal, just to name a few, the same opportunity of freedom awaits all as you will soon read.

The method I have decided to utilize in expressing my thoughts throughout this book is to use the biblical account of the book of Exodus – how the Hebrew people were enslaved under the heavy hand of Pharaoh – and parallel this to my life. The circumstances are different but the outcome is the same as it entails pain, suffering and finally, freedom. This book will be in three sections to portray the truth and relevance of its content:

1. Born into Bondage
2. Exodus
3. Promised Land.

Prior to each section, I will give a brief account of the Hebrew people and the bondage in which they found themselves. At the same time, I will parallel this to my life. At times, I will pause or inject a footnote on either the subject matter or the content of previous pages. At the end of each section, I will review and discuss some of the most sensitive issues that are common to each of us in one way or another. Lastly, because I did not keep a diary, in writing this book, I had to depend on the memories embedded in my mind. All events in this book are accurate and true, although the timing may vary.

Section 1

BORN INTO
BONDAGE

CHAPTER 1

The Larsen Family

Before I vent about my life's journey, I would like to introduce my family. We were like any other normal family back in the 1950's – or so I thought.

My Dad

First, there was my dad; his name was Buster. When he was just two years old, his dad, my grandfather, died leaving my grandmother with five children. My father was sent to stay with a German family and the other children were sent away as well. As the story goes, an arrangement was made for my grandmother to meet an Italian man who was living in Italy. They married and although I am not sure of all the facts, the one thing I am certain of is that my father's step-dad was a family man. I believe this because of his insistence that if he were to marry my grandmother, he would adopt all of the five children as his own.

If my father had been adopted by someone else, I would not be here to tell this story because the chances were very slim that my dad and mom would ever have met. *So you can see how one man's decision can impact the lives of those around him. For instance, I would never have met my wife Marcia and Denise my daughter would never have been born. If I had not*

been born, my grandchildren would not exist either and that is just the tip of the iceberg! Back to my father, as far as I was concerned, he seemed to be the perfect husband. My dad would cook, clean, paint the house and fix anything that was broken. He liked to busy himself with something. If anyone needed something to be fixed, you didn't have to ask twice; he would be there in a moment to help you. If he wasn't doing something around the house or working, he would take up a hobby such as building model boats or airplanes.

Some people have to busy themselves with something all the time and my dad was that kind of person. He derived a certain amount of happiness doing this. He was self-absorbed. I distinctly remember one day when my dad was building a model boat about two feet long; he placed it on the dining room table, just to admire it. All of a sudden, my mom, for some strange reason, smashed the boat into a thousand pieces. Perhaps, it was because he was not spending enough time with her. My dad's reaction was a quiet non-reaction. He just stood there without saying a word until my mom left the room.

He then picked up all the pieces and put them into the garbage bin, still maintaining absolute silence. Afterwards, he walked into the living room, sat down on the couch to watch television, and ate peanuts while ignoring the family. My dad was totally into his own world and this became a problem for all of his children, especially me. He wasn't a bad father at all, but he never showed affection towards his kids or wife. We needed his affection so desperately!

Sadly enough, I inherited my parents' inability to show affection when it came to having my own family.

My Mom

Now, I want to introduce you to my mom, Tillie, and give you a brief glimpse at her life and how she also spent most of her time when I was growing up. I will begin by saying that she was brought up in a Jewish home with her two brothers and two sisters. My mom's family was not as religious as other Jewish families, but they did observe the high Holy days each year. The most important part in a Jewish family is to marry another Jewish person to keep the heritage from one generation to another. Well, wouldn't you know it, my mother met my dad who was of Italian decent, and very good looking in his day. His nickname was Tarzan, just like the character in a movie. His family lived near Coney Island and in the summer time everybody hung out at the beach where he would show off his physique in front of all the girls; my mother was one of them. My mother was the type of person who could sacrifice almost anything to get what she wanted, no matter what the cost. It was told to me by my family members that she was a rebellious young woman. Marrying my dad was no big deal to her, even though she was Jewish and he was Catholic/Italian. With that in mind, she was considered to be the black sheep of the family.

My mom was very pretty and my dad was very handsome. She had met her match! She had a very giving nature, even to the point of

Helping others who were less fortunate than we were. It seemed to me as if nothing much mattered to her with the exception of her morning coffee and cigarettes. Mom was not especially materialistic but if something was new on the market, she would just go out to the store and replace her old appliance with the updated model. She did this without blinking an eye! She did this without discussing it first with her husband, even though we were poor.

What were considered of utmost importance in a Jewish mother's life were her children and their education – hence the term “Jewish mother.” However, *my* mother was not a typical Jewish mother. Although she did not focus on her children as much as she did on her coffee and cigarettes, my mother cooked, cleaned, and taught my sister early on to do those chores and to take care of me. The average day for my mom began when she got up in the morning and made breakfast for her kids and then sent us off to school. After that, she would sit for hours until noon having coffee and cigarettes with her friends. Then she would get dressed and go shopping for the evening meal. I must say, even though Mom didn't have much money, she sure knew how to prepare a good, healthy meal for us.

My dad and my mother both had nicknames. She was called, “Beacon Tillie.” There was a movie theater around the corner from where we lived; it was called the Beacon Theater. Mom got the nickname “Beacon Tillie” because she went to the movies on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays for years on end. She was also known for helping others who were in need, even if it meant taking food off

our own table. At times, she did so when there wasn't much for us to eat. She never turned anybody away. But she did neglect her own children in the most important way; we lacked love and affection.

The sad part was, like my dad, my mother also lived in her own world. It seemed that neither understood anything about marriage or raising kids. *Surely, if a person does not have a role model or example of what a wholesome family is, except what they see on TV, which is a fallacy in itself, a healthy family life cannot exist for that person.* As you read about my life in the upcoming chapters of this book, it will be clear that I am proof of what I am trying to convey here. *I must say there are exceptions to the rule.* There are some people who have a so-called “perfect” marriages and families; unfortunately we were not one of those families. We were not Ozzie and Harriet.

Peggy — My First Sister

At this time, I am turning my attention to my oldest sister, Peggy, who was adopted at birth because my mother had her out of wedlock, my dad left my mom and it was only years later, I learned she was my sister.

My Sister Marion – My Caregiver

My second sister is Marion, who was like any other little girl except, instead of playing with toys and dolls, my mom made her take care of my brother Arthur until I was born. It was unfortunate that my sister was burdened with the responsibility of taking care of me. I am

going by what my sister told me about my early life, since she was the closest person to me. To be honest, I can remember very little about my childhood, other than I referred to my sister as “Mom.” Anytime I needed help, either after using the bathroom or anything else, I would call for my mom, and my sister would show up time and time again.

My mother never appeared when I called! When my sister wanted to be with her friends, I had to tag along with her. I remember one day in particular, my sister wanted to go to the public swimming pool, but as usual, she had to take me along because that was the only option Mom gave her. So at the age of five, my 9-year-old sister and I got on the bus and headed to the public pool. When we arrived at the pool, I was too little to change in the men’s locker room by myself. My sister had to take me with her into the ladies locker room. When we entered to change into our bathing suits it caused quite a scene. All the women and young girls were running around shouting, “There is a boy in the locker room!” I didn’t know what the big deal was as I was only five at the time.

After my sister and I put on our bathing suits, I was put into the kiddy pool. Then, unexpectedly, my sister came over, picked me up in her arms and started to walk into the adult pool. I wrapped my arms around her neck, holding onto her for dear life. I was screaming at the top of my lungs, “Take me back to the little pool!” In spite of my fears, she kept moving further and further until she reached the deepest part of the pool. I was frantic until she decided to take me

back to the kiddie pool. I trusted my sister completely to look out for me and to protect me from all harm. It is beyond me why anybody would think it was funny to scare a small child like my sister did to me that very day in the adult pool because she was only nine at the time.

At the age of thirteen, my sister Marion was made to work part-time in a factory to help Mom with the family finances. The sad part about that is, my sister had to give Mom all of her pay, just like my dad had to. My sister didn't have such a bad life, but she always brought up the subject about her giving Mom all of her pay and even to this very day, it still bothers her. Incidentally, my mom favored me over my sister and this also affected my sister's life, even today; it is so sad.

My Brother Arthur

Meet my brother Arthur; he is five years older than me. He was a piece of cake! In Brooklyn, this means that you never know what to expect from him; *he was so bad!* I could give you a list as long as my arm, but I'll mention a couple of things he did to give you an idea of just how bad he was. When I was a child, there was a horse and buggy that would go around the neighborhood selling fruits, vegetables, and poultry.

One day, the buggy came around and while the driver was busy selling produce to a customer, my brother went behind the horse and

buggy and while the driver was distracted, he quickly grabbed two live chickens and ran off to our house. As he entered our apartment he saw my mother with her friends sitting at the coffee table. He ran to the back room and hid there until he thought the coast was clear. The man from the buggy ran after my brother and as he passed the front door of my house, he stopped to ask my mom and her friends if they had seen a kid running with two live chickens in his hands. Of course, they replied, “No!” To be honest, we ate really well that night.

There was another time when my brother threw my mom’s false teeth down the toilet and he blamed it on me. I got hit for it. He did a lot of crazy things, but this takes the cake: on a certain day, my sister Marion and my brother Arthur were each given a piece of chocolate bar by my uncle Jack while my sister wasn’t looking, my brother stealthily hid his piece of chocolate in his pocket, pretending to have dropped it on the floor. Since the chocolate was now dirty and not fit to eat, my sister kindly shared half of her chocolate with him. After they had finished eating the chocolate, my brother reached into his pocket and unveiled his candy bar right in front of my sister with sarcastic laughter and said, “Boys will be boys!”

Having digressed to give you some of my background, the ball must roll back to the main character of the book, “Me” and possibly “You” as well! Your thought might be to excuse yourself straightaway by thinking, “We have never met so how can I be a part of this story?” It’s true, we haven’t met, but I urge you to be patient, sit back in your chair and keep reading. You will discover what I am trying to

convey and possibly see yourself or a replica of yourself on one of these pages as one a character in this book.

Chapter 2

In the Beginning...

The year was 1941 when my father was drafted into the armed forces, and my mother, having to raise two children on her own had to apply for housing and financial assistance from New York State. Based on her financial status, Mom was accepted into a new housing development called, Queens Bridge Housing Projects, in Long Island City, Queens. Based on the term, “public housing,” you may have concluded that there was crime and violence there based on newspaper headlines that indicate; there is always crime and violence in public housing. On the contrary, the housing projects were in the final stages of completion, and those of us who were fortunate enough to be accepted had a nice place to live. At times, since there was no air-conditioning, the tenants kept their doors open throughout the day. Once a month, the housing management provided music for the entire community to come out and dance to under the stars. Other times, movies were provided as well. I am not implying crime didn’t exist, we still had to be careful; the upcoming events in my life will show just how dangerous life could be even in the best of areas.

As usual, my sister had to take me everywhere. This particular event took place when I was one year old and my sister was 6. My mom

wanted my sister to go to the store to buy a pack of cigarettes and of

course, she had to take her little, baby brother along in his baby carriage. When my sister arrived at the convenience store, she placed the baby carriage with me in it in front of the store, in plain view. Just as my sister was about to pay the cashier for the cigarettes, she turned and noticed that the carriage was not there! She immediately ran outside and saw a man running off with the carriage with me inside. He was heading for the basement of the building, but with my sister screamed so loudly, the man ran off leaving the baby carriage behind! Who knows what would have happened if my sister had not noticed. Like my sister, whenever my brother wanted to go out and play, he had to take me along. I was 5 years old and he was 13.

One Saturday afternoon, my brother and I went to the Hand Ball Park to play hand ball. My brother came up with an idea to climb over a 15 foot fence and onto the railroad tracks that led to the tunnel from Queens to Manhattan. As we were picking up all the balls that were on the tracks, my foot got wedged in between two tracks. I tried to free my foot when I felt a force of wind coming from the tunnel. My brother also tried to free my foot from between the tracks when all of sudden, the train appeared. My brother was frantic! He pulled my foot out of my shoe when the train was just 10 feet from us. I could actually see the expression on the train driver's face as he kept blowing the train horn; obviously, I made it out alive.

In the 1950s when street gangs' members went out to fight opposing gangs, they used baseball bats and knives. At times, gang members would modify a simple cap gun into a lethal weapon referred to as a

zip gun using .22 caliber bullets; the firing mechanism was a rubber band. The reason I mention it because my brother at the age 14, took one of my Roy Rogers cap guns and turned it into a zip gun. At first, I was mad at him until he said I could take target practice with live .22 caliber bullets. We went to the roof and he took target practice first. He then loaded the gun, handed it to me and I fired at the roof door. Boy that was exciting! As he was reloading the gun, it accidentally went off missing me by inches! From that point on, I stayed away from my brother and his crazy ideas; I played with kids my age.

My life as a little child was what I considered to be as normal as any other child. I would play games with other kids my age, play hide and seek, race with my friends to see who was the fastest. We would go to the park, climb trees, and so on. But there was one thing that stood out; I was extremely shy around grown-ups in my family. Whenever my mom and dad invited friends or family members to come over to our house, I would immediately go to my room and play there until their departure. I am not sure if other kids behaved the same way as I did around adults.

As the years passed by, I went to a public school and only then did I realize that there was something terribly wrong with me. I began to notice how difficult it was for me to read and spell. The harder I tried, the more frustrated I became. Over time, I decided that I must be stupid because the other kids always got the answers right. The only

consolation I felt was that my problem was not obvious to others, and it would remain hidden for as long as I maintained silence in class.

My parents and I did not know at the time that I was struggling with something later called dyslexia. When I was in second grade, there was no medical diagnosis for this condition because the common assumption at that time was that students who had difficulty were just a little slower than the other kids. I would think of a sentence, put it down on paper, and when I read it, it appeared to be completely different to the original thought that I had in mind. Also, there were times when I would constantly reverse words and numbers and because of this disorder, I had problems comprehending even the basics throughout my entire school life.

In third grade, there were times my teacher gave us homework to do for the following day. After dinner one evening when everything was cleaned up, I sat at the kitchen table trying to solve one of the questions I had for homework. I couldn't find the answer to one particular question so I asked my mother if she could help me, not knowing what her response would be and without thinking. She made a comment that would forever change my life. I need to repeat this old proverb that says, "THERE IS LIFE AND DEATH IN THE TONGUE" but in my case, it was death, as my mom replied, "Are you that stupid that you can't find the answer to the question by yourself?" That comment had such a negative impact on my self-confidence and reinforced what I already thought about myself, even

Though it wasn't true! So from that point on, I found myself avoiding any participation in the classroom as much as I could.

I always tried sitting as far back as possible from the teacher so she wouldn't see me. It wasn't easy trying to avoid the teacher day after day, fearing she would call on me in front of the class and request the answer to her question. If my answer to her question was wrong, I was deathly afraid the whole class would laugh at me! This experience in my life is very interesting. I'm sure you are astonished at the way my mother answered me and the negative comments she made when I requested her help with my homework.

On the other hand, my grandfather responded with positive words. This occurred as I was approaching the age of thirteen, which is when a young Jewish boy prepares himself for his special day; the day he would stand before the congregation and recite the prayer in the Hebrew language indicating he is now a man and that he is accountable for his actions, according to the Jewish tradition, the "Bar Mitzvah." My mother enrolled me into a Hebrew school, six months prior to my thirteenth birthday. I really didn't want to do it because I lacked confidence. Trying to learn English was hard enough; how was I going to learn the Hebrew language?

Since, I had no choice in the matter and with only five months to learn the whole prayer, I gained admission to a Hebrew school. I just could not comprehend anything at all until my grandpa came to my rescue and volunteered to teach me the prayer. It was October 1st,

I had only thirty days to completely learn the Hebrew prayer. My grandpa devoted his time, exercised lots of patience and most of all displayed unending love just for me to succeed. Thanks to him, I was able to completely learn the prayer in less than thirty days as opposed to most kids my age who would take one to two years to complete the whole course. My grandpa encouraged me in ways that were so very different from my previous experiences with Mom, hence, we became fond of each other, and I wasn't afraid of him at all; I knew he would not make fun of me. He was a very smart man, but most of all, he loved me very much. It wasn't long after that, I graduated from elementary to junior high school.

It never occurred to anyone, including my teachers that I suffered from dyslexia, simply because I remained quiet, and well behaved. To my teachers, I was just another shy child and nothing more, and that is what mattered to the teachers back then. I always received an A in conduct throughout my early years in public school. I entered a vocation school at the age of 15, thinking I had more chances to succeed by working with my hands, alas! Dyslexia does not discriminate, even when it comes to a vocation or trade. So at the age of 17, I quit high school and tried to join the navy. Ironically, I almost passed the test, but that was not good enough to enlist me. Not long after that, my friends began signing up for the army.

I decided to try the army with my friend, thinking that I would have no problem passing this test, since months earlier I almost made it into the navy, which is a much harder test to pass. The day finally

arrived; we had to report downtown at the indoctrination center. So with our bags in hand, we all got on the train and headed to White Hall Street in downtown Manhattan. I was so overwhelmed with the possibility of being accepted for the first time in my life. You cannot fathom how I wanted this more than anything else in the world; to become a part of the United States Armed Forces with my friends. I passed the first exam, which was the “physical test.” After that came the written exam, which I was most concerned about. I was so nervous and unsure of the questions in the test. After we had completed the test, we were directed to go into an adjoining room to await our results. I sat totally subdued, waiting anxiously to hear my name and wondering when it would be my turn to gain acceptance into the U. S Army.

Then it happened. Wow! I heard my name. It was my turn to be interviewed by the sergeant. As I entered the room, I was asked to sit down while the interviewer was going through my test results. I sat there quietly as I eagerly awaited the first word from the sergeant. Finally, he looked at me and said, “You failed the test.” I got only 8 answers right out of fifty. *I was dumbfounded and confused. How could I have gotten so many answers wrong?* I was then told I was 4F, which simply means I was, “stupid and dysfunctional.” Since, I could not make it into the United States Army, and to me, that was the lowest point a person could go, I packed my bags and headed home on the train. All I remember was the sound of the train moving on the tracks as I drowned out all my thoughts. I lost all hope that day of ever succeeding at anything in life.

From that point on nothing mattered to me anymore. I am sure by now that you will have gotten a picture of how I felt while growing up. It was at that time that I started making a lot of bad choices, such as taking drugs because life seemed hopeless. However, there was a positive side to my life or so I thought. The Catholic Church in the neighborhood invited all the youth to join them on Thursday nights for a dance. I was hoping to meet some girls there, so I went.

Looking back now and thinking about it, the motive of the Church was twofold: one was to keep the kids out of mischief, and the second was to convert those who were not of the Catholic faith. That seemed okay by me, until the priest started to place a strong emphasis on how the Jews had crucified Jesus. At that point in my life, I had already experienced the humiliation of being referred to as a dirty Jew and a “Christ killer” by some of my friends and strangers. If the priest was trying to convert me to Christianity, he was certainly going about it in the wrong way, to say the least! So I headed for the nearest exit of the church, *before they started to stone me for killing Jesus! (Only kidding!)*

This experience left me with a bad feeling about the Catholic Church as a whole, and what it stood for. I am not sure if I ever went back to the church after that incident, but I am sure of one thing, most people can relate to this type of experience or something like it, which is really sad. I am happy to say that some thirty years later, the church has taken a different approach to teaching the Bible and how we should act toward each other.

It wasn't long after the church incident that a few of my friends decided to go hiking up-State New York. Since I had nothing better to do, I told my mom I wanted to go hiking with my friends, and she gave me permission. The day arrived when we all met up with bag in hand and took the train to Port Authority. We purchased a round trip ticket to Suffern New York; it is about a 3-hour drive. When we arrived at the campsite we unpacked our knapsacks and other belongings, and then started to explore the surroundings. I was overtaken by the vastness of the forest; remember this was the first time I had been out of the big city. Towards the end of the day, we started a fire and prepared our food. As the sun was setting, we got into our knapsacks preparing to call it a night. The one thing that stood out was all the sounds that I heard. As you can imagine, I was scared.

The following morning after breakfast, we all decided to climb Face Mountain, which was approximately 2,000 feet high. We made it to the base of the mountain, and started to climb to the top – remember, I was just 16, so I thought I was indestructible. We made our way to the top of the mountain without incident. I hadn't realized it, but I was about to discover I was afraid of heights. After 10 minutes, we decided to return to the campsite, but for some reason we had to take a different route down the mountain. Have you ever seen a movie where a person was climbing down a mountain on a narrow ledge and grabbed a branch sticking out of the rocks, which came loose and the friend had to reach out and grab their hand just

in time to prevent them from falling? That's exactly what happened to me.

As we made our way to the base of the mountain, would you know it, we walked right into a beehive — you should have seen us all run for dear life. We made it to the campsite and decided we'd had enough of camping, so the next day we headed home. That was another close encounter with death. There were numerous times in my life when I came close to death. I almost drowned and was resuscitated, and I had a gun put to my head while one of two men said, "Don't shoot him whatever you do." I was almost killed in a car crash, and countless other times I came close to death. I've come to the conclusion that somebody up there loves me.

Apart from all my close encounters with death, there was one incident where I was injured and I would feel the effects for the next 30 years. It started when a few of my friends wanted to go to the park. As we were about to leave, a guy who happened to be our neighbor, although slightly older, asked if he could join us in the game? We didn't think anything of it, so we let him, and after playing for a while, I jokingly said to the older guy, "Let's wrestle!" As I was about to remove my jacket, I got hit in the nose. It felt as though my nose was broken but I left it alone thinking it would heal by itself. To my surprise it healed a little crooked and out of shape. I never gave it a second thought until my mother mentioned it years later in a joking way. She said I had a big nose like my father — and his nose was big,

to say the least. That comment really sealed my fate for the next thirty years.

I could remember a verse in the Bible that read, ***“If you know the truth, the truth will set you free.”*** In my case, my mother’s comment was true about my nose, and that seriously affected my already low self-esteem, which is another form of bondage. This imperfection, which was of course visible, would attract many discouraging and hurtful comments. This was also to be expected from my dyslexia because the time would come when I could no longer hide it. From that point on, I became so obsessed with looking into the mirror every day just to see how big my nose was, and if it was getting bigger as time passed. I am sure you have been told of your imperfection’s and how it affection your life as well

I could not hide this kind of imperfection, as I could with my dyslexia. My obsession became so bad that I started fantasizing about having amnesia so I could be somebody else. As the saying goes, I was “one sick puppy” at that point of my life. I am sure you can understand the effects that these three words carved into my life; the experiences I had at home with my father and mother during my childhood, at school, and later in the army and how these experiences eventually affected my own future

I feel I do not need to delve into further detail about my childhood with my family. I am optimistic that the message is well communicated, and it is clear how words and actions of family can

cause pain and suffering in our lives. Hereafter, I will explain how it affected my future, and those around me and how those negative words and my dyslexia brought me into bondage. I was not a free man and for the following years, I did what any dysfunctional person does, and that is, take drugs and have as much sex as possible to overcome the deadliest disease known to man, “rejection.” I am sure that each and every one of us has experienced some form of rejection, leading us one way or another to do things that we wouldn’t do under normal circumstances.

Jail Time

The year was September 1959 just prior to my 18th birthday. It was a Monday afternoon and I was going about my business when all of a sudden, an undercover detective arrested me for drug possession. I was handcuffed, placed in a police car, driven to the 24th precinct and was booked and fingerprinted like a hardened criminal.

Because I was 17 years of age and considered to be a minor, my parents had to be informed of the pending charges. Until my father came to bail me out, I was put into a holding cell. As I sat there, fear set in, not for my father but because of the stories I had heard about young boys being physically and sexually abused in prison.

Later that evening, my father showed up at the 24th precinct. I was sure he would come to my rescue and bail me out. After my father finished talking to the officer in charge about the charges I was facing, my dad walked over to me. The first words out of his mouth were, “You stupid, blankety-blank!” And then he left. I was kept in a holding cell until the following morning. Five other boys and I were then put in a paddy wagon and whisked off to Brooklyn jail waiting for my arraignment.

In the Beginning

After we arrived at the jail, we were first directed to the processing section. As we stood in a single line the officer said he wanted each of us to give our full names, addresses, and ages. I was third in line. The first boy left out his age. The officer hit him so hard, he fell to the floor. That's when reality really struck me. When it was my turn, I gave him all the information he requested. After the last boy was finished, we were ordered to march in a single line to the showers. We were stripped naked and then clothed with prison uniforms. Another boy and I were assigned to a 5 x 8 cell.

The first thing I did was to lie down on my bunk thinking that this was no game. I was in prison with hardened criminals. I must have fallen asleep when the officer was doing a head count because I didn't hear him ask my cellmate and me to stand up to be counted. He ran his night club across the bars to get my attention and shouted: "Get out of bed and stand up front at attention!" Boy, was I scared that he would beat me like the boy in the room. The officer let me off this time, "Don't let it happen again or else!"

From that point on, things got better; my cellmate was moved and that was fine with me. A couple of days later as I was heading to the mess hall, one of the gang members from the housing projects got my attention with hand motions and threatened me with violence and who knows what else. One thing was for sure, I stayed in my cell as much as I could; that meant not taking showers.

After 30 days of being in this God-forsaken place, my arraignment was scheduled in Queen's County courthouse, we were put in a paddy wagon and driven to the courthouse and place in a holding pen. When my case was being heard, I was escorted into to the court room. As I look around the court room, I didn't see either of my parents. The judge called Miss Larson to approach the bench! as my sister stood up and shaking in her pants slowly approached the bench, the judge asked where my mom was and she said

Born into Bondage

mom was sick. The judge asked my sister how old she was, when she said 22 years of age and had two children, he couldn't believe it. She actually looked like 13 at the time. Since I was a minor and had no other offenses, the judge dismissed the case.

Approximately five months later, my mother decided to move from the housing projects because of the drugs and rivalry between the whites and African-American gangs. My mom's sister's s Lillian and Rose who lived in Benson Hurst Brooklyn, a more family friendly neighborhood and suggested to Mon to move in that area next to them. It wasn't long after that Rose found an apartment that was two blocks from her house, that was for rent. Rose called my Mon and said an apartment was for rent two blocks from her house. Mon and dad got on the train to look at the apartment and went to the landlord and agreed to take it. Two weeks later we move into our new apartment, I must admit that it was a far cry from the projects. But to make a long story short, I made new friends who were in the drugs business as you will read in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3

A Slave to My Human Nature

The year was 1962 now. I will relay some of the results that my future decision-making brought upon me because of my poor decisions I made do to my dyslexia, that lead to my poor Self-image and the negative comments as a child. I came to the conclusion that even if I was what people now referred to as “normal as everybody though from the outside, I looked good, if they only know the pain I was experiencing. Even if I was what people considered to be normal there is still something missing in each of our lives. I like so many people I tried to fill a hole in my heart and by so doing; I seemed to have no control since I became a slave to my human nature.

Think about this for a moment, there are and always have been many rich, poor, successful, powerful, and intellectual people with lists of unending issues, and regardless of who they are, some are unhappy just like I was. It seems to me that each of us is trying to fill a void with minimal success, only to end up right back where we started. I know there is hope, (I am the living proof of it) that each of us can get off the merry-go-round of unhappiness. You may have your own

thoughts about happiness and how to achieve it but consider this – just look around and you will notice that something is definitely wrong in our society today. Especially here in America, all we have to do is read the morning newspaper to see how the young and old are

Committing suicide like never before due to a lack of love and fulfillment in their lives. The thought of committing suicide never crossed my mind whatsoever. Instead, I turned to drugs and women.

One night while I was walking through midtown Manhattan, I was high on drugs and as usual, I decided to get a drink at the first bar I came to. Right then, I noticed a bar just ahead of me. As I entered, suddenly, everyone in the bar focused their gaze on me. Wouldn't you know it? I had just walked into a gay bar without me even knowing it! There was no sign on the door to indicate it was a gay bar. So I thought, what the heck, I might as well order a drink while I was there. As I stood at the counter having my drink, for the first time in my life I felt special. It seemed that everyone wanted to be around me. Things were so bad in my life, that it took men who participated in the gay lifestyle to give me some kind of self-worth. I must say that this was not exactly what I was looking for; nevertheless, it made me feel wanted and that is all that mattered to me at that time.

I ordered another drink from the bartender and then I noticed a girl dancing on top of the counter so I made my move to get to know her. Her name was Abigail; I asked her if she would like a drink. She said, "Yes!" We talked for a while and ended up at my home. After our brief encounter, I drove her home that night thinking to myself that I'd found a nice girl. So I went back to the bar the following week hoping to see Abigail once again, but luck was not with me that night. It just so happened that I met another girl there, and we talked for over two hours. I convinced her that I was a great lover; she fell

for it line hook and sinker. We eventually ended up at her apartment that night. The following morning, she woke me up and asked me if I wanted to come back to her apartment that night? Apparently, I must have done something right that night; I said, "Why not?" Just as we were leaving her place, I asked her what kind of work she did and without hesitation, she said, "prostitution." When I heard that, I decided not to accept her invitation. Four days later, I began to experience some burning when I went to the bathroom. I asked my father what was wrong with me, and he replied "You stupid son of a blankety - blank!" I had picked up a sexually transmitted disease but thanks to one shot of penicillin, I was cured. From that point on, I never went back to that bar.

Just a foot note, I learned every time somebody goes to bed with a new partner, it's like playing Russian roulette with his or her life. You have no idea how many women and men have multiple partners. For that reason, you never know what kind of sexual disease you may wind up with! Of course, the worst possible scenario is AIDS; however, there are hundreds of other sexually transmitted diseases in the world.

It was now five months later when I got a call from Abigail saying that she was pregnant with my child or so she said. I had no reason to doubt her; some women will do anything to be loved, and in this case, it was by having a baby, no matter who's it was! The only thing she wanted from me was to give the baby my last name, and hopefully, in time, we would even get married. I had no problem with giving the baby my name. That was the least I could do for her because getting

married was out of the question. About two years later, Abigail realized that I was not going to marry her, and it wasn't long after that she met somebody else and got married. I believe Barry junior had been adopted without my knowledge. I also think Abigail and her new husband were afraid I would protest the adoption of Barry Joseph. The reason I came to that conclusion is, I drove by her old address and there was no sign of her or Barry Joseph. I only hoped the best for all of them.

CHAPTER 4

Happily Ever After

About a year later, I met another girl by the name Marie. We also met at a bar; ‘what else is new’ I bought her a couple of drinks, and we spent the rest of the night dancing and drinking. At the end of the night, I asked Marie for a date the following day, Saturday, and she said, “Yes.” I called her and picked her up at her house like a real gentleman should; from there, we went to a nice restaurant for dinner. I must say, we had a nice time but the first dates are usually good when we keep trying to impress each other. After we finished eating, we left the restaurant and drove to an isolated location at the back of a boat yard and started to make out – the rest is history. I am sure you know by now what happened next without going into details.

I think you are getting the picture that most of the male species are driven by sex. For the next five months, Marie and I became more emotionally involved. Then one day, Marie said to me that all I wanted from her was sex and that marriage was not in the picture. I had to agree with her on that. The truth was, Marie was 25 years old, living with her mother and did not want to become an old maid as the Italian referred to as an old maid. With that in mind she wanted

to get married to the first guy who would ask her. I got to

know this because she revealed it to me. *For me, that was not a valid reason for anybody to get married. Whatever happened to love? Isn't that the sole reason for getting married? Look who is talking! My reasons were just as wrong as hers were. I am sure many of you have had an experience such as mine. Marie made me feel really guilty as she stood there crying with tears rolling down her face. I felt that I had no other option but to say "Yes!" What a head trip that was! So I agreed to get married against my better judgment.*

After nine months of preparation, the day finally came for us to take our vows for better or worse – it ended up for the worse. It all started when my new bride and I left the reception and headed home, all I was thinking about was consecrating our marriage, and everything was great up until the point. Wouldn't you know it, As I was about to carry my wife across the threshold of our home. When all a sudden as I was turning the door handle it fell on the floor, was that a bad omen or what. If that wasn't bad enough, it was just a matter of time after the wedding that I was given a note saying, "The sex machine is out of order," and then another note which said, "You can keep knocking, but you cannot come in!" The last note was a real doozy and not unusual for a lot of men; she had a headache that night. In spite of the lack of sex the relationship was fun, but it was short lived.

Remember me saying, I had to have my own needs met? When one of my co-workers found out that my marriage was on the rocks, he introduced me to a girl named Judy. He made arrangements for us to

meet at a local bar where he introduced us. We hit it off immediately. I was in ecstasy at that point, being drunk and this girl, who I had just met, had taken my car keys and was driving me to her house at the end of the night. I just knew from my past experience with the women I had met that there had to be an ulterior motive behind this. She came onto me that quickly, and I was right! My relationship with Judy was short lived as she tried to break up my marriage with Marie

by giving me the biggest hickey on my neck, such as you've never seen. I felt she was no different from the other girls I had been with. There is an old saying, and it goes like this "*There is always somebody out there waiting in the wings to take advantage of that person, either male or female who is going through difficult times in their marriage.*" So I told Marie what I was doing with Judy, hoping she would understand men like me who needed to engage in an intimate way, no matter with whom they are having it with

I asked Marie if she would consider going to a counseling service with me, so we could at least try to save our marriage. She was very hesitant at the idea of going to counseling, and she did not take heed to what I was trying to tell her about our relationship, and how we needed to improve it. As I anticipated, there was no real effort on her part. There was nothing else I could do or say that would make a difference in our relationship. It just didn't matter to her since she now had a piece of paper; a marriage license that indicated on October 5 1969 her name had changed from Marie Thompson to Mrs. Marie Larsen.

The year was 1974 when I asked Marie for a divorce, and she agreed to it; from that point on, we went our separate ways. The sad thing was, I really liked Marie. I have to emphasize once again, our reason for getting married was so wrong from the very beginning, and that should be a lesson for everyone, especially for me — or so I thought. Nevertheless, life goes on. For the next year, I was on a mission. Because I felt so rejected by Marie, I had to prove to myself that I

was loved and the only way I could convince myself of it was by being intimate with a woman. It did not matter what means I had to use to have that sexual encounter, which shows just how messed up and confused I was. Like so many others, I tried to fill that void in my life, thinking sex and drugs was the answer to all of my problems. The only way I could prove sex was the only answer to my problem was to have a different girl every night of the week. It wasn't long after that, I came to the understanding that sex alone was not the answer to my problems! I finally found out that true love comes from the heart, not just from a physical experience. It certainly plays a very important part in any marriage.

There are many aspects of love, and the most difficult is unconditional love. Unfortunately, no one can teach you, or so I thought, as you will read in the last chapter. I never knew what love looked like, except on TV. There was no real expression of love in my family, which is very common in many families, even today. Of course, there are many exceptions because some families do have loving environments, and I am glad to say that they are the fortunate ones. Unfortunately, however, there seems to be many more dysfunctional families.

In July of 1974, the same year I divorced Marie, I again thought I had found the perfect girl. She was not very pretty, but she was raised by parents who believed in the old fashioned way of marriage. Her name was Marcia, and yes, we met at the neighborhood bar. From the very start we had a good relationship as she was easy to please, and

so was I. She also felt the same way as I did about marriage. This time, our motives were somewhat right, but there still seemed to be something missing in our relationship. Despite that, I was convinced it would be much different between Marcia and me. She lived with her parents, and like Marie, she too wanted to leave home and get married. But Marcia was somewhat different. She wanted a family of her own, and that's exactly what I wanted. I never really knew what a family looked or even acted like but Marcia portrayed some resemblance of what family was allabout.

I truly believe we still had the wrong motive from the very start and that was, she and I thought we could fill the void in each other's' lives just by getting married. This is just something to think about! before you make the same mistake as I did countless times. I also thought that having an intimate relationship with somebody would fill the emptiness in my own life. In my opinion, throughout time, men and women have always tried to fill their voids with something or somebody. I can name thousands of ways people have tried but without any success. You may be saying to yourself, "My family and I are doing just fine." Yes, I agree that you may be an exception to the rule, but I am sure, without even knowing it, biblical principles are important in your life, even though you may not be religious.

You may be asking, what are biblical principles? In the last chapter of this book, you will see an illustration of people's lives and how biblical principles can change them. Like I mentioned earlier, Marcia and I did not understand what true love was at that time in our lives.

Nevertheless, as time passed, we became closer both emotionally, and

sexually, this made our relationship nearly perfect. I had never before had this kind of relationship in my life and what really brought completeness into my relationship with Marcia was that her parents received me as one of their own family members. Remember, I never had that kind of family or felt the feeling of love from a family before.

Whenever I went over to Marcia's house, her parents would always invite me for dinner. I remember one time in particular when I was fixing Marcia's car in the back of the house, her mother kept asking if I would like something to eat; I felt that Marcia's parents were really nice people. Their lives reminded me of a TV show called *Ozzie and Harriet*. It portrayed the perfect family every child desired, including me. For the first time in my own life, that's just how I felt — loved and accepted. I am not implying my own family didn't love me; on the contrary, my mom and dad were only doing what they had seen in their own families while they grew up. It seemed to me that dysfunctional families continue from one generation to another and nothing ever seems to change for the better. That is why I am taking the time to write this book. I hope that after reading this, somebody out there will change his or her life first and then help other family members.

Since I am writing about In-Laws, I want to propose a question! When is it wise and permissible to intervene on behalf of either your daughter or son in-law when there is a difference of opinion between them about their marriage? I am sure some of you know exactly what I am saying because some of you went

through the same kind of marital conflicts at one time or another or perhaps, you know a couple who did, and have regretted the outcome.

That's what happened to Marcia and me. Our parents played a part in our divorce. It was thirty years later that Marcia told me she had hoped I would come back to her. I believed, based on our conversation at Denise's wedding, Marcia regretted getting her mother and father involved in our marriage. At the end of this chapter, you will see what actually happens when parents get too involved in their kids' marriages.

It was after five months of courting that Marcia and I decided to get married. We decided to elope to West Virginia. That's where I had some friends who were making arrangements for the church service. Marcia and I were very excited at the time, hoping we would be able to fill each other's desires and needs. At this point, I already knew sex was not an problem for me, and as far as Marcia was concerned, she just wanted to be loved and cherished just like any other woman and I hoped to fulfill that part of her life.

Early in the morning, on the day we had arranged to start our trip to Pulaski West Virginia, I put my suitcase in the trunk and drove over to Marcia's house, as I pull up into the driveway I felt the excitement in the air

Marcia's Mom prepared some breakfast for us before we started our trip, after we finished eating I place Marcia's suitcase in the trunk of the car and her mother and dad came over said good bye and handed

me 500 dollars and off we went.

After driving 7 hours we arrive in Pulaski West Virginia, it was a quaint little town, it reminded me of some of the programs I seen om TV. As we were driving through the town, a police officer was sitting in his patrol car and noticed we were lost. He got out of his car and approached us and ask if he we needed help, I said yes. I was looking for a person name Bob and Sue house, he said I know them, follow me and I will get you there. As we drove up to Bob and Sue house they came out and welcome us with open arms, such a nice couple. We went inside the house and wouldn't t know it they had prepared food for us, that was southern hospitality. After we had finest eating we had a light conversation Marcia and I was very tired from long trip, so we called it a night. I ask where we were going to sleep, to my supplies they said in separate rooms that was a first for me. The following morning we woke early to prepare for the church service. We had a light breakfast and then each of us got into our cars and head to the church. When we arrive at the church Bob went to the pastor as Marcia and I walk up to the front door of the church, I turn to Marcia and said, I have a bad feeling about getting married today, I noticed that the countenance on Marcia's face went from smiling to disappointment. *Déjà vu! Rewind, just like Marie and against my better judgment, I agreed to get married. I didn't want to break her heart!* After all, we had travelled some six hundred miles, and it seemed to me that I had no choice but to go

through with the marriage. To my surprise, the wedding ceremony went well without any incident. Bob, Sue, Marcia and I decided to celebrate with a dinner after the service. Marcia and I chose South Florida over West Virginia as the perfect location for our honeymoon. As a result, I became so impatient to get on the road to Florida that I didn't stop to consider the conditions I was about to drive through. Although, I am aware that the Blue Mountains could be dangerous anytime, either day or night, I traveled on the assumption that "If I could travel to West Virginia without any problems, this part of our journey would be no different." Hence, I felt very confident in my driving, having left Brooklyn to drive to West Virginia. We had a stopover at Bob's house and thanked them for their hospitality, then packed our bags and put them in the trunk of the car with a thankful farewell.

Marcia and I settled in the car and traveled for a while before stopping at a local gas station to check the tires and oil to prevent any problems. I must say that Marcia was in the happiest mood I had ever seen since we met because she had just married a guy like me. So with directions in hand, we went off into the sunset. Everything seemed to be going as planned until the sun began to set. It was hard enough to drive my car in daylight, much less at night. As the roads narrowed, I could see the cliff on Marcia's side, and it appeared to be at least a five hundred foot drop.

To make matters worse, there were no guardrails. Whenever a car traveled in the opposite direction, I had to calm myself with careful

concentration, not to drive off the road and off the cliff. I was a wreck and felt needlessly trapped! As I drove further up the Blue Mountains, my fear got the better part of me, and I started to lose control of my emotions. In the impending darkness and the danger of driving off the cliff, I was now running out of gas.

Do you remember I mentioned previously that I was so insecure, to the point I never drove very far from home? Well now, I was confronted with being some six hundred miles away from home, and driving up a mountain that is very dangerous. On top of that, I was running out of gas. You cannot imagine what was going through my mind at that time.

I drove for seven hours, and it was approaching midnight when I noticed that my gas gauge was showing red. Even though I still had one quarter of a tank left, the reality of our situation began to dawn on me as the sight of a gas station at the top of the mountain began to turn into a mirage. At that point, I began to freak out as you can imagine! It wasn't long afterwards, as luck would have it, I saw some cars lining up to fill their tanks with gas. What a relief that was! However, something seemed different as there were no gas attendants assisting any of the customers. Oh no! It was a self-service gas station. *Remember, in the early days there were no credit cards; you had to use hard currency at this particular gas station.* Marcia and I nervously scrambled through her pocketbook and my wallet trying to gather enough money just for enough gas to get us to the nearest hotel.

After frantically searching, we gathered all the money we could, and it was enough to fill the gas tank. We continued our journey down the mountain and finally made it to the nearest hotel at about 4:00 a.m. Overwhelmed by the long journey, we went straight to the office to check into a room without inspecting it first. We were aghast! The room was in such bad condition, it should have been described as a, “Flea Bitten Hotel.” What made it unbearable was the fact that we didn’t even unpack anything from our luggage because of the bad shape I was in emotionally from the drive. Now, we had to survive the night and because of the fear of what might crawl onto the bed, we just lay on top of the covers with our clothes on and held each other.

It seemed like a horror movie. The walls seemed to be closing in on me; the water faucet was dripping into the sink. It seemed to get louder and louder by the moment. Poor Marcia, I couldn’t imagine what she was going through seeing me in that condition. *We never spoke about this in all the time we were married. I guess I tried to put it out of my mind. In fact, I never thought about it again until this very moment while writing this part of the book.* The following morning we got up and left the hotel as quickly as we could, that how bad it was.

We got into the car and drove to the nearest restaurant to get something to eat. All I could remember was that when we were seated at a table, the waitress gave us a menu and I asked to be excused so I could wash up. As I entered the rest room, I sat down in the toilet and cried uncontrollably for what seemed a long time. All I

could think of was that I had to get back to my house in Brooklyn as fast as possible. I was uncontrollable and so distressed that I was ready to leave my brand new car in Georgia, and take a plane home! I was in a bad shape! Unless it's happened to you, I don't think anybody can truly know or understand how it feels to freak out like I did at that time. I certainly did then! *Later in my writing, you will see just how I have used my own experiences to relate to others who had emotional problems.*

After the tears, I washed my face and returned to sit at the table. I informed Marcia about my present predicament and the necessity for us to leave for Brooklyn immediately. We ordered something to eat before we headed back home. I asked Marcia if she was able to drive while I slept on the back seat of the car, which she gladly accepted. What a relief! I got onto the back seat of the car and slept for several hours. When I woke up, I felt a little better, so we stopped for lunch. After the finessing eating lunch, I told Monica I was able to drive back home, and since we had to pass though Pulaski, West Virginia, Monica and I decide to stop at the Red Carpet Inn before continuing driving back to Brooklyn, but this time just before checking in, I asked the receptionist if I could inspect the room. This way, I would know in advance if there were any problems like we had the previous night in the Blue Mountains. After we inspected the room, we returned to the receptionist, checked in, then went straight back to our room and breathed a sigh of relief. It was dinner time, so we went downstairs to the restaurant and had something to eat. After we

had finished eating, we retired to the room to sleep. The following morning we felt refreshed, so we got dressed, packed our bags and had breakfast before we headed home. Away we went, back to Brooklyn!

We made the trip without any incident, thank God! When we arrived home, our lives soon went back to normal, and for the first five months, we went about our marriage as if nothing had happened. A year later, Marcia and my family started to have issues. They became uncontrollably angry, and to this day, I have no idea what caused the attitude and such anger. It came to the point where I confessed to both Marcia and my mother that if they did not stop arguing, I would just pack my bags and leave because I'd had enough of that as a child!

For a time, the arguments ceased and Marcia conceived our first baby. Not long after that, the contention between her and my family grew worse again. I made it clear to my family that they had to stay out of our relationship, even though I was their son, and they eventually did. Like every young couple expecting a baby, Marcia and I started to fix up the spare room in anticipation of the arrival of our child. Not long after the baby was born, Marcia focused her attention completely on the baby.

As a young couple, we were able to resolve our differences until one night when I arrived home at 1:00 a.m. I entered my house when lo and behold; Marcia and her mother were waiting for me in the living room. I didn't think anything was wrong with our marriage but

Marcia insisted that her mother stay with us. Puzzled, I asked why? *We must have had an argument or something, who knows?* I told Marcia, very nicely, that I did not want her mother staying with us. Whether I liked it or not, she replied, “She is staying with us tonight.”

I called the police to see if they could eject my mother-in-law from my house but when the police officer arrived and having explained the situation to him, he turned to me and said, “She has every right to stay here.” When the police officer left, I was furious that I couldn’t have my mother-in-law removed from my house. I felt I had only one option. I told Marcia that if her mother wanted to stay at our house, I would make myself comfortable by getting undressed.

As I started to disrobe in front of them, they decided to leave. After everything had quieted down, I got dressed and went downstairs to sit on the front steps. I began to think about what I had done and how I had shamed myself. Friends and some family members tried to comfort me by saying Marcia was no good, and other things about her but that was the last thing I needed to hear. I stopped them in their tracks by saying, “She is still my wife and the mother of my child, so keep your own opinions to yourself.” Disturbed by the incident of that evening, I went upstairs and sank into my bed.

It wasn’t long after the incident with Monica I started to go out to the bars again hoping to meet a girl as I did so many times before. A week went by when I received a court document saying that Marcia had filed for a divorce. Now, the sad part of this entire dilemma was,

the papers indicated two reasons:

One was the claim of physical abuse, which was not true. She also accused me of sodomizing my six-month-old baby girl. She used my baby as a tool for revenge, just to get back at me. If you think about it, this is not unusual for someone going through a divorce, either male or female, especially if the person feels rejected by a partner. Marcia had no idea what effect this would have on Denise in the future. To cut a long story short, I fought for over two years in the Supreme Court to see my child because I loved her and wanted visitation rights. After two years of fighting for my right as a father to see my daughter, the court denied me visitation privileges. If the court was fair, they would have at least questioned Marcia's allegations to determine if I was guilty of molesting the baby. If the judge really thought that I had molested my daughter, then I should have been convicted of a crime and sent to jail, which did not happen. This time, I really did not care at all; I was having too much fun once again as a single man!

I just want to give you a footnote on the aftermath effect of the devastation I had in the hotel with Marcia during our trip to Florida.

Years later, after Marcia and I were divorced, I went to a local bar and met a young girl and asked her if she would want to go to a hotel. She said, "Yes, of course." So we got into my car, drove to a local hotel and checked in. As soon as we entered the room, I looked at the girl and said to her, "I can't stay here." I thought to myself, the room was horrible, too small and without windows. I was reminded of the awful hotel room on my honeymoon night with Marcia. Therefore,

Born into Bondage

I had to leave. For me to turn that girl down for sex indicates just how the trip with Marcia still had an impact on my life two years after.

CHAPTER 5

Lessons Learned

I would like to make an encompassing comment on this chapter, simply because the last thing that I want to do is give you the wrong impression about my mother and father, their role in my life and how it affected my siblings and me throughout our lives. Unfortunately, like so many other men and women who have what I refer to as “the I syndrome” simply put, it is all about them and their needs. They want this and that, are self-centered or they are trying to fill that void in their own lives. This emptiness was probably caused by a misunderstanding or problem in her mothers’ lives as children or because her dads were poor role models or they lacked love in their lives. In spite of moms pass, I had a good childhood. I never experienced any form of physical or sexual abuse. My mother expressed her love towards me in so many different ways that you could assume I was the “apple of her eye,” and I could do no wrong as far as she was concerned.

Each kid in our family was fortunate enough to have parents who tried their very best in raising us kids when life was difficult. In the year

Fast frowned to the year 1993, after Mom passed away, I visited my aunt Lillian, Mom's sister in Brooklyn, New York. It was nice being with my immediate family once again. It was like the old times when Mom was alive. I went over to my aunt's house, I cooked dinner and made repairs around her house. In the evening hours, all the family members sat in the living room and reminisced about Mom and how she helped anybody in need. It was very obvious how each of us had our emotions stirred; all in all, we had a great time. After all the guess has left, aunt Lillian invited me to stay overnight, I thought that was very nice of her, and I said yes;

The following morning as I was sitting at the kitchen table having breakfast, Lillian came over to me and sat down at the table. She enquired about my parents and their relationship although she knew too well that it was not good. In my opinion, she was comparing her and much other marriage to my mom and dad's. Hers was much more normal. The question she ask was, if I had the chance, would I choose other parents? Without a second thought, I answered her defiantly, NO! I noticed that a strange expression of disbelief clouded her face, and I am sure you are thinking the same thing.

Why in the world would I want the same parents who affected my life in such a negative way? The answer is simple: the conversation I had over thine with some friends and strangers enlightened my clouded judgment about life and how they were affection by their parents. Believe me; their ordeals were heartbreaking. It was not at all easy as they narrated their experiences regarding sexual and physical abuse

Lessons Learned

and how they endured the pain of this bondage throughout the golden years of their lives. The sad

part about this group of people is that they not only ruined their lives, but sometimes, they initiated or inflicted others with the same abuse or even worse. Unless a solution is addressed at the early stage, the cycle of abuse will continue from generation to generation.

Were my mother and father perfect? No! Did their actions have any effect on me? Yes! Did I affect those in my life negatively? Yes! So who do we blame? A better question is how do we end this vicious cycle? It all starts with me and you! If by chance, you were molested, physically or verbally abused and thereby placed into emotional bondage as I was, I have good news for you! Just as I gained my freedom from such bondage, I am hopeful that after reading this book, you will find the same freedom as well.

I do hope that you will consider how the words you speak influence people and particularly, the ones we love. My advice is, “Think twice before speaking since you do not know what is in the mind of the other person.”

If you happen to be a victim of sexual or physical abuse, although I cannot fully understand the pain you have had to bear, even if the act of abuse occurred in the past, the pain can linger on throughout your life if not addressed.

The types of pain associated with abuse are hatred, bitterness, inability to forgive, anger, resentment, subjection to slavery, self-

rejection, fear, withdrawal, isolation, self-condemnation, depression, hopelessness, shame, self-pity, worry and anxiety. These pains can further contribute to mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, manic depression, mind racing, learning disabilities, paranoia, emotional trauma, obesity, compulsive eating, bulimia and obsessive compulsive disorders.

These can lead to fear of cancer, death, crowds, heights, men, the dark, nightmares, disrespecting authority, anger at God and blaming God. As a result, you may get high blood pressure, low blood pressure, heart attack, strokes, arthritis, back pain, female organ problems and so many other common diseases that affect the human body, and of course, drug and alcohol abuse. I am sure that many of you reading about these abuses and the aftermaths will be thanking God you are not victims. Nevertheless, each of us has been in shackles and imprisonment at one time or the other. With that, let's discuss choices!

CHOICES

I will begin the subject on the choices each of us makes on a daily basis and how they can affect us and those around us. In my dad's case, his dad pass away at an early age and grandma remarried a man from Italy, only on one condition! My dad and the rest of the sibling were reunited with grandma, after putting them up for adoption! if his step-father had not reunited all grandma children, neither I nor my siblings would have existed and that included our children and

Lessons Learned

grandchildren. Who is able to predict what would have happened to those in our lives such as friend and relative spouses if we were never born? This brought me to the conclusion that my grandfather made a good choice.

On the other hand, my mother made some poor choices. For instance, prior to Mom getting marriage to my dad to be, she had premarital sex and got pregnant, shortly after their brief encounter! he abandoned Mon with her first child. The point I am trying to make here is that you need to abstain from premarital sex or go through the same ordeal as my mother did. In either case, since you are the architect of your life, design it according to your choices.

The worst scenario is when I went to bed with a stranger and contracted a sexually transmitted disease, even though I was cured with penicillin. In today's society, it's like playing Russian roulette. Every time you go to bed with a new partner, you could be infected with HIV/AIDS or hundreds of other sexually transmitted sexual diseases.

Question: If by chance you do contract one of those sexual diseases, do you think that confessing to that “special person” about your predicament would guarantee your marriage? I don't think so! Even if you are lucky enough to find that special person who will accept you regardless of your past, then there might be the issue of having children. Is that sexual disease transferrable to your children? Just like a proverb in the Bible that says, “Pleasure for a moment and regret of a lifetime, something to thinkabout.”

It is often quoted that the biggest investment a couple can make is purchasing a home; I have to differ on that. The greatest investment ever ventured into as a marriage couple is having a children.

Just think how your child will impact the society as a whole? You never can tell, he or she may be the one who finds a cure for cancer or another disease that plagues our society.

Aside from the financial aspect of raising a child, more importantly is that you are actually creating a living soul that will live throughout eternity! Therefore, if you are fortunate enough to meet that special person, I suggest that both of you go for marriage counseling, and if possible, find someone who has been married for a length of years and has a good reputation. Learn from them the secrets to attaining a good marriage. There are many good books that can also give you some insights to a successful marriage and raising well-adjusted children.

I think you will find this very interesting. The Medical Doctors Association did a study on the growth of the embryo and how we have an impact on its growth. The study revealed that, after a woman conceives a child and within 24 weeks of conception, you could actually start teaching that child a wide range of subjects. For instance, music, vocabulary, literature, biblical studies and anything else that could enhance the child's future. But the most important thing you should and must do is in a very soft voice, tell that child how much you love him or her. On the other hand, loud music, screaming and yelling have a devastating effect on the child while still in the womb, and sadly enough through his or her entire life. I know every young couple wants the very best for their children and this is

the first step to be considered. Remember how those two words had a devastating effect on my life! Next

avoid and abstained from premarital sex and considering marriage counseling, both of you are ready to commit yourselves one to another in matrimony

STATISTICS

The Census Bureau identified the main obstacles to marriage that are most likely to lead to divorce as follows:

- Money
- Sex
- In-Laws

As newlyweds, money or sex is usually not an issue but after the honeymoon and especially after the birth of a child that's when the real challenges of marriage begin. Shortly after the child's birth, women often lose interest in sex. Who can blame them after the ordeal of giving birth? At this time, the man begins to feel rejection. Shortly afterwards, money issues arise. When this begins to unfold, both parties are advised to attend a Bible-based counseling service where a trained and qualified marriage counselor who is not impartial to either party can guide them through some of the obstacles they are likely to encounter. There is no guarantee that your marriage will be perfect. Nevertheless, talking

to a counselor proves that you are really serious about making your marriage work.

When their baby leaves home and gets married, parents and other in-laws may feel concerned if they see a sign of trouble or lack of love. With the best of intentions, they may intervene on behalf of their child, just like my in-laws did. In Genesis, chapter 2; verse 24, it is written, when a man marries a woman, they become one flesh; therefore they shall leave their father and mother and they should make a life of their own.

I hope that you carefully consider what you have read so far and that which you are about to read because this will shed some light on some sensitive areas that you and others will be confronted with in your life. If you stop and think, you will realize that as you read my life story, I am having an impact on your life at this very moment. I will end by saying, each and every one of us plays an important role in life, whether you realize it or not.

IN-LAWS

I suggest that couples try to resolve all differences they have. If that is possible both of them should see a marriage counselor, preferably, a man of the cloth. The reason I suggest this is although our parents mean well, they are often partial to their children. If the marital conflict becomes too intense, then and only then should the parents of both couples step into the conflict, especially if there is any sign of violence? I speak without a doubt in saying that if my daughter

was in this type of situation, I would be partial, and it would be especially hard for me to just sit there and do nothing.

I want to end with this very important note that when a child leaves home for college or matrimony, studies show that in many cases, the parents feel no longer needed. This is referred to as the “empty nest syndrome.” When there is a separation or divorce and the partner who has custody of the child sometimes they moves back to the parent’s home with the grandchild, the parents (now grandparents) once again feel a sense of purpose in life. How do I know? Just ask my ex-wife, and she will tell

Section 2

EXODUS

CHAPTER 6

My Obsession

I will liken the story of my life to the Hebrew people who were in Egyptian bondage for more than four hundred years before God called Moses to deliver them. It was only after Moses performed ten signs and wonders that Pharaoh, with a hardened heart, finally gave the Hebrew people their freedom to serve God.

That was a highlight of the events that took place in the lives of God's people before they became a free nation. Nonetheless, the subject of this chapter is premised on how they got their freedom from the land of captivity, and their journey to Mount Sinai. Moreover, while they camped at the base of the mountain for 40 days awaiting Moses' return with the Ten Commandments from God, they demanded of Aaron that he make a golden calf for them to honor as their god. In addition to this, in Moses' absence they also participated in sexual and immoral behavior. In spite of all the wonders displayed by God through his servant Moses to free them, they denied the same God so much that they even chose to return to Egypt and perish under the heavy hand of Pharaoh.

You must be asking, “Why in the world would they do that? They must have been crazy!” Well, I have done the same thing, and there is every possibility that you have too, although probably under different circumstances.

In my case, in 1977 when Marcia and I were separated, my lifestyle degenerated. I returned to my old rotten ways. It all began when I visited a local bar and, on impulse, I walked up to two girls who were sitting at the end of the bar. After a formal introduction, they told me their names were Barbara and Sabrina. I looked at Sabrina and said, “I am going to know you for a very long time.” I had no idea where that came from, but 40 years later, we are still friends, as you will read latter in the chapter. I stayed with them until closing time, and then left with Barbara for her apartment. Ironically, Sabrina now lives right across the hallway from Barbara’s apartment.

Two days later, I visited Sabrina. I knocked lightly on the door, and she opened, surprised to see me standing at the doorway.

“What do you want?” she asked.

“A good friendship,” I replied.

“I thought you liked Barbara?” Sabrina protested.

“Not really.”

With that we became close friends. We did some crazy things together, such as going to a night club to see which one of us could pick up a date first. *Although that was bad, we didn’t care?* I can

Remember calling her up in the middle of the night to get dressed for an adventurous ride on the Staten Island ferry, just for the heck of it. I got dressed and drove to Sabrina's house and we drove to Pier 66 and boarded the ferry, we were little kids playing with a new toy, we had a great time. On our return trip back to Brooklyn, I suggested we go up to the upper deck of the boat and look up at the stars in the clear night. That's when I suggested we go to my apartment and sleep on the roof, which she thought was a great idea. I took pillows and blankets from my apartment up to the roof to make it a comfortable place to spend the night. The weather was so clear we could see all the heavenly stars, making that a first for both of us. I could go on and on, but I am sure you get the idea of how well we got along. Unfortunately, it wasn't too long into our friendship that things changed. Sabrina did not suspect it at the time but my friendship with her turned into an obsession. She never knew this until thirty years later.

You are going to read how the bondage of obsession affected my life to the point that I had no control over my actions or my behavior. I am sure that many of you can relate some of your experiences to what you are about to read, which happens to be what I was going through at the time.

Every working day of the week, I would park across the street to watch her until her shift ended, and she left for home. There was a time when her boyfriend came to town, and in the middle of the night I parked my car in front of her house wondering what they were doing. That morning, I went to her apartment as early as 8 a.m.

and knocked on her door. Her son from a previous marriage opened the door, I entered the apartment and I sat in the living room and waiting for Sabrina to wake up! Unfortunately, her boyfriend John's shoes were beside the chair I was sitting on. He was a big man, 6 feet tall and weighed over 250 pounds. I weighed only 120 pounds

and was only 5 ft. 10 inches. This was where it got really dangerous; John was not the kind of guy you mess with! He was well connected, if you know what I mean.

When Sabrina and John got out of bed and entered the living room, they saw me sitting there. You had to see the expression on John face! He was mad as hell and threatened to throw me out through the window of the third floor apartment, but fortunately, Sabrina intervened. Bear in mind, the obsession I had for her made me do things I would not normally do. It was not until another two years had passed that I was finally able to break away from my own type of bondage. My obsession became so bad that I had to get away from Sabrina, no matter what it took, even if it meant quitting my job or selling all my possessions and traveled halfway round the world to Israel, thinking that I could free myself from my obsession, but ironically after months in Israel! I had enough and returned home to moms house! And just like the Hebrew people who wanted to return back Egypt, likewise I put myself back into BONDAGE when I got involved with Sabrina once a again

CHAPTER 7

Life Changing Encounters

I started to experience some strange events, mainly supernatural in nature. I started to remember at the age of thirteen, a stranger had given me a Bible,

which I periodically tried to read, remember I was unable to read or spell at that time. I kept this Bible for over 20 years, and it is obvious that it had a profound significance in my later years. At age 19, I traveled to the Museum of Modern Art in uptown Manhattan, New York City. For the first time in my life, I went there to pick up a girl. However, to my surprise, God had something else in store for me. After entering the museum, I went from one exhibit to another trying to look as if I knew something about art, which I did not. I am sure it was obvious to people around me that I had no knowledge of art; yet, I was determined to meet somebody that day regardless of what people thought of me.

As I went from one exhibit to another, as I entered the last exhibit in the museum, a large painting about eight feet high and four feet wide caught my attention. I had never seen a painting anything like it before. I became so overwhelmed that I sat on a stone bench for quite a while just gazing at it. It could be described as modern art,

with a three dimensional picture of a cross, but what I know is that I was mesmerized by this painting. I can remember thinking about its beauty, although I was not religious at that time in my life.

This very large painting of the crucifix left such an impression on me that I returned to the museum to view the cross again; it had the same effect on me as it did the first time I saw it. Here is the most interesting part of the story: I went back for the third time some months later, just to see that picture again, but when I went into the room that the in exhibit was in and seen it wasn't there, I became frantic. At first, I assumed it had been moved to another room, so I went from one exhibits to another throughout the building, looking for the painting of the cross. I even stopped one of the employees to ask if he knew anything about the painting of the three dimensional cross of Jesus, but his reply left me brokenhearted, as he answered saying, "It must have been sent to another museum." At that moment, I felt like something had departed from deep within my soul. I never went back to that museum.

As stated earlier, when Marcia and I finalized our divorce in 1977, my life really started to change. It was at this stage that I began to understand that there are some supernatural forces at work in my life. You may or may not accept what I am about to write, but nevertheless it happened. I can remember one day I was sitting in my living room watching a documentary on TV about ancient Egypt and the pyramids. As I watched, it drew me in making me feel like I belonged there. That feeling lasted only a short time because I gave it

Hardly any thought. Soon after that experience, something else happened...

As usual, after a busy work schedule, I headed back home, had a bite to eat and then went to sleep. But then, something was happening in my life. I began to sense that a ghost was hanging around my apartment. I was so scared to enter my apartment, especially when the lights were out and this time was no different. When I got home, I changed into something comfortable, ate dinner and then went to bed. As I was lying in bed, I noticed that I had left the lights on in the kitchen. With a loud voice I said, "If there is anybody out there, turn off the lights." Believe it or not, the light went off at that very moment. My first reaction was to pull the covers over my head.

Even though I was 35 years old at the time, I acted like a child. I went into the kitchen to see for myself what had actually happened, and I found the plug was not all the way into the light socket. Was it a ghost or something else? I am truly not sure even to this very day what happened. How was the light switched off on my command? From that point on, an illogical series of events began to happen to me. I remember it was at my mother's kitchen table that all of a sudden, my sister made a suggestion that I go to Israel. I don't know where that came from because that was the last thing on my mind. I am unsure of why she suggested that.

I want you to consider my past and the frame of mind I was in at that time of my life. I was dyslexic, insecure, had a phobia about traveling – remember *my Virginia experience with Marcia*? Besides that, I

worked for the Sanitation Department in the city of New York and going to Israel meant quitting my job, losing my large salary, and eligibility for retirement in 13 years with half pay medical benefits for life. You can say I had just about everything a young man could want. I had a house, a new car, money, drugs, and sex.

There had to be something very powerful that propelled me to give up a well-paid job and sell everything I had, just to buy a one-way ticket to a country far away. It surprised everyone, including me that I felt so compelled to give up everything and go to Israel. I tried to prepare for my trip in a systematic way to avoid a repetition of the occurrence with Marcia. I was informed by one of my family members that a cousin of mine went to Israel and that he had to apply for a passport. That was number one on my list. I was also informed that there was a Jewish Embassy in uptown Manhattan that helped people like me to travel to Israel, and provided them with housing and employment. That was number two on the list. So the following day, I took my birth certificate and other pertinent documents to the Jewish Embassy in New York City and told them of my desire to obtain a passport. Bear in mind, I was not very adventurous, and I had actually been fearful all my life. I had never before traveled so far away by myself. So, with my documents in hand, I boarded the train to a downtown Manhattan office that would process my passport.

After one hour on the train, I finally arrived at the 28th Street station. I had no problem finding the building where the City Hall was located, because I had worked in the city over the years. I went straight to the office and asked the person at the front desk if I could apply for my passport. She directed me to the room next door, where I submitted all my documents. To my surprise, I completed all the forms without any problems. My next objective was to apply at the Israeli Embassy. They would contact the main office in Israel, and inform them of my intentions to relocate there permanently. They would also help secure accommodation and a job for me as an auto mechanic. After I left City Hall, I made my way to the Israeli Embassy; when I arrived, I asked the rabbi about submitting a request to be placed on a *kibbutz*. Twenty minutes after, the rabbi in charge at the Embassy came over to me to confirm the delivery of my request. I was surprised and felt very satisfied with how things went. I headed back home using the train.

[I will refer you to this chapter after arriving in ISRAEL and while applying for work and living accommodation – very strange to say the least]

When I arrived, I narrated to my sister all that I had accomplished that morning, but to my surprise, a strange look of disbelief clouded her face. She could not believe that I was going to take her advice about relocating to Israel. As we sat at the kitchen table, I said to my sister, “I have an overwhelming desire to visit my grandpa's gravesite and take some of the top soil from his grave to the top of Mount

Sinai and cast it into the wind.” I am not sure what in the world I was thinking at the time – I can only guess. Let me ask you a question. If one of your family members went off to another country as I did, what would you think? Good question!

The following morning, I asked my mom about grandpa’s burial site, and also the name of the cemetery. With this information, I drove north, having little or no idea what I was thinking while I drove to the cemetery. All I can remember was standing over his grave and saying to him: “Grandpa, I am going to Israel, and climb to the top of Mount Sinai to cast your topsoil into the air.” I remember bending over the grave and putting the top soil into an envelope, and saying farewell. Just like the previous day, I was feeling good about how everything was going so easy. When I returned home, I thought about all the mysterious events that had unfolded in my life until this time.

I found out that I actually needed to have enough money in the bank for a return ticket, even though I would only be purchasing a one-way ticket. So, I still had two major obstacles to overcome before I could even think about buying my ticket to Israel. That night, I went outside and looking up to heaven, I poured out my heart and insufficiencies to God saying, “If I do not sell all of the contents of my house and my car, I will be unable to purchase a ticket to Israel.” Two days later, I received a call from a cousin whom I had never met before. She inquired about purchasing the contents of my home and wanted to schedule a time to see what I had for sale. I asked her how she had found out that I was selling everything, and she replied that

Her mom told her I was going to Israel. *I am sure my whole family thought I was out of my mind to have given up everything.*

My cousin viewed everything in the house and asked what price I was willing to accept. I asked her if she was willing to pay \$1500 for everything. She agreed without hesitation, and I was immediately given a check for the amount we had agreed. My final obstacle was to sell my car. I would then have enough money to purchase my one-way ticket, with some money left for living expenses in Israel.

The next day, I called up the daily newspaper and placed an ad in the auto classified section hoping that someone would be interested in buying my car. Two days later, I received a call, and I invited the person to my house to view the car. The following day, he arrived as arranged and was interested because the car was in good condition. We bargained over the price and after five minutes, we came to an agreement of \$1500 dollars. At that point, I can boldly say that I was free from all ties that could hold me back from my journey to Israel.

The following day, I went to a travel agency to make reservations to go to Israel. I then gave two weeks' notice to the Sanitation Department where I worked, but when my co-workers heard that I was leaving my job, my close friends Tom and Vinnie tried to talk me out of my foolish decision to give up everything. We had all started the job about the same time, and from the beginning we became very close, to the point that I knew each of their family members in a personal way. There were times when I was invited to their homes for dinner, and occasionally even stayed overnight. So you could just

Imagine how my resignation from the job would have shocked them. I was paid my salary and resignation benefits as required. At 48 years of age, I only had another few years before retirement with half salary for the rest of my life. At that time, I was completely clueless of what was truly happening to me. It felt like I was compelled to do it.

The last thing I needed to do was to obtain a one-way ticket to Israel, with just two weeks remaining before my departure. I moved my few remaining personal belongings to my mother's house and stayed there for those two weeks. From that point of my life, I began to experience more unexplainable events, even stranger than those that had happened before. Shortly after moving into my mom's house, I felt protected from my emotions, such as fear, anxiety, joy, and sadness, as though a bubble was around me, although this feeling only lasted for two weeks.

Finally, my departure date arrived and at 11:00 p.m. my friend's accompanied me to the J.F.K airport in New York to see me off. They still believed I was out of my mind. Oh! Let me introduce you to my two jolly friends, Vinnie and Tom. Vinnie was a big guy, six feet three inches tall; a black man from the Islands. Tom on the other hand was of Italian decent, but shorter at only about five feet five inches. In this threesome, I looked like an alien who had just crawled out from some rocks. Anyone seeing my passport photo could have easily mistaken me for a terrorist, to give you some idea of my looks. Moreover, it was a time when there was much distress in Israel due to

frequent terrorist attacks, so all airlines were placed under heavy surveillance because of attempts to blow up aircraft that were bound for Israel. As the three of us made our way through the terminal, we noticed that we were being closely watched by security personnel. In addition, at the boarding gate, the security police interrogated me about my trip to Israel, with questions like:

- “What is the purpose of your trip?”
- “Who are you going to see?”
- “Why did you purchase a one-way ticket?” (*This was a red flag!*)
- “How long are you going to be in Israel?”

I could not tell them that God was leading me to Israel because that might have caused them to think that I was crazy or mentally ill. So instead, I told them of the arrangements I had made with the Israeli Embassy in New York City to stay on a *kibbutz* and join the Israeli Armed Forces. I also explained my one-way ticket by saying I was not planning to return to the United States but wanted to be a part of the Jewish Nation and their cause for freedom.

In spite of my explanations, the authenticity of my claims needed to be verified. The security police took me into an interrogation room and examined everything, including my passport, baggage, and my physical body by stripping off my clothes. After this, I was cleared by security and directed to sit in the waiting area while the plane was being refueled and prepared for take-off. It was just a matter of time

before the flight attendant started to call the passengers by their seat numbers. When it got to my turn to board, I walked down the ramp with a feeling of excitement – I was on my way to Israel.

CHAPTER 8

A Stranger in Israel

The stewardess directed me to my seat next to an old man by the window, and behold, the woman sitting next to me was publicly nursing her infant boy. So, I was in the middle, and had to turn my head sideways throughout the fourteen hour flight to avoid looking at the woman nursing her baby next to me. *I was so embarrassed!* This was July 26, 1976.

I maintained this uncomfortable position throughout the flight, and only got up from my seat a few times to stand next to the restroom to stretch my legs. At one point of my trip, I was able to fall asleep for 5 to 6 hours due to exhaustion, after which we were notified by the pilot that we would be landing in approximately one hour. I breathed a sigh of relief, but this was short-lived. Just as the plane landed, my so-called protective bubble burst asunder, and I was jolted back to reality. Emotions of fear and anxiety kicked in and from that point onward, everything seemed to go wrong.

As I was leaving the airport, some guy grabbed my bags out of my hands and started running to the exit. I chased after him only to

realize that he was just a taxi driver and that was their method of operation in Israel. He tied my luggage to the roof of the cab and drove me to the hotel I had reserved. I couldn't stop looking around and thinking of how primitive the city looked. Remember, the year was 1976 when I went to Israel. We finally arrived at the hotel and while I was checking-in, the clerk told me they had not received any confirmation of my reservation. So she made a call and reserved a room for me at a hotel five blocks down the street. The taxi took me to this hotel where the accommodation was very nice and comfortable. However, the window was only about a foot wide and about 5 feet high with a limited view, but I didn't mind, as I was only staying for eight days. The room was clean and would serve its purpose.

DAY 1

The following morning, I plugged in my small appliances, such as my electric shaver, electric toothbrush, and hair dryer, preparing to start my new journey clean and neat. I did not realize it but their electricity was a 240 DC (direct current) compared to America where we use 120 AC (alternating current). To my surprise, this caused all my electrical devices to burn out! In spite of that, I got dressed, went down to the front desk and asked the clerk to direct me to the area where breakfast was being served. I followed his instructions and found the banquet room where people were in line serving themselves. I walked around the buffet counter to have a closer look at the food that was being served. The food was actually quite

different to what I was familiar with. It consisted of yogurts and cheeses, lots of dairy products, different types of breads, and fruit and vegetables. I picked up a serving tray, moved slowly around the buffet counter and helped myself to bread and cheese, and of course, a cup of coffee.

After breakfast, the front desk clerk directed me to the proper agencies that would help me get established as a citizen in Israel. I left the hotel, and walked to downtown Tel Aviv and found the office that would provide me with housing on a *kibbutz*. Remember, I was told by the rabbi at the Israeli Embassy in New York City that he had contacted the Social Service Agency in Israel – but you are not going to believe what was in store for me next?

I found the Social Service Agency on my own without any problem and went to the office, signed in and waited for the person in charge to assign me to a *kibbutz*. A woman came to me and said that in order for her to place me on a *kibbutz* I would have to fill out some procedural forms and documents, which I immediately did in both Hebrew and English. The forms required me to supply details about where I came from, my qualifications and work experience as an auto mechanic, since I had requested an auto mechanic position in New York City when making my inquiry at the Israeli Embassy. After filling in all the paperwork, I was told in English by the young lady handling my case that I should return the following day because they needed time to process my paperwork and check their records for correspondence from the Israeli Embassy in New York.

As I was walking back to the hotel, I felt overwhelmed. For the first time in my life I had been able to complete written forms without any difficulty. It was also the first time in my entire life I had ever done anything like travel to a far off country. So, there was a good reason to celebrate my first victory in this foreign land, Israel, where the citizens rarely communicate in English as their native language is Hebrew. Since, I understood neither Hebrew nor Israeli customs, I must say, for me it was a great night of celebration as I returned to the Tel Aviv hotel where I was staying after my first day in the city. I was very excited just to be in that great nation.

DAY 2

At 5:00 p.m., I got dressed for a walk around the city to observe the people. After walking through the lower part of the city, I found myself in the midst of a large group of people sitting and eating in an ultra-modern plaza overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. There is no way to perfectly describe what I saw, as I was taken aback in awe; it was the epitome of an oasis in the midst of the desert. I had no idea of what food was being served, so I assumed a scouting role by walking around the tables to take a glimpse at the food people were eating. After taking a walk around the plaza, I chose a café. I didn't want to be too obvious, so I quickly seated myself at the first empty table I found.

The next challenge was the menu, which was in Hebrew, and proved difficult to understand. I then turned my attention behind me to view the Mediterranean Sea. It was the most beautiful sight I have ever

seen in my life, with all types of boats, both large and small, and some that I had never seen before. I was so captivated by it all that I lost track of time. It wasn't long before a waiter came over to my table but he spoke very little English. He tried to communicate the entrees on the menu to me, but on discovering that I was from the United States, he suggested a familiar dish, so I ordered a salad.

After dinner, I decided to take a stroll around the plaza before calling it a night, but instead of going back the way I came, I found a park alongside the water's edge that led back to my hotel. The park seemed to be familiar, with people walking their dogs, and families sitting on benches playing with their kids. I must say it was a perfect night.

DAY 3

The following morning I woke up with the anticipation of being placed on a *kibbutz*. After getting dressed, I went down to the dining room to have some breakfast, which I wasn't really crazy about, so I ate a little bit of fruit and had a cup of coffee before setting on my way.

It was a mile or so to the Social Services office. When I arrived, I immediately went to the person handling my case. I was offered a seat on the bench and was instructed to fill out *more* forms to work as a mechanic on a *kibbutz*. To my astonishment, I was once again able to fill out the necessary paperwork in English. I handed the documents over to her, and she went to look for my files. I waited for her to call my name. After a short time, my name was called and she

confirmed that no records had been received from the Israeli Embassy in New York City. She advised that I check back the following day, promising to look further into the matter.

I was very disappointed but since I had nothing to do for the rest of the day, I decided to tour the city once again to check out where the local banks were located so I could open a savings account. You may find it interesting to know that all Israeli banks and businesses open at 9:00 a.m. and close at 1:00 p.m. for lunch. Workers then take a *siesta* (similar to Europe) and then reopen at 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. Fortunately, it was still early in the afternoon, so I decided to get more familiar with my surroundings. However, due to the language barrier, I started to feel a little lonely. To worsen the matter, the Israeli people did not act kindly to strangers because of a bomb explosion that had occurred in the marketplace in Tel Aviv, only two days prior to my arrival. This wasn't the first time this had happened. It was actually a common event in the lives of the Jewish people living in Israel. With this, I could understand their suspicion of foreigners. However, for me it was very difficult because I was not able to converse or interact with anyone.

After touring the city, I went to get a snack and then went straight to the hotel and hung out until evening came. Then, like the previous night, I visited the plaza that accommodated people from all over the world. My intention was to meet an English speaking person; however, *no such luck!* I still had nothing else to do, and since it was too early to go back to the hotel, so I decided to go to Movie Theater down town Telavi, just to pass time. Fortunately, "Rocky" was playing

that day and because I needed some kind of inspiration at that time in my life, I resolved to watch this movie. I purchased a ticket and entered the theater, only to see soldiers with machine guns ready to stop anyone who looked suspicious to them. *Not again!* I thought, knowing full well there had been several attempts to kill innocent people, even in movie theaters. I went in courageously and sat down to watch the movie. At the end, I felt deeply inspired and this inspiration made me want to continue on this journey. I returned to the hotel with this feeling and immediately retired to bed.

DAY 4

The morning began with a feeling of inspiration from the previous night. I went for breakfast and helped myself to the buffet. It was still too early for the Social Services office to be open so I took my time walking there, looking in the local shops on my way. Little did I know the fate that was about to befall me, so I took my time enjoying the beautiful scenery on the way. On entering the Social Services' office, my countenance changed, as feelings of disappointment clouded my head, eating deep like a cankerworm. Without having to utter a word, the look on the face of the woman handling my case signified that something was wrong. She explained that my records were nowhere to be found and then suggested I go to another Social Services department down the street. Perhaps, they may have received my *kibbutz* request.

She gave me the directions, so I left feeling a little hopeful. I located the building, entered, and headed straight for the receptionist who

directed me to another room filled with volunteers who were also seeking placement on a *kibbutz*. I tried explaining my situation to the receptionist, and she assured me that she would look into the matter diligently. Pending her arrival, I took my time to inspect the room. It was like a haven, where destinies were rewritten for young people eagerly awaiting a placement on a *kibbutz*. One after the other, their names were called, and they were assigned a place to go. A short time later, the lady came back to me with the same disappointing message – there was no record in her files of me being assigned to a *kibbutz*. Now, things seemed to be getting bleaker by the minute. I went back to the social worker at the first Social Services office and explained to her that my records had not been received by the office that she had sent me to. She advised me once again to return to her the next day – perhaps my application would be located.

Then it started to happen all over again! The feelings of rejection, insecurity, and countless negative thoughts overwhelmed me. To worsen the situation, I was running out of money, so I was becoming very worried. I began to prioritize my needs, and I worked out how much money I could spend daily on food and cigarettes. I then went to the local store and bought five slices of cheese and a piece of bread. *No more eating out for me!* Compared to the United States where we buy cheese and other cold cuts by the pound, in Israel, they are sold in grams. I sat down by the water's edge to eat. After I had finished eating there was nothing else to do so I decided to return to the hotel.

As was my usual routine, I went to the plaza just to be around people, even though I was alienated from them due to language. Of course, I was very lonely but it did not matter to me anymore. I can remember sitting by myself when all of a sudden, a little girl came over to me with a bright smile. You cannot imagine how much that smile meant to me, especially at that time. After that warmth and affection, I decided to call it a day, so I headed back to the hotel by the way of the park. When I got to my room, I retired to bed immediately and began to cry uncontrollably. I had to put the pillow over my mouth so that people in the next room wouldn't hear me crying. That gives you some idea how loud it was. Eventually, nature took its course, and I fell asleep.

I don't know why, but for some reason, I felt somewhat refreshed in the morning and this time during breakfast, I devoured almost everything in sight, regardless of what it was. After I had eaten enough breakfast, I headed stealthily back to the food counter and, convinced that nobody was watching, I placed some food in a napkin and walked back to my room, assured that I would have dinner that night. I then made my way back to the Social Services office to check if my request had been located, but it was just like the day before. My request was nowhere to be found, and I was again asked to return the next day. I went back to the hotel and stayed indoors for the rest of the day. Around 8 p.m., I ate the food I had taken from the breakfast buffet counter earlier that day. After "dinner," I got dressed for the promenade. A couple of hours later, I was on my way back to the hotel to sleep, and once again I wrapped the pillow over my face and

I wept aloud.

DAY 5

Just like the days before, I headed to the Social Services office, and again there was no confirmation of my request from the Israeli Embassy in New York City. I felt so disappointed, betrayed, lonely, and rejected in this strange land of Israel. Feelings of rejection flooded my mind as I returned to the hotel feeling unaccomplished and in a daze. To put my family's mind at rest, I went to the plaza that evening to write them a letter. Even before my departure from the States they had been very worried about my travels. In the letter, I assured them that everything was fine, but I knew within me that after writing the letter I would go back to the hotel and cry myself to sleep.

DAY 6

It was 7 pm Friday night that was the start of the Sabbath, and everything closed by 7:00 p.m. until the following day, which was Saturday, at 7:00 p.m. I centered my expectations basically on being granted my request to be placed on a *kibbutz* before the start of the Sabbath or else I would have to wait until Sunday morning to know my fate. I had an extra-large breakfast and left for the Social Services office. *Guess what! No request found, no good news!*

Like I did before, I left the office feeling hopeless and walked around the city once again, dazed, in shock and totally exhausted. With

nothing to do, so I went back to the hotel. To my surprise when I entered the hotel, the front desk clerk informed me that they needed the room, so I had to leave. *You can imagine my first response to that clerk.* I told her that I could not leave, so they agreed to let me stay for another week. I went to my room immediately and remained there until after the Sabbath; all activities would resume on Saturday evening. *This felt like the longest day of my entire life – every minute seemed to last a year.*

At exactly 9:00 p.m. on Saturday evening when the Sabbath was over, I got dressed and decided to go to the local bar in downtown Tel Aviv. I was desperate to talk to someone, as my loneliness was really beginning to get to me. *Disappointments were now turning to depression.* I entered the bar, sat down on the stool and ordered a drink. It appeared as if everyone was having fun and laughing. To be honest, as the minutes passed by, I was even more depressed. Despite this, I stayed till midnight before finally leaving the bar for my hotel. I walked down a dark and lonely street, and with my fist raised to heaven, I screamed at the top of my lungs, *“Why are you doing this to me?”* This gave way to a downpour of tears that streamed down my face.

My heart was broken, and I was like Jesus in the Bible who resorted to the supreme and final option by saying to God, “Why have you forsaken me? Why is this happening to me?” Although there was no answer, I nevertheless imagined God was looking down from heaven as a loving Father and saying with sadness in His heart, “Just a little while longer. Everything will be okay, you will see.”

I continued my walk back to the hotel through the park and saw a fork on the road. As I approached the fork, I noticed some men of the gay lifestyle hanging out. At that moment, I had two options. The first option was to turn to the left and without a doubt have someone to talk to. Despite being incredibly lonely, this was not the option I wanted, even if it meant deep loneliness. The second option was to keep walking. I chose the latter and stayed on the path that lead me back to the hotel. Once again, I began to cry uncontrollably with my face buried in the pillow, screaming aloud to God before falling asleep out of exhaustion. Looking back thirty years ago, I now understand what God was preparing me for.

DAY 7

The Sabbath was over, so very early on Sunday morning, I went down to the buffet, had my breakfast and returned to the Social Services office to see if they had found my request forms. Guess what, no records! With that, I went straight to the hotel and remained there. In the evening, I decided that since there would not be a place for me on a *kibbutz*, I might as well go downtown to get a bite to eat. This decision led me to meeting a young guy named Jim from the States. Finally, I had someone to talk to. He said he was going to visit the old part in Tel Aviv and asked me if I wanted to join him the following day with his friends. Without any hesitation, I replied, "Yes." After some more talking, we departed our ways and I returned to the hotel feeling much better just knowing that I had someone and something to look forward to.

DAY 8

Today, like every other day, I got up early in the morning and went to the Social Services office to see once again to see if my request forms had been located. Lo and behold, they had not. I could understand the expression of disappointment that clouded the face of the woman handling my case, knowing that I traveled 6000 miles to become an Israeli citizen.

I went back to the hotel and stayed there all day until 4:00 p.m. just looking at the clock. Then I got dressed hurriedly, left the hotel and ran a mile and a half – I was so excited to be meeting Jim and his male friend Bob. We became the American trio. We got on a bus and went to the old part of Tel Aviv, which goes back a thousand years in time. The new city was four miles away. I had a great time with them that night, and we all agreed to meet the next day around the same time. So I went back to the hotel, but this time I felt like a million bucks. I didn't cry.

DAY 9

I went down to eat breakfast the following morning and as I was walking to the Social Services office, I said to God, "If I can't find a placement on a *kibbutz* soon I will have to return to the States because I'm running low on cash."

This time, the social worker said to me that somebody from the States did not show up for their position as an auto worker. If I wanted to fill that position, I could. *At that time, I had no idea what in the*

World God was doing. All I knew for sure was that this was the same position I applied for at the Jewish Embassy in New York City. Could this be a coincidence, or was God at work in my life? This was one of many strange event that would happened to me while in Israel, but this time, it turned out for the better, *and I knew in my heart that it wouldn't be the last either.* So arrangements were made for me to go to the kibbutz, and with the paperwork finalized, I left the office with a big smile on my face signifying it was time to really celebrate.

At 5:00 p.m. I left the hotel feeling confident that everything would be okay from this point on. Later that night, I met with my new American friends, and we decided to go out and get something to eat. We wound up at a sidewalk cafe. As we sat down at one of the tables, I noticed a man eating his pizza with a knife and fork. That was strange to me since back in the States we picked the pizza up with your hands. So I ordered a pizza and ate it with a knife and fork. Even today, I still use a knife and fork when I eat pizza. After dinner, John asked me if he could stay the night in my room, since his assignment to a *kibbutz* was the following day. I said, "Sure."

DAY 10

Early in the morning, John left, and I began packing my things. I was so excited at the thought of starting a new life in Israel. It was beyond my comprehension how I made it to this point of my journey. I went down and had my usual large breakfast, trying to get my money's worth, and then went to the front desk to check out. *You should have seen the look on the desk clerk's face when John left!* Off I went to

get a cab to the bus station in downtown Tel Aviv. I now looked forward with great expectation to be placed on a *kibbutz*. My hopes and dreams of acceptance without any rejection were now becoming a reality in this great nation of Israel.

CHAPTER 9

Kibbutz

My intentions were now to learn the Hebrew language and then join the Israeli Army to defend my people from their enemies. I reached the bus station and waited alongside a throng of passengers for the arrival of the bus. I noticed that everyone had a sober face without any expression. It was a common practice for terrorists to blow up innocent women and children, especially on a bus. Hence, people waiting in bus lines were always concerned that a terrorist might be among them.

Finally, the bus arrived, and people began shoving and pushing, just like people in Brooklyn. The heavy awkward suitcase that I was carrying diverted all eyes and attention on me as I tried to find a seat and settle in for the long ride to my new home. The people on the bus brought animals and other farm goods that reminded me of a similar scene in a movie I had seen back in the States. I now came to realize that I was part of a different culture. I felt good about this and settled comfortably in my seat.

The ride through the countryside was beautiful. Having lived in Brooklyn and New York City, I hadn't seen many farms. It was like a

sea of rolling hills covered with grass, and off in the distance I could see farms and livestock, including cows and horses. A rural view that was so different to city skyscrapers.

After an hour, I began to notice remnants of war at the side of the road, including army tanks and other military vehicles. The tanks and trucks were burnt out, and they stood as a reminder of a past war. I guess these were left just to remind us of the cost of freedom. The closer we got to Jerusalem the more evidence there was of a major war.

You have to remember that in 1973, Israel was one of the smallest countries in the Middle East with a total population of only three million people, yet, this small country was located in the midst of large Arab nations. The ratio of Arabs to Israelis was 20:1 at that time, and the same ratio occurred in the artillery used in combat. In spite of the odds being 20 to 1, Israel not only won the war, they actually captured major areas of Arab land. Who says there is no God? There are many other stories just like this in the Bible that had similar outcomes because of God's protection. Israel recorded these great victories because of the mighty and outstretched hand of God.

We finally arrived in the city of Jerusalem and exited the bus in an open area. At that time, there was no such thing as a bus terminal, so I had to wait for another bus to take me even further east to a small town called Ashkelon, some three hours away. It was late in the day before we arrived. My usual habit was to spend a little time taking in some of the sights, but I couldn't because I was exhausted, so I

decided to catch the next bus to the *kibbutz*.

Ashkelon is just one of the several small historical towns that date back thousands of years. The city was primitive and probably looks much like it did in the past, just like the old part of Tel Aviv. It was a 30-minute ride to the *kibbutz*. I arrived at 7:00 p.m. and my first impression was that I was in paradise. There were families sitting on the hillside playing, laughing, and having lots of fun. I felt right at home compared to my experience in Tel Aviv.

The director in charge of the *kibbutz* met me and escorted me to the dining room where I was given a piece of bread and water because everyone had finished eating and the kitchen was closed for the night. She spoke English, and I made known to her my intention to be a part of Israel. I explained that I wanted to be a dual citizen and join the Israeli Army. After our conversation, we left the dining room, and she called one of the volunteers who were assigned to show me the cabin where I would spend the duration of my time on the *kibbutz*.

I was instructed to rest up for the next two days and become familiar with the *kibbutz*. During this time, I would meet other volunteers, especially those I would be living with for the next three months. My cabin was nice, and I shared it with three other volunteers who were much younger than I was. As a matter of fact, I was the oldest volunteer on the *kibbutz*. After my two days' rest, I reported to the office to sign some paperwork and was given my work description. *I am sure the whole gang at the kibbutz must have been wondering what in the world I was doing there, since I was older than the other volunteers.*

When I awoke the following morning, all my roommates had left for their job assignments for the day. I got dressed and went to the dining room for breakfast with a strange feeling of not knowing those who passed by me. After breakfast, I walked around the campground the rest of the morning hoping to find someone to talk to. At noontime, about the time for lunch, I went back to the dining room and ate very well for the first time. Afterwards, I went back to my cabin and took a nap. I was glad to be there and wondered what lay ahead.

At 4:00 p.m., the volunteers returned from work or school and went to their cabins to get ready for dinner. I joined my cabin partners for dinner, and was introduced to the rest of the volunteers. I felt right at home next to people who spoke English and who also had the same interest as I did: to help Israel fight for freedom. I instantly made friends with most of the people in the dining room, and we spoke until it closed, which brought all interaction to an end; we all retired for the night.

It was 7:00 a.m. we rolled out of bed and got dressed quickly to get to the dining room before the kitchen closed. I got there just in time to have breakfast, and as I looked at the counter, I noticed that the *kibbutz* served the same kinds of food as the hotel in Tel Aviv. After breakfast the director came over to me and we went to her office to discuss my obligations, their expectations and the necessities I would receive, such as clothing and medical needs. *Oh, yes, I forgot to mention one thing, I was going to be paid a mere ten cents a day, not bad for a beginner.*

What was I thinking? I had no money anyway! I was assigned to clean up the kitchen in the morning and then prepare for lunch. After lunch, I would study Hebrew for four hours in the afternoon, as all volunteers did. We then returned to our cabin and rested until dinner was served. Everything was going great!

There were drugs to be had. A lot of the volunteers were young kids mostly from France, and Pierre, one of my friends who I met at dinner had the drugs. He approached me after dinner and asked me if I wanted to smoke a joint? *I wasn't sure how he got drugs into the kibbutz, but nevertheless, he did.* I also met a young girl named Collate who came from Eastern Europe. Collate and I became sexually active in a very short time. I fitted in because I was doing drugs and having sex! It seemed no matter where I went I wound up with a bunch of misfits!

I think it was about two weeks later, while I was sitting by myself having dinner in the dining room that all of a sudden I decided to go outside and lie down on the grass to think about my journey so far. As I was gazing into the heavens, the thought entered my mind that *I just might be the Messiah, the one promised by God to save His people. I knew God had led me this far. But that thought only lasted for a seconds because I was having sex at the time, and taking drugs. Yeah right! Me, the Messiah? Give me a break! With that, I went back to my cabin and never thought about being the Messiah again.*

In the following week, I was assigned two different types of jobs. My first job was to pick fruit in the fields and compress cotton in the back of a truck; however, *I preferred the kitchen.* The next job was a real

dozy; I had to get up at 4:00 a.m. in the morning, go to the hen house to catch the chickens, place them into crates, and then load them onto trucks for shipment. The hen house smelled real foul, as though somebody had poured a bottle of ammonia on the floor. It was the chicken droppings! Still, we had a lot of fun running around the hen house.

A month or so passed by and things started to change. My emotional state and finances began to worsen, and to add to that, the residential families on the *kibbutz* began to avoid the volunteers as if we had the plague. It began to affect me so much that it brought back to life the old feeling of rejection, especially as I was only a volunteer working in the marble plant at that time. Here is just one example of what I had to deal with. When it came to break time, the residents would walk in a different direction when they spotted me sitting at the table having coffee. It was very obvious they didn't like me. One day a man and his wife, who resided on the *kibbutz* and also worked in the marble plant, came over to comfort me. They confirmed that the permanent residents found it very difficult to like any of the volunteers because they assumed them to be foreigners who came from abundance and were now feeding on the insufficiency of the local people; so, they were envious. I now had an explanation as to why I was being avoided.

My purpose for being in Israel was not just to serve on a *kibbutz*, but to serve in the army fighting for Israel's freedom. My intention was truly centered on fighting for their freedom, so why were they

treating me this way in return? On one occasion, I was hurt when a resident baby girl ran over to me in the cafeteria and the mother pulled her away with force to avoid me. I am sure you must know how I felt at that moment – it wasn't pleasant!

Two months later, when my money was completely gone, I called my family to wire me some money, which they did. However, two weeks later, still no response from the bank. I called the bank and complained about the hold up. They explained that the money transfer was held up, so I just had to wait for the bank to call me. Another problem that developed during this time was the disagreement I had with Pierre over drugs and money. Our friendship ended, and since he had so much influence on the rest of the group, he then turned everybody against me. Even Collate alienated herself from me. I lost my sex partner; I had no money, no drugs and no friends. To make matters worse, I was kicked out of the cabin. I was right back where I began! I was so poor that whenever I took a shower, I would always search for a piece of soap on the floor. The hardest thing I had to cope with was that I had never been this poor or desperate in my life. I was surprised when someone even stole my underwear off the clothesline; you have to agree, that was low.

Before I continue, I must say that I learned a lot about myself through all these unpleasant experiences that took place while I lived on this *kibbutz* in Israel. I learned that life does not revolve around me, that friendships can quickly backfire and most importantly, that I should never take anything for granted! These lessons were very

important in my life. I used this enlightenment to cope with similar situations years later.

CHAPTER 10

The Desperate “Terrorist”

There was a young gay guy named Bob. He was about twenty years old and like me, he was turned away from the group. I guess nobody wanted him as a roommate. He asked me if he could room with me, and I agreed. *I understood how it felt to be rejected by everybody.* My answer brought a sigh of relief to his face. The following day, I went to the camp director to request a loan until my money was cleared. The volunteers were given three days off and my roommate Bob invited me to journey to Jerusalem with his college friends. This would be a good opportunity to revisit the old city, so I immediately replied to them with a “Yes.”

The next day we got on the bus to Jerusalem, the holiest part of Israel. After three hours on the bus, we arrived at Jerusalem and walked through the old city. I couldn't describe it even if I tried, but if you have ever watched the movie, *Indiana Jones*, you would get some idea of what the city might have looked like at that time. I finally went to the Wailing Wall, which was the original temple site of King David and his son King Solomon.

As I stood in the courtyard of the temples, something strange began

to happen to me. *As I describe this, it might seem very strange to you because it was even stranger to me!* I gazed at the Wailing Wall, and I figured that if Jesus, in whom I did not believe, could have walked from Jerusalem to Bethlehem then so could I. *Now, here I am competing with someone who lived and walked this very path two thousand years ago.* What in heaven was that all about? Competing with somebody I did not even believe in? With that in mind, we thought we would walk through the desert. So being street smart, we packed our knapsacks with apples, just in case there was no water. Wouldn't you know it, the road was paved alongside the mountain; it really was not a desert.

The walk was only twelve miles from Jerusalem and halfway up the mountain, there was a man carving out a beautiful statue of Jesus. As I stood there looking at it, I said to the statue, "You are beautiful, but I don't believe in you." *Can you believe this? Now I am talking to a statue! Unreal!* As we were approaching the top of the mountain, a man coming in the opposite direction directed us to a church where we could spend the night, stating that it was the site where Jesus was born. Thinking back, he might have been an angel because as I turned around to take a second look and thank him, he seemed to have disappeared. Was he an angel? Who knows?

In the late afternoon, as we entered the city of Bethlehem. We went directly to the church that he directed us to. When we arrived, I knocked on the door and a priest answered. He asked us how he could help. I asked if we could stay there overnight, but he replied, "No!" What a disappointment that was! Bob and I left the church

and visited all the historical sites. As it was getting late in the evening, we decided to check into an inn for the night. *Yes, you guessed it right! The innkeeper said there was no room!* Since it was getting dark, we considered just camping out on the grass for the night, but we had second thoughts. We changed plans knowing that this part of the country was prone to scorpions and snakes. As we were walking around the town, I noticed down the valley that there were some houses under construction and I felt it might be safer to sleep on a hard floor rather than the grass. I do not remember how in the world we ever got down the mountain to the valley because it was so steep.

We made it down to the bottom safely and entered one of the new buildings that were still under construction when a Palestinian man confronted us. The Palestinian people had no love for either Jews or Americans. Remember, in the 1973 war, Israel had taken control of much of the surrounding Arab land, thereby causing a contention between the two nations. The Palestinian man asked us with hatred in his eyes, “What are you doing here?” We replied by saying that we just wanted to rest until daybreak but he ordered us to leave at once. We watched him as he got into his car and drove off. Being aware of his intentions, I said to Bob that he was going to get his friends to come after us. Sooner than expected, he returned with other cars and more Palestinian men. *I have no doubt in my mind that if they had found us, I wouldn't be here writing this book. I would be dead!* We avoided the men in the cars and walked in the opposite direction.

We walked right into a wedding ceremony that was taking place that

midnight, as was the Palestinian custom! We were not on safe ground yet. I looked at Bob and said, "Let's just walk past them as if we are some hikers passing by" As we got closer to the wedding party, suddenly, everybody stopped to look at us. *Who were we?* I am sure they wondered what we were doing there at that time of the night. We walked right through the party without any incident. Thank God! I kept thinking where the safest place would be to hide from those men who wanted to harm us? Then it came to me! The last place anyone would look for a thief would be in a police station. So with that in mind, we made our way back up the mountain to the main city in Bethlehem where we assumed we would be safe.

We could actually see the cars driving around the city looking for us, so we went straight to the police station and asked if we could stay for the night, but we were rejected again. So with no other options, we decided to go back to Jerusalem to the college where Bob's friends were staying. It took us two hours to walk back to Jerusalem and when we finally got there, we had no idea where the college was. We just happened to meet up with two army soldiers in a jeep and asked for directions to the college. They kindly offered to take us there.

No sooner had we gotten into the jeep when we heard gun fire in the old city. One of the soldiers said, "Hold on!" and they took off like a bat out of hell. *That's Brooklyn lingo!* It was a ten-minute walk to the college. We found an open door that led us to the laundry room and so with no other option; we slept on the floor until I was awakened

in the morning by a dog was licking my face. We tried to freshen up as best we could, since it was the Sabbath and if you recall reading earlier, everything is closed until sunset. Even the buses will not run until about 7:00 p.m. We could not stay any longer at the college, so we went to the bus station and waited patiently until the bus arrived to take us back to the *kibbutz*. Our journey came to an end at around 10:00 p.m. that evening. What a trip that was! *I did not know how significant this trip would play out in my life since our lives are like puzzles. Until all the pieces are in place side by side, no one can fully understand the reason why things happen the way they do.*

The following day, I contacted the bank about my money transfer from New York City. The bank had returned the wire because there was a problem with the signature. This meant I still had no money, and now I had a debt to repay the *kibbutz*. I had to wait another five weeks without money and friends. It seemed I was not making any progress! I thought to myself, *how could this be?* I have to be honest. All I wanted to do was to get back to the United States as fast as I could to be with my family again. Even though I could have left, I had to fulfill one more task, and that was to go to the top of Mount Sinai and cast the handful of topsoil from my grandfather’s grave into the wind.

I was so desperate at this point to leave Israel that the thought of hiking to Mount Sinai seemed impossible. I had to wait for another few weeks until my check was cleared by the bank. At that point, things were not looking very promising for me, but I endured the

Pain, suffering, and loneliness that came my way with the consolation of knowing that everything was going to be alright. As I had mentioned earlier in my writing, my jobs only paid me ten cents per day and in the month of October, it summed up to only \$3.10, my first month's salary on the *kibbutz*. I immediately went to the canteen with my paycheck and purchased a soda and a piece of chocolate.

I wonder why we humans appreciate even the smallest things in life only when things get really bad for us. In most cases, we seem to take everything good for granted; when life gets back to normal we tend to return to our old ways. This is very sad!

As time went on and days turned into weeks, all I could think about was going to Mount Sinai and after that, returning to the States. On November 15, I received a message from the bank authenticating the clearance of my money. I went to the director to secure permission to travel to Tel Aviv the following day. After the approval of my request, I went directly to the bank, withdrew the money, bought a pack of Camel cigarettes, and lit one up. *Boy that felt so good!* I took a walk around downtown and eventually went to the bus terminal to board the first bus back to the *kibbutz*. I paid my debt to the director and I think she was sad to see me leave, as she was convinced that I really wanted to be a part of Israel. After our brief conversation, I went back to my cabin and packed my belongings.

The next morning, I left immediately for Tel Aviv and checked into a hotel room. After that, I headed to the corner store to purchase another pack of cigarettes. My next stop was a travel agency to book

A trip to Mount Sinai. As much as I wanted to return home, I had to do this last thing. I found a travel agency and booked both my trip to Mount Sinai for the next day and also my return trip to the States. It was evening now, so I went out to eat and drink, feeling a real sense of relief for the first time in Israel. After that, I headed straight to my room and fell asleep while crying, all because I wanted to return home. In the morning, I felt much better with a great breakfast of cheese and yogurt, before heading to the airport where my plane was waiting to take tourists to Mount Sinai, which is part of Egyptian territory. It was a two hour trip by air, after which an awaiting bus conveyed us to the monastery at the base of Mt. Sinai.

You could remember how I thought about walking to Mount Sinai to show you how desperate I was to get home. But can you imagine me walking through the desert for some three hundred miles? I wouldn't have lasted one day, and after that I am sure the vultures would have been flying overhead just waiting to have a good meal as I lay dying in the middle of the desert.

We finally arrived at the Saint Catherine monastery that evening, which was located at the base of Mt. Sinai. The monks who lived there led us to our rooms and then we had dinner. After our meals, we headed back to our rooms because we had to get up at 4:00 a.m. to reach the top of the mountain and experience the sunrise. At the set time, every tourist was fully prepared. We had a bite to eat and immediately headed for the top of the mountain. It wasn't an easy task for most of the elderly because it was still very dark and a steep

Climb. I can remember helping an older lady up to the top of the mountain. The sun started to rise just as we reached the top, and I must confess that it was really breathtaking and beautiful to say the least. It is written in the Bible that Moses met God there. Just before we were to leave, I climbed to the highest point of the mountain, opened the envelope that held the topsoil from my grandfather's grave, and cast it into the air. Immediately, I cried out in a loud voice, *"It is finished!"*

You may be familiar with these words uttered by Jesus while He was on the cross. Just before He took His last breath He cried out with a loud voice saying, *"It is finished!"* He said this having accomplished what He was sent to do. I am not trying to compare myself with Jesus in anyway, but wasn't it ironical that I used the same words "it is finished" for the same meaning, which was, "I can go home now." Jesus went back to His place in heaven, and I was headed back home to Brooklyn. We stayed on top of the mountain for 20 minutes, then went back down to the monastery, headed straight to the bus, and then to the airport. You cannot imagine the relief I felt when we all boarded the airplane, and we were on our way back to Tel Aviv.

During the flight, a thought entered into my mind once again: since my return flight to the USA was three days away, I would get off when the plane stopped to refuel at a resort town called Eilat, which was half way back to Tel Aviv. When the plane landed to refuel, I got off and went directly to the front desk in the airport building and explained that my new plans were to stay in Eilat for two days.

Almost immediately, I was surrounded by security police and rushed to a back room where I was interrogated and strip searched for bombs. Apparently, the only people who got off in the middle of a flight were terrorists who had planted a bomb on the plane. They interrogated me about the money I had in my possession, which was only \$800 dollars. Being sarcastic, I said I was a rich American but they did not seem to appreciate my position.

They gave me two options, to either stay in custody until the plane landed in Tel Aviv or get back on the plane and continue the trip. I considered that if I stayed in Eilat and the plane blew up, I would be labeled a terrorist. On the other hand, if I got on the plane and it blew up, they would still think I was a terrorist. I was in between a hard place and rocks, but I chose to get back on the plane and spend the rest of the time in Tel Aviv. I boarded the plane hoping it didn't blow up because if it did, my family would be notified that I was a terrorist.

When I arrived in Tel Aviv, I checked into a hotel for the next two days, which seemed like a lifetime that would never end. The day finally arrived, and I made my way to the airport about three hours earlier than the time scheduled for the flight. I boarded the plane and fell asleep for most of the flight, only to wake up prior to landing at Kennedy airport. As the plane was on its final approach to land, I looked out the window to see if I could recognize my house from the air. After we landed, we exited the plane, and I literally kissed the ground I was standing on.

CHAPTER 11

Home Sweet Home!

My adventure to the Holy Land had finally ended. I arrived home with a gladdened heart, feeling a refreshed air of comfort. I kissed my mother and had a glass of ice cold milk. All my family and friends were so glad to see me get home safely. To be honest, I find it so hard to remember any of the details of my arrival back home other than the celebrate of my return; my mother invited everybody to a family Thanksgiving dinner. Of course, it was so great seeing them all together at one time. It was during dinner when we were all sitting at the table that I could say I was truly at home, as I was once again eating real American food.

After dinner, my sister asked if I would like to take a trip to Florida and stay with our friends, Diane and Carl. The idea sounded good to me since I had nothing else scheduled. So my sister called our friends and notified them of our plans to stay at their place. They were so excited to see us as well. After a week or so, we set off on our way to South Florida. We left home during the winter with snow on the ground but it seemed the further south we went, the warmer it became. We drove eight hundred miles and stayed overnight in a hotel.

The following morning after breakfast, we continued south and arrived in South Florida about 4:00 p.m. As we exited the turnpike at Sunrise Boulevard, I turned to my sister and said, "I am going to live here." I cannot say where these words came from but like many other things that happened to me, these words came to me, and it seemed to come to pass. We made it to our friends' house and stayed for two weeks.

In that time period, I familiarized myself with the local areas so that when I returned, I would have some idea of where to get a home of my own and start a new life. You could say this would be my second exodus, since every man deserves a second chance. Florida seemed to be a real nice place to live with great weather all year round. It was much cleaner than New York City, with a slower lifestyle, and it seemed like I could settle in this area. Our two-week vacation went by very fast and before we knew it, my sister and I returned home. For the next few weeks, I just hung out with Sabrina. Yes, Sabrina! So you see, going to Israel did not change my obsession with her. I thought maybe moving to Florida would help, but no such luck.

The day finally arrived for me to go to Florida and just like before, with bags in hand, off I went. I want to mention that just before I purchased my one-way airline ticket, I had second thoughts about once again going to another strange place by myself. But I figured that, if I could journey somewhere as far as Israel by myself, why couldn't I make it here in the States? I understood the language and the customs, so what's the big deal? When I arrived at the airport this time, it was different. I was not interrogated by the airport police or

strip-searched. On the contrary, I felt at peace about going to Florida, assured that I had friends living there.

For the next two hours, I sat back and enjoyed the flight to Florida. After the plane landed, I checked into a hotel but was unable to sleep well that night because of what I had heard from the clerk at the front desk. Apparently, a room was broken into and ransacked the previous night. I had all my savings in cash, some thirty six hundred dollars, so I stayed awake most of the night.

The following morning, I visited my friends Carl and Diana and stayed at their house for a day or two. I wasn't going to waste any time in trying to understand my new situation. This way, I could get my life back on track, once again. My friend Diana dropped me off at the rental office about 8 miles from her house and went her way. It is nice to have real friends by your side; it sure made this trip much easier than the one to Israel.

I went straight to the real estate office and inquired about an apartment for rent. Soon after, the realtor took me to a complex in a bad area. It was so bad that it was loaded with roaches. The agent that was showing me the apartment knew it was not for me so we left in her car to head back to the office. Half way back to her office I asked the agent to let me out of the car so I could walk the rest of the way back to her office. The first thing I needed was a car of my own so I could cover more territory if I needed to.

On my way back to the office, I entered a car dealership and saw a

1969 Plymouth Satellite for sale in perfect condition. A salesman came over to me to find out if I was interested in this particular car. I replied, "Yes", and within 10 minutes, I became the proud owner of a 1969 Plymouth Satellite. I paid \$650 dollars for that car, which left me with \$3,000 dollars. The salesman said that prior to me inquiring about this car; a lady had come in and was very interested in buying it, but needed her husband's approval. Boy, I was so lucky, wasn't I? You will be amazed when I refer you to this part of my life experience in later in this book.

After registering the car, I had peace of mind knowing that if I was unable to find a place to rent, I could sleep in the car. Everything so far seemed to be going smoothly, so I called one of my ex-coworkers, Mike, who also quit the Sanitation Department to relocate to Phoenix. I explained to him what my intentions were after I quit my job and decided to relocate to South Florida. After talking for a while, he told me about a lady friend of his who lived not too far from where I was staying. He gave me her phone number and told me to give her a call, so I did.

We chatted for a while and she invited me over. Without wasting any time I got into my car and was on my way. When I arrived at her place in downtown Miami, I went to a phone booth, called her up and notified her that I was down the street in the local convenience store near where she lived. She invited me to her apartment and talked about how we came to know each other. We had a lot in common, such as drugs and sex, and to me it seemed that everybody

I was fortunate enough to meet so far those who are into drugs and sex. She invited me to stay with her for the next two weeks while I applied for a job. I saw an ad in the classifieds that caught my attention. A lumber company was looking for a truck driver, so I went to the lumber company and filled out an application.

The owner of the company requested a reference, which I gave based on my experience in New York City as a truck driver for the Sanitation Department. I was hired on the spot with an expected pay \$320 a week. It wasn't as much as I made working for the New York City Sanitation Department, but I accepted the offer. As I was leaving to go back to Sue's house, I turned around and asked, "Is it three hundred and twenty dollars a week?" He replied, "No, its three dollars and twenty cents an hour." My first response was to say to him, "You must be crazy!" However, on second thought, I remembered what my friend Tom had said to me just before I left for Florida. "Take whatever job you can get, because as long as you do not have to touch your savings, you are ahead of the game." So I followed his advice and accepted the job. After all, I made only ten cents a day on the *kibbutz*, so I now had a raise of about \$ 3.10 an hour.

I started the very next day and at the end of the week, on my day off, I decided to go back to the rental agency to see if they had any other apartments for rent. As I was driving back to the agency, I remembered seeing an apartment complex with a, "For Rent" sign in front of the building. Since I had no reference to give, I thought it

best to pay six month's rent in advance. That would certainly help me acquire the apartment. With that in mind, I entered the office and approached the person at the front desk to ask if there were any vacant apartments for rent in the complex. He said there was one vacant apartment and asked if I wanted to look at it. We went to the apartment, and it was really nice. It had central air-conditioning and carpet throughout; it was more than I could ask for!

We went back to the office and I asked the rent was. He replied, "\$217 dollars a month plus one month deposit." The manager gave me an application form to fill in and after filling in the form, I asked if I could pay 6 months in advance. He almost fell off his chair since he had never had an offer like that. He then called his boss to ask him what to do. The boss said to him, "Are you crazy? Take the money, of course!" I gave him \$1,200 dollars in cash, and I now had a place of my own to live for the next 6 months without worries. After I left the office I drove to Sue house and collected all my belongings and drove back to my new home.

The flowing morning I left the apartment and went straight to the local Kmart department store to purchase a mattress, box spring, cardboard end tables, and some other basic needs. Everything seemed to be going very smoothly. I went back to the store the following day and purchased a living room set, which consisted of a couch, two end tables and a chair. I motioned to the sales person that I had no way to take the set home, but he assured me delivery would be safe in my car. I parked my car at the front of the store, and got it all tied to the roof. I am sure there were people looking at me as I

Home Sweet Home

was driving back home with all my furniture tied to the roof of my car?

When I arrived home my next door neighbor came out of his apartment and offered to help me unload the furniture, which we then arranged in the living room. It wasn't hard at all to make new friends in the complex, and I felt right at home there from the start. The guy at the front desk, whose name was Jack lived next to my building, and we became good friends. He knew I had a lot of money, as I had paid \$1,200 dollars rent in advance. I guess in the 70's, drugs were so rampant throughout the world, especially here in South Florida. It seemed every place I went, there were like-minded people who were also into drugs.

As I have mentioned earlier, the complex was really nice, and only about 10 feet from my door was a swimming pool that most people in the complex used on Saturdays and Sundays. I never had anything like this in all my life, especially back in Brooklyn.

CHAPTER 12

The Jesus People

As time passed by, I met many more friends including two strange girls living opposite the pool. It seems every time I passed by their apartment, they were always singing songs to Jesus, which was a first for me. They had a reputation of being religious. I didn't want anything to do with them but whenever they saw me, they would try to get me to join them in church. I refer to them as the kooky twins. And on top of it all, a man who was of the Jewish faith, believing also in Jesus, wanted me to join him at the temple.

He tried repeatedly to get me to go with him, and just to get him off my back, I finally went. He seemed to be a nice man, but I wanted nothing to do with him after I went to that temple. It became very difficult to get away from the kooky twins and the old man. Then one day, I surrendered to Jeanne who insisted that I go to her church on Wednesday night. I went just to get the kooky twins off my back as well.

The following Wednesday night, there was not only one "Jesus person," but three other women I had to contend with. They all got into my car and started to chatter away about Jesus. We finally arrived

at the church and soon after, the preacher began to preach from the Bible. I had no idea what in the world he was saying. To be honest, I just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. The church service finally ended, and I was certainly glad it was over.

On the way home, due to the loud chatter of the women, I went through a red light, and wouldn't you know it: there was a police car on the opposite side of the road. So I pulled over on the grass and waited for the police car to catch up to me. He said I had transgressed the traffic law by running through a red light. I explained to him that I was coming from church and that the women in the car had distracted me with their chatter. He gave me a warning and told me to be more careful. I used the church thing, and it worked.

It wasn't long after that, I met a girl and we became involved with each other but our relationship was short lived when she confessed that she had a boyfriend. As bad as I was, I encouraged her to go back to her boyfriend assuring her that he loved her more than I did. I asked for his name and she replied, "Adam," Coincidentally, her name happened to be "Eve." After she left my apartment, I immediately went outside and gazing up to the heavens, I said to God, "First it was the Israel thing, and now Adam and Eve. Are you trying to tell me something?"

After that incident with Eve, I called Sabrina and asked her how she was doing? Ironically, she was leaving her boyfriend John for good. I asked her if she would like to relocate to South Florida and live with me. She was positive in her reply, just to get away from John. It

seemed to me that everybody was running away from one thing or the other. *As you know, I was in all my glory.*

Two days later, Sabrina packed her bags and the kids and left Brooklyn. After her arrival and since I was unemployed at that time, I decided to start my own cleaning business. I invited Sabrina to partner with me in the business, and she agreed, even though she hated cleaning her own apartment back in Brooklyn. With that, we named the company B&L Professional Cleaning Company. We had cards made and placed them on doors of condos. Within a short time of establishing the business, Sabrina quit, leaving me to continue on my own.

Four months later, I decided to end my cleaning business and apply for a job that paid a salary. I looked through the classifieds and saw an ad for a carpet salesman. I had never sold carpets before but I decided to give it a try. To cut a long story short, I became very successful through this job; so much so, that I started my own carpet business within 5 months. I named the company “Carpets Are Us.” I met a man named Jack who operated a carpet business. He offered me his warehouse for 10 percent of my sales, which I couldn’t refuse considering my background and my financial limitations, it was a God sent

That decision made me feel important and successful. For the first time in my life, I had everything under control; I was making money and Sabrina was also working. Then something happened — Sabrina and her girlfriends at work started going out to the local bars to meet

men. At the thought of this, my obsession with her started all over

again, just as it was in Brooklyn. At times, I would park my car across the street from her workplace just to see where she and her friends were going.

I became desperate and overwhelmed with my obsession to the extent that I parked behind the local church, and out of desperation, I asked God to put somebody in Sabrina's life; this way I would be finally free. Miraculously, a few days later, Sabrina met a young man, and she got involved with him causing her to leave my apartment. From that moment on, I was totally free. My life continued the same way for the next 5 months until I ended my carpet business.

I had a number of jobs after that, but my income was not sufficient to cover my expenses, which were mostly drugs and women. It was just a matter of time before I found myself homeless once again. Nevertheless, as luck continued to shine on me, I met a girl and when she heard that I was homeless, she offered to let me stay with her until I got back on my feet.

So, life wasn't so bad after all. I had a place to stay, food on the table and a relationship with her. But to be honest, just like other women I had been with, I was not in love with her at all; I just needed a roof over my head. Then it happened. I had reached the end of the rope. I became so tired of everything in life, and I mean everything. After dinner that night, I left the house without saying anything, drove down to the local church and said these words to God, "If," and I have to emphasize the word IF, "this Jesus is who He says He is, I will serve you God for the rest of my life!"

To be honest, I didn't know what in the world I was saying. To accept Jesus as my Savior was one thing, but to serve God? That was not a normal thing for anybody to say. I know now without doubt that God was preparing me for a time such as this from the very beginning of my life, as you will read in the next section. All the pieces of the puzzle in my life began to come together.

Section

PROMISED

LAND

CHAPTER 13

Kooky for Jesus

I had no idea who this Jesus was. All I knew for sure was that my life began to change dramatically, right in front of my eyes. As I served God, my eyes were opened spiritually. It allowed me to see people in a different light. Remembers Jeanne – one of the kooky twins who loved Jesus? I, too, became kooky for Jesus.

As I mentioned, I was homeless. And I remember the man name Jack whom I work out of his warehouse a number of months ago. By the grace of God! I went to the warehouse and told him about my homelessness. He offered to let me stay in his house until I found a job. That was the beginning of my new promised life!

I stayed with him and his wife for two weeks until I found a job with a roofing company. I began selling new roofs although I had no idea how to sell anything, especially roofs! I remember being sent out on my first lead without training. While I was closing my first sale, it happened – I had to fill out paperwork to calculate the costs and close the deal. I was very embarrassed and was unable to complete the

Contract due to lack of training I had to call my office and my coworker at the other end of the phone talked me through the completion of the contract. It was very important that I walked away with my first sale in hand and had a bit of income – that’s all that mattered to me! After this experience, I began to understand all aspects of the roofing business. It seemed I made just enough money to get by each month. I learned a great lesson while in Israel – I learned how to survive in a world of uncertainty.

A short time later, Jack found a place for me to rent in a house with two bedrooms and a garage turned into a third bedroom. My move took place in mid-November when evening temperatures could get as low as 42 degrees, which was unusual for South Florida. I had to share this house with the existing roommates and a pit bull. It was unbearable there. The situation was so bad, that when I went to sleep, I had to position myself around the box spring sticking up out of the mattress. Also, the hot water was broken; that meant I had to take a cold shower. I had to put the heater on in the bathroom for ten minutes in order to warm up the room. And like in Israel, I was in and out as fast as I could.

Lastly, my roommates were the filthiest kids on this earth! The house was so dirty that after I finished taking a shower, I could not walk barefooted. If I did, my feet would be so black; you could not even tell that I had showered. Here’s where it gets really bad: my roommates never took the dog outside to bathe – so you can imagine the smell! Also, whenever I left my room to go to the kitchen for

Something to eat, I had to watch where I was going carefully, lest I stepped in the dog pile.

The ultimate sign of how filthy the house was on an occasion when my sister was picking me up to go out to eat, which was a big treat for me at that time. I wanted to show her my room and how I fixed it up, but she took one step in the front door, and immediately, she turned around and went straight to the car.

As horrible as it was, I had no other options at the time! I made the best of it. I made very little money. As for food, I bought cans of clam sauce and boxes of spaghetti, which became my everyday diet for months. I remember one particular day; I had just enough money to buy a three-piece chicken dinner for \$2.99. I felt as if I was having a feast, just like the Israelites did during all of their celebratory feasts.

I only lived in this house for three months. When I was at work one day, out of the blue, my boss came over to me and asked if I was interested in taking over his girlfriend's apartment, which was completely furnished. A day later, my co-worker asked me if I would like to share his apartment as well. I wanted to see both apartments before I made a choice.

I went to my co-worker's apartment first. It happened to be really nice. However, he was into drugs and girls. The following day, I went to my boss' girlfriend's apartment, which was nice as well. Once again, I found myself at a crossroad in my life. Based on my

previous experiences, you would think I would have chosen drugs and girls. But strangely enough, the thoughts of drugs and girls seemed not to be as important to me at that time as they were in the past. I felt something pulling me to choose my boss' girlfriend's apartment, which I eventually did.

Guess what? My new apartment was in between a church and a Christian bookstore. The night after I moved in, I went outside and I looked up to heaven. I said to God, "So you got me where you want me." I know God was moving and directing my life in an undeniable way! God was moving in the lives of those around me as well. The following day, I went to the office to thank my boss once again, to pick up my paycheck and get new leads. I was only inside the office for five minutes when I felt that something was wrong. I went to my car, got into it, and as I turned the key, nothing happened. The car was dead.

I immediately got out of the car and opened the hood. Lo and behold! Would you believe it? My battery was gone! It was stolen! My first impulse was to say, "You mother f...k," and then it happened – I was asking God to forgive whoever stole that car battery. It seemed weird to be asking for that person's forgiveness. If I had lots of money, that would be one thing, but I was almost destitute – had just enough money to make it each day. So, I went back inside the office with a big stupid smile on my face, and said, "Somebody just stole my car battery. All of a sudden, the whole office ran outside to check for their car batteries. My battery was the only one stolen! By the

grace of God, my boss said that he had a brand new battery in the back of the store. He offered it to me as long as I would pay for it a little bit at a time. That's exactly what I did!

There was another strange incident that happened while I was driving my car to my next appointment. I stopped at a red light and was listening to a Christian radio station that was airing a song about Jesus. A car pulled up alongside me and stopped at the red light. I quickly turned off the radio. *Remember what I thought of Jeannie and her sister, who I refer to as the kooky twins? Well, the last thing I wanted was to be referred to as one of those weird people for Jesus!* After turning the radio off, it seems like a little voice came out from heaven – it was like God speaking to me – and He said, “If you are ashamed of me, just forget it!” I felt like a worm, and if I could, I would have crawled under the dashboard of my car. I would have done this because that's how ashamed I felt. I had to make a decision at that very moment about my relationship with Jesus. When the light turned green, I drove my car to the next red light. I purposely waited for the next car to pull up alongside me. But this time, I turned up the radio as loudly as I could to let everybody know that I was not ashamed of Jesus. From that time on, God showed me great favor in my life.

CHAPTER 14

Truth Sets You Free!

It was not long after I moved into my boss' girlfriend's apartment, my boss started to indulge in cocaine. From that point on, his business began to fail. I started to look for another job. One Friday, after I finished work, I went straight home and immediately went into a church. I asked God for a different type of job – one with a salary this time. I distinctly remember the following morning when I went out and got the newspaper so I could read the classified section for any job openings.

While reading the newspaper, I saw an ad that said, “night owl wanted,” and nothing else. I had no idea what the job involved, but the ad night owl caught my interest. I called the office and made an appointment for an interview. A few days later, I got a call from a man named Burt asking me to come in for an interview the next day. I got dressed up, and with an address in hand, I went to the office.

When I arrived, a young man met me and led me to a vacant room. I was being interviewed by a district manager, a supervisor, and a service person. At that time, I asked what the job description was.

Burt, who was the branch manager, said that the business was a pest extermination company. I had no idea what in the world that was! It didn't matter to me. I just needed a job. I felt that this job was as good as any other. They questioned me for nearly three hours! *I felt that I was back in Israel in the interrogation room.* After all was said and done, they said I would be contacted. I wasn't thinking too much about the job after I left the office. So I continued to work selling roofs. A few days later, Burt called and asked me if I was still interested. I said, "YES!"

Another interview was set for that week. Once again, Burt and the supervisor questioned me. This time, they described the company's policies and goals. Based on what I heard, I was very impressed. The name of the company was Pest Elimination Service, and the founders were Mr. Sanchez and his wife. They were not religious people at all, but they held to what I refer to as biblical principles. Simply put, these biblical principles are honesty, integrity, fairness and respect – and all these aspects lead to having good character. To me, these are rare qualities in today's world.

One of the things that impressed me most of all is that when Mr. Sanchez spoke, he meant what he said, and said what he meant. He also held these same standards for his family. The practices of the other companies, which he referred to as pest control, simply meant that you could leave a few roaches behind. Mr. Sanchez felt that with proper training, supplies, and the necessary tools, you could be successful. He knew that the employees were the heart of any

Company, and if he treated them right, the company would be profitable.

As Mr. Sanchez and his wife followed their dreams, and after some years, his company was well-known throughout the United States and the rest of the world. Afterward, Burt disclosed that there were two other candidates applying for the same job. He would consider which one of us was the most qualified for the job. If I was the one he chose, he would call me back. I was thinking to myself what kind of job this was. Was it security for the company? A week went by, and there was no call from Burt.

I went out to pray, which I always do at night because it is so quiet and there is not a person in sight – I had God to myself! I would walk over to the front of the church at the end of my street. There stood a waterfall, and it was there that I would sit and ask God for this job. I was so desperate and tired of working in sales. After I finished praying for the night, I went home and did not think much of it.

God is faithful! I got a call from Burt the following day. He had made an appointment for me to have a polygraph test. Here we go again, and this one is dozy! That night, as I was praying to the Lord for the job, He put it in my heart to tell the truth, and the whole truth about everything. I went to the office the next day to take the polygraph test. I was asked some simple questions such as my name and address, and then, the real questions began.

He asked me, "Have you ever taken drugs?"

I said, "Yes."

He asked, "When?"

"One week ago."

"Have you ever stolen anything?"

I said, "Yes."

"When?" he asked.

I said, "Yes, in some prior jobs I held."

"Do you drink?"

That was easy, "No."

It was the end of the test.

That Friday, I was thinking about going to Key West where my brother lived. I was not sure Burt would even think of hiring me after he heard the answers to the questions on the polygraph test. So, I decided to leave for Key West to visit my brother. I brought a bag of pot with me, figuring I wasn't going to get the job anyway, so, why not?

When I arrived at my brother's house, he was glad to see me, especially since I told him that I had a bag of pot. That night, we went out and had good ole' time. The following day, Saturday, I went to the water's edge to pray, "God, if you give me this job, I will stop smoking pot."

After praying, something interesting happened. I took the pot and threw it in the ocean! *Believe me; I would have never in a lifetime thrown*

away a bag of pot! To be honest, I was someone who was really addicted to drugs, and I did not know the effects withdrawal would have on me.

After that, I got into my car without telling my brother and I drove back home. *I was paranoid now!* I drove off as fast as I could – that’s how scared I was! After driving four hours and pulling into my driveway, I felt relieved. I had made it home! As soon as I opened the front door to my house, the phone rang. It was Burt on the other end. He told me that I got the job. If I still wanted it, I was to report to the office in Fort Lauderdale. Of course, I said yes!

The office was only ten minutes away from my home. *I want to ask you personally if you were in charge, would you have hired me knowing that I took drugs and was a thief. The Bible states in Revelations 3:8 God has the power to open doors, which no man can close, and to close doors that no man can open. If you think this is something, you have a lot in store as you keep on reading.*

CHAPTER 15

Life as a Pest Eliminator

It was Monday morning when I reported to Burt, and wouldn't you know it, he was a Christian – not just in word, but in his actions! He was fair with all his employees. It was very easy to work with Burt. This led me to see that this company had such a different approach to business. For instance, Mr. Sanchez was our role model. We started to think like him, and we were honest with our customers. We never made excuses if we didn't get the results. We went back to the same customers as often as it took to get the pests eliminated. I came to the conclusion that one of the most important things in life is having a good character and a positive attitude.

The pest elimination services for restaurants were done after nightly closings. My assignment on the first day was with two supervisors they had schedule service that night. They met me near my house and drove me to the restaurant that was scheduled for service. I had no idea what I was expected to do. We arrived at the restaurant, and for some reason, they could not perform the service. As they drove me back home, I thought to myself, "What in the world am I doing working for this company?" I was wrestling!

I was actually thinking about resigning, but for some reason, I changed my mind as I was thinking to myself, I would try it for a week since I had nothing to lose. I did report to Burt the next day to get further instructions. I went directly into his office and sat down. Burt asked me how I liked the job so far.

I said, "It was great."

Just think, I got paid for actually doing nothing that night.

After a short conversation about me, Burt changed the subject to tell me about the tools I would need and how to use them. He led me to the back of the warehouse to show me the tools and a truck so I could go out on my own. In the meantime, I would assist the person who was training me. He also asked me to come back in the office once again to explain in more detail about the business and what he personally expected of me. And then it happened! Burt began to speak about the church he attended and his faith in Jesus. He did not know I had accepted Jesus into my life six months prior. I decided to use this opportunity to get on Burt's good side. I told him that I would attend the Sunday, Burt said he would meet me there, I said great.

The saying goes that it's not what you know, but who you know, that will determine how far up the ladder you climb or get the best jobs. So, I was going to use my faith in a wrong way. At that time, I agreed to go church with Burt on Sunday and meet him there for a service. Until then, I was being trained on how to do pest extermination. During the first week of my training, I was very impressed with all my co-workers.

Each one had amazing attitudes about the job and the company. In

all the years I have worked, I had never seen such employee dedication to an owner and his policies.

I reported to Burt on the Friday, and he gave me the address of his church so I could attend services there on Sunday. As I left the office, I was thinking about how many “goody” points I would receive by meeting Burt at church. That Sunday morning, I dressed nicely and left early just to make sure I got to the church on time, which I did. I am the kind of person who likes to sit as far back in a room as possible. *Remember my school days when I sat as far away from the teacher as I could.* Well, that was an interesting observation. I arrived at the church much earlier than the church service began; only a handful of people were present. I sat very still, not knowing what to expect. In the meantime, I looked for Burt.

When the service began, I started to cry. I felt that I was sitting in a dead church; the sermon did not reach me, and there was no life there. After the service, I thought to myself that this was a waste of time! There was no sign of Burt and the service was over. The only thing I had going for me was that I showed up.

The next day was Monday, and I went to the office to get my assignment for that night. While in the office, Burt apologized for not showing up for the service. I said it was OK. He then asked me how I liked the service. I said it was good. I was not going to say it was a dead service. He then assigned me to a different person so I could learn his way of doing the job. My theory was this: If I learn

one good thing from each technician, I would be very successful in pest elimination business. To my surprise Burt assigned me to service a restaurant by myself. After living Burt office I went home, to be honest, I was a little scared to do the service by myself. It was 11 p.m. when I went out to thank God once again. After praying, I got into my truck and drove a mile from my house. When I arrived at the restaurant, the first thing I did was to introduce myself to the manager and when he left, I locked the doors and started to spray for bugs in the kitchen. After finishing the kitchen, I made my way into the dining room. It was so quiet; you could hear a pin drop. Then all of a sudden, I heard something crash. When I went to investigate, I found that the ice machine was dispensing ice. I was so scared that I picked up all of my tools and ran out as fast as I could. I was not finished, but I didn't care.

The following day, Burt assigned me to one stop because it was a very large restaurant – a very well-known ice cream parlor in South Florida. I had no knowledge of the service I was to provide, which was referred to as a “clean out.” It was the term used to define the service given when a new customer signed up for his place of business. And because of the size of this particular restaurant, ten technicians were needed to do the job.

We all met at the appointed time. Prior to starting the service, my co-worker warned me to tuck my pants into my socks because mice or cockroaches can crawl on my leg. That's when the fun began! At the end of the service, my co-workers and I found thousands of roaches

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and hundreds of rats. If you only knew how many pests were actually there, you would never eat at that place again!

When I went into the office the next day, Burt asked me how the job went, and I said it went well. From then, my confidence increased. After the clean out job, I was given a small route of my own. If I needed any help, all I had to do was ask. And with no hesitation, my co-workers, and my supervisor would show up to help me. If the supervisor was on the job, he almost always took my co-workers and me out for breakfast after the job was completed.

I was once again impressed with the approach Mr. Sanchez had taken. It was just a matter of time before he owned the top pest extermination company in America, and within a matter of time, I became one of top pest service technicians.

This job was meant for me because God planned it. The Bible states that everything God does for His followers were ordained from the beginning of time. And this is exactly how I think it happened in my life!

Chapter 16

Walter — My God-given Friend

In the previous chapter, I wrote about going to church with Jeannie and her Christian lady friends and not understanding anything the pastor was preaching that night. However, for some strange reason, after recovering Jesus as my redeemer, and when I returned the following Sunday to the same church as a believer! I began to understand the scripture and its meaning for me. Interestingly enough, someone gave me a King James Version of the Bible, which most people say is the hardest version to understand. But even with my lack of education, not to mention my dyslexia, I was able to read and understand it. When I attended church, I even understood even more what the preacher was saying and how it applied to my life.

At the end of the service, the preacher stood up and said that the church would be accepting clothes for charity. If anyone had any clothes to donate, they could drop them off at the church by the end of the week. I went home and started to think about the love and changes I was experiencing. That night, I went out to pray and thank God for all He was doing in my life. I told God if I ever turn away

from Him, take my life. That's how much His presence meant to me.
Throughout my life, I never completed anything—jobs, relationships,

marriages you name it. I read Philippians 1:6 in the Bible, which says that God, who started a good work in me, will finish it to the end. From that point on, it put my fears to rest.

The following week, all I thought about was the clothing drive. Friday came, and I put all my clothes in a donation bag and went to drop them off at the church. Afterward, free coffee and cake were served to everyone; the people there were very nice to each other. I felt right at home with other Christians.

As I stood at the corner of the room having my coffee and cake, all of a sudden, I saw a man walking toward me. As he approached, the first words out of his mouth were, “Will you be my friend?” I looked at him and said, “of course!”

When a stranger comes up to me and asks out of the clear blue sky, if I could be his friend, I had to wonder what was up with him. It didn't seem normal. To be honest, nothing seemed to be normal up to this point in my Christian walk. He introduced himself as Walter. I talked with him for over an hour, and it was evident that something was wrong.

During my conversation with Walter, another man came over and joined us. His name was Phil. We talked for a while and then an announcement was made that the church was closing for the night, and we had to leave.

As we were leaving the church, Walter and Phil asked me if I would like to go out to coffee with them. I told them that I had very little money. In response, Phil asked me how much money I needed until I got paid. I thought that it was nice that he had offered to help me, but I told him that if God did not show up to help me, I would take him up on his offer. We exchanged contact information and then we went our separate ways. It was one of the nicest evenings I had in a long time.

When I got out of bed in the morning, there was a knock on the front door. I opened the door and saw that it was Walter. He was holding two raw chickens in his hands. Walter said to me that he brought some food because he knew I had very little money. I didn't know what to say! I offered him a cup of coffee. On that visit, Walter only talked about his mother and himself. He stayed for two hours and before he left, he asked me if he could come back and visit the next day.

I told him that I worked nights and so I usually went to bed at 5 a.m. and normally got up at noontime. I told him that he was more than welcome to visit on any day he would like. Wow! If you could have seen the expression on his face! He had found a friend, and he looked as if he had won a million dollars! This was the start of a friendship that existed for the next thirty years!

As time went on, after Walter and I finished talking, he would go to his home, which was nearby. Our friendship progressed, and I

formed the opinion that Walter was a very sad and hurting man. He

confided in me that he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. It was only a matter of time before I realized just how mentally ill he really was.

The one thing I loved most about my friend Walter was how he loved Jesus more than anything in the world, despite suffering from mental illness. Even though Walter was dealing with mental illness, he would attend church – our church. And as time went on despite the issues he was dealing with, our friendship grew.

After church, when Walter came over, he would sit in a chair next to the window and stare outside; often enough, he would cry. As I sat on my couch and observed him quietly, I wondered what was going through his mind. He would talk to me when he was ready and do so with tears in his eyes. When he did speak, Walter would look at me and say that he wished his mother would love him more than she showed.

During these episodes, Walter told me many things, including the happenings of his childhood and how his mental illness began. He started his story by saying that his parents owned a restaurant, and when they needed help, they would ask him to clean up at closing time. He really wanted to help and had wanted to do so ever since he was a child. He yearned for the love and approval of his parents. Walter then went on to say that when he was seventeen, as he cleaned the restaurant, all of a sudden, his father would start yelling

and screaming: “Walter, you can’t do anything right! You will never amount to anything!”

His father’s actions and Walters need for love and approval from his parents eventually led him to flip out. His father put him in a mental hospital. There, he was given shock treatments and put into a room where he was in physical restraints. He would be physically restrained for days at a time. Walter then told me that after this incident, his father left his mon for another woman. I realized that Walter never really spoke about his parent’s relationship with each other.

I remember that one day – a day when Walter was sitting down and looking out the window – he turned to me and said that he was hoping he would die of a heart attack, rather than return to the mental hospital to have shock treatments. With this, I realized how much pain he experienced. According to Walter, the hospital he was in put him on medications to help him cope. After taking the medication for nine months, he was feeling normal. But he stopped taking it because he thought he had recovered. It was after Walter told me his story, that he eventually told me he was diagnosed with manic depression and having schizophrenic tendencies (Today, this diagnosis would be known as bipolar disorder with psychotic features).

Do you remember when I said that there were only two words that affected me in my life? The words were “ugly” and “stupid.” Walter is an example that we need to be careful with the words we say to our children. I want to say that all of

we have come into this world imperfect. Some children are highly emotional and can be dramatic in their responses to all people. I am not putting the blame on our parents, but their words can be triggers to lifelong problems.

My purpose here is to show how God used me to help Walter. You may be asking yourself why in the world I would associate with Walter. Well, before going to the church and donating my clothes, I had prayed to God for a new friend. And when I made this request to God, I could see Him smiling down from heaven at me and saying He has the right friend for me – a manic depressant and schizophrenic. Read on and you will understand the reason God chose Walter to be the friend I prayed for. Like I said before when God acts on my behalf – He is an awesome God!

CHAPTER 17

Finding Love & Trust for the First Time

Weeks later, when I felt I knew Walter better, I decided to give him the key to my house so he wouldn't wait outside for me until I got out of bed. From that time and for the following eight years, he would come in and make coffee for both of us before I woke up in the morning.

Before I go on, there is one other thing you need to know about Walter. Whenever he started to recover from one of his manic depressive episodes, he would become very social. In this state, Walter seemed so confident. He would approach anyone in his path and start conversations with them.

One Friday night, Walter asked me if I would like to go with him to a Bible study at a friend's Dominic's house. When we arrived, Walter introduced me to all the people. And when the group got going, the people started to argue about *tongues* – a gift from God. I had no idea what they were talking about! *What was a tongue?*

All I knew was that they started to argue even more, and became contentious with each other. I stood up and said to all of them that I came to learn about Jesus, not to hear an argument. To everyone's amazement, they stopped arguing and looked at me; they stopped arguing about who was right. This quiet did not last long. In the end, they went back to arguing.

As the group contended, I found myself feeling “triggered,” because the arguing reminded me of my childhood. In the midst of it all, I asked myself some questions – I wanted to know why there were so many misinterpretations among the people in the church who read the Bible. I also wanted to know why humans have to prove that they are right, regardless of the answer. My thinking on these things was that Jesus should be the focus, not some gift. Not long after I asked myself these “why” questions, I told Walter that I wanted to leave. I said goodbye to everyone and left with Walter. Mark 3:25 declares that a divided house cannot stand. It is beyond me, how the Devil can take a beautiful gift and use it as a tool to divide the church. That's something to think about.

The next day was Saturday. As usual, Walter was sitting at the counter, waiting for me to join him for a cup of coffee. He couldn't wait to tell me what Dominick said about his spiritual encounter – that some spiritual being had thrown him against the wall.

In my early years of walking with the LORD, I saw and heard of a lot of strange things, but I had never experienced or heard about such an

extree encounter with a spiritual being. So I was skeptical – that is, until I had an encounter of my own, which you will read about later.

Because it was Saturday, Walter and I hung out. And at 5 p.m. Walter went home to eat and sleep. It wasn't until midnight that I took my daily walk to the church so I could pray. This visit to the church was different – there were no people in sight as I walked around. As I said, I love going to the church late at night because of the solitude. I experience something very special this particular night. As I was walking in front of the church, I noticed that there were quite a few little sun flowers growing on the grass, I was looking for the perfect flowers so I decided to lay them alongside the man made waterfall that was next to the church entrance. There also happened to be trees and colored lights that made the setting more beautiful than it normally was. In the end, I picked the most perfect three flowers – one for the Father, one for the Son, and one for the Holy Ghost as a memorial to them.

As time went on that night, I sat on a bench thanking God over and over again. I thought about when I first came to know how much Jesus loves me, and how He went to the cross on my behalf. It was normal for me now to say how much I loved Him. The way I see it, the Bible states, in Luke 7 states, when there is much to forgive, there will be much gratitude. You may think this is a bit strange, but true, when we do the same thing to people when they do something nice for us, we show our gratitude by saying thank you for it. I figured that if I could show gratitude to other people, why couldn't I do the same

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to Jesus? After looking for true love in all the wrong places, I finally found true love in Him. I sat there praying a while

longer and then went home. When I went to sleep that night, I woke in the morning feeling that I had a beautiful rest. I was at peace.

It was Sunday morning as usual, Walter came over to my house to pick me up so go to church; once again it was a great. After service was over, Walter went back home to be with his mon, I went back to my house to rest up until that evening prior to going to work. I went out pray thinking about the Bible study at Dominic's house the previous Friday night. I was so disappointed how Christians reacted toward each other overs spiritual gifts, and the thoughts and feeling were not good. As I prayed, I ask God why so much division in the church, as I read the Scriptures I understood more about human frailty, with that, I called it a night went to work. I reported to Burt on Monday morning to get my next assignment. When entering Burt's office, I saw there was a trainer named Keith, who was one of the best in the business. It was then I learned how to spray. That night, there was a clean out at a local bar, and ten servicemen including myself, showed up when the bar was closed. Similar to the clean out of the ice cream parlor, the place was loaded with rats, mice, and cockroaches. We were there for at least three hours. It happened that Ed, our company supervisor, was with me and my co-workers at this cleanup. That morning, Ed took all of us out to breakfast at a local restaurant. *I bet you wish you could work for a company that would treat you with respect and pays well!*

Not long after the clean out I just mentioned, Burt had enough confidence in me to assign me my own route. I was finally on my

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own – someone actually put his trust in me! Knowing that Burt trusted me made me feel like a million bucks! This was the beginning of my new career at Pest Eliminations Services technician! Within two months on the job, I became friendly with all my co-workers. Ed, one of the supervisors that I have mentioned, stood out in the group since he was much older than I was. As a matter of fact, he had been with the company from its inception. It also helped that Ed was very

knowledgeable in the pest extermination industry. Occasionally, we would meet for coffee after a night of work.

When we went out for coffee, we would talk about the job and life in general. While these conversations were taking place, Ed took an interest in me. I had not told him as yet that he was like a father-figure to me. When my car needed to be fixed, Ed was always ready to help me. Every payday, he would tell me to open up a savings account to save for a rainy day. He was also very aware of how much money I was spending helping other people. It took Ed nagging me for four years before I took his advice.

He had invited me to his house and introduced me to his wife Louise; she was very attractive and a good cook. Ed and Louise had two fine boys; that was the start of our friendship! Over time, we became good friends. Along the way, I thanked God that Ed was not just a friend, but a father figure. That's how special he was to me. I never told Ed how he was touching my life. Ed and I remained friends until he passed away.

From this point on, I will shift the subject matter from my own personal life, and focus on events, which led to changes in the lives of many people in my life. It would be impossible for me to write about every life-changing situation that occurred in the last thirty years. So, I will write about some of the main events that I feel to be most important.

CHAPTER 18

Open Doors

It all started on Sunday, Walter and I went to church and when the music began to play, I heard a voice behind me that sounded Heavenly. The girl was singing the name of Jesus like it was a love song. Evidently, she was in love with Jesus! I turned around and looked at her; there was a glow on her face that was unbelievable! *You had to be there to see her heavenly qualities!* After the service ended, I went over to her to introduce myself by saying: “I was overwhelmed by the way you sang the name of Jesus.” As it turned out, my statement started a long friendship – a friendship with the woman whose name is Sandy.

Sandy was very pretty with long blonde hair; she spoke with a southern accent. She had a heart for those who were hurting. Sandy would go into the streets, and every time a person passed by her, she would give literature that explained Jesus’ love for His people. She would pray for strangers and tell them how much Jesus loved them.

Something specific needs to be said about Sandy and her love for Jesus. I recall a day when I asked her out for lunch and to talk, and

she said yes. We went to a Cuban restaurant. As we waited in line, Sandy turned around and started to talk to the woman behind us. She gave her some literature about Jesus and told the woman of the love Jesus has for all of us in our struggles. After Sandy gave the literature to the woman behind us, the woman mentioned that she was praying about the circumstances of her life. Sandy and the woman spoke for a while longer. Yes, that's my Sandy! As we sat down to eat, Sandy told me how she dressed up in a Santa Claus outfit in front of a 711 handing out literature about Jesus, when all of sudden the store manager called the police thinking she was a prostitute. They came and asked her to leave but she even witnessed to the police officer before she left. Like Walter, Sandy is very special to me!

Isn't it amazing how much people change after their interaction with God? These changes were all for the better. God was opening doors and helping the poor and hurting. You could say it all started when Walter went for a ride and met up with a longtime friend named Tony. Walter was telling Tony all about himself as he did many times with others, at the end of his conversation about his life, Tony interrupted him and ask Walter to come out side showed him the girl he was watching sitting on a bus bench. Tony walked right up to the girl to make sure she was OK. He found out that her name was Marsha; she had her child with her. They were homeless. Marsha explained to Tony that she was homeless because they ran away (and not for the first time) from Marsha's husband (and the child's father) because the husband wanted her to work the streets of Las Vegas as a

prostitute. Marsha did express fear of her husband finding her because he always did every time she ran away.

After Marsha told her story, Tony offered her and her child a place to stay in his room for a short time. But she would have to leave eventually because the room was too small for three people. Walter, who had been present at the time, came back to my house and told me about Marsha's situation. I gave it some thought and told Walter that I would not make any decisions until I spoke to her.

So, the next day, Walter, along with Marsha and her child, came to my home for dinner. I tried to make Marsha comfortable as she was telling her story and expressing her desire to start a new life for herself and her child. I agreed that they could stay with me as long as she agreed to my conditions: no drinking, no going to bars, she had to find a job, and start looking for an apartment. Marsha agreed with my conditions. She and her child moved in the next day. To make them more comfortable and to give them some privacy, I allowed them to use my bedroom while I slept on the couch.

Marsha rested for one day, and then she started looking for a job. Since Walter had a car, he offered to drive her around town to search. She got a job as a waitress not far from my apartment. In a very short time, she started working and saved most of her paycheck so that she could find and move into her own apartment. It was obvious to me, she was determined to get her life back together and bring up her child in a safe environment. It was a joy seeing Marsha get on her feet; I know what the feeling of being homeless like, very well. Six months had passed and Marsha had saved enough money to get an apartment of her own. What a blessing that was to witness! Walter and I did not

see her often because she was busy working and raising her child. However, Marsha and her daughter, Diana, went to church with us every Sunday and Wednesday.

After that, it was business as usual. Walter would come over, make my coffee and listen to a Christian radio station for half an hour. As time went on, he would repeat the same stories about his childhood again and again on an almost daily basis.

Then one day, he asked me to go to a restaurant, and we went. When we arrived, the parking lot was empty because the diner was just about to open for dinner. Walter led me to the back of the diner and sat down. He told me to wait. Within five minutes, he looked up and told me, “watch.” I did.

As I was watching, I saw that two people had entered the restaurant and sat down in a booth. I was sitting there thinking to myself, “OK, now what?” Walter looked at me with a serious look on his face, and he told me that every time he went to the restaurant, people seem to follow him in. Walter wanted to ask the owner of the diner to give him some money because he thought that he was bringing in customers – the customers, being the people who he thought were following him.

I looked at him with amazement. I didn’t know what to think. I said to Walter that it was time to go home. As we headed home, we didn’t say very much to each other. I did say to Walter that I didn’t

think the owner would give him any money. I let him off at his home and said goodnight. At this point in time, nothing surprised me – not even this surprised me!

A while later, Walter went back to visit his friend, Tony. And wouldn't you know it: Tony had a new friend named Phil who was homeless at the time and asked if he could stay with him. Like with Marsha, Tony's room was too small so he turned to Walter and asked if Phil could stay with me. Walter said he would ask me the following morning. He came over first thing the next day and asked me if I would take in Phil until he found a job. Just as I did with Marsha, I told Walter to bring Phil to dinner and I would make a decision then.

As soon as the words left my lips, Walter got into his car to pick up Phil. When they returned to my house, we had dinner. He seemed to be a nice guy. He was clean and his clothes were neat. At that point, I knew that he was not the average homeless man. However, Phil had issues that kept him in bondage. He had a drinking problem, but it did not stop him from working as a cook. I found out that in the past, Phil would stay clean and sober for a period of time, and then relapse. I thought that he needed a second chance in life. So, like Marsha, I told Phil that if he wanted my help, I had some conditions – no drinking, no going to bars, must find a job and must find an apartment.

Phil agreed to all of the conditions. I was in contact with Tony who said he would drop Phil at my house. Until that point, I had never

met Tony in person, but I knew that he was also helping people. When they arrived at my home, Phil had all his belongings in a shopping bag. He was hoping that this time would be different for him, so we prayed.

It was very obvious God was using Tony. First, he helped Marsha and now Phil, once again, with Walter's and my help. Walter drove Phil around town so he could look for work. When they returned to my apartment after this first day of job hunting, Phil went to his suitcase, pulled out a Bible and started to read. On seeing this, I asked him about his Christian faith. He explained that he was fighting this addiction to alcohol, and it was not easy.

I had been in my own type of bondage. Before any of us judge him, we need to look into my mirror, knowing that I am not perfect, either. The things I personally went through in my life were not in vain, simply because God was preparing me for this point in time – to help others in need. The person in need of help at the time was Phil.

Phil did have prior experience in cooking, and he did get a job. Everything was going well with him. He read the Bible and even went to church on Sundays! It was there, he met Marsha and Diana. Phil was doing very well. He was holding a steady job as a cook and saving money. Five months passed and Phil told me he had found a place of his own. He didn't move too far from my house. His move made it convenient for him to visit me. Every Sunday, we went to church where we all met new friends. Phil was introduced to

a girl named Mary at church, and they started dating. It seemed as if God had brought them together forever.

They went to church every Sunday, and six months later, they decided to get married. They set a date and started planning the wedding. Mary was so happy she had found such a nice guy. The wedding date arrived, and all of Phil and Mary's friends were at the ceremony, which took place in a small church. I was so glad to see that the two of them had begun sharing their lives. I arrived at the church and everything was as perfect as it could be, As Phil and Mary stood at the front of altar making their vows to each other. When the time came for the pastor asked if there was anyone present who felt that Phil and Mary should not get married.

From the back of the church, a voice said exactly that, they should not get married There was a deafening silence – it was Dominick who spoke. He walked to the front of the alter and repeated himself. Everyone stared at Phil and Mary, along with their pastor; they were astonished. No one spoke. The pastor looked at Dominick and asked him why the marriage should not take place. Without ever stating a reason, Dominick just said they should not get married and walked out of the church. The pastor and the congregation were dumbfounded.

Without any other interruptions, the pastor continued the ceremony despite Dominick's dramatic scene and subsequent exit. After the ceremony was over, we all went to dinner. *I have never been in a position*

like this, I sat there thinking. *I have only seen objections to marriages in movies*. However, *after* everything was said and done, Phil and his new wife, Mary, went on their honeymoon.

For six months Phil and Mary were very much in love. They invited family and friends over house numerous times for dinner and fellowship, Walter and I were especially happy for Phil considering his pass. But everything changed when Mary received a call from her doctor, who told her she had terminal cancer. Phil and Mary's families were devastated. Who wouldn't be? Mary died a short time later – first a wedding, then a funeral. After the funeral was over, Phil disappeared and no one knew where he had gone. The happiness turned out to be short-lived for the couple who were so very much in love. Once again, things quieted down at the home front.

CHAPTER 19

Shooting Stars, Strippers, and Demons

I call Jeannie (one of the kooky twin). We had become good friends partly because she introduced me to the church prior to my accepting Jesus in my life. Since both of us attended the same church we saw each other every Sunday. I am sure she was overwhelmed when she saw I had changed the direction in my life, especially how I was helping others getting their lives to getter. At the end of the church service, I asked her if she would like to join Walter, Marsha, and Diana at my house for dinner. She accepted gladly. Like so many others, she fell in love with Walter, like so many others in spite of his illness. We had a great time at my house eating and fellowshiping together. To me, Walter, who helped everyone, seemed happiest and contented having so many people in his life, who loved and accepted him.

I am sure you will find this event very interesting. It all started a Saturday evening when I was at home alone. There was a knock at my door; it was a friend from church, named Bob. I asked if he wanted to take a ride to Miami; he said sure. As I was getting into the car, I felt an excruciating pain in my left hip. This pain had affected

my work and leisure time over the years. I asked God for a sign of what I

should do about my hip. I used shooting stars as a sign just like Gideon did according to the Bible with the fleece to go to war or not I used the heavenly body for a sign. The first shooting star I see meant no healing. The second star meant I should go to the doctor and have surgery. The third star would be a signal to go to the doctor but do nothing.

As soon as I entered I 95, Bob and I saw a shooting star, shortly after that another star. On our return home, believe it or not, a third star fell from heaven, which meant, go to the doctor and do nothing. I told Walter what happened and ask if he would go to the doctor's office on Monday morning, we went to the doctor's office and waited for almost an hour to see the doctor. I went over to the receptionist and asked why I wasn't called. She said he was called away on an emergency. Having heard that, we left the building and the pain was gone permanently. That night, I went to work with no pain and have done so until this very day. The following Sunday, I went to church to thank God for His faithfulness in healing my hip.

At the end of the church service, I was introduced to a man named Rafael and his wife Mary. They had three young children. They seemed to be an average couple. After talking with them about church, I asked Rafael and Mary if I could visit them sometime, and they said yes. It just so happened that they were having some friends over on the Friday evening. For some reason, I did not know at the time that God had plans for me in Rafael and Mary's lives. Throughout the week, I found myself looking forward to going to

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meet them at their home. The day finally arrived.

It was 7 p.m. Friday evening when I got dressed to go to Rafael's house. I was warmly greeted by everyone. I had such a great time being around other Christians. Rafael provided food and soft drinks. I heard a lot about people's testimonies and how they came to know Jesus. I found these testimonies to be interesting and inspiring since I knew God calls us in so many different ways. In my case, it took a trip halfway around the world for God to get my attention. The best part of the night was when one person at a time shared testimonies of how God impacted their lives. I was inspired, to say the least.

The night was coming to an end. Everybody left, and when I was just about to leave Rafael and Mary asked me to stay because they wanted to share their testimonies. Mary started by telling me that Rafael had been in the drug business, and he was connected to some people in high places. During that time, Mary happened to meet some Christians who led her to Jesus. It was then her life changed. She went on to say that Rafael did not care what she did, as long as it did not interfere with his business.

She said that Rafael would come home and fall asleep on the couch. And while he was sleeping, she would stand over him and pray that he would turn his life around and give it over to Christ. Mary said that she did this for three years. Then, one day, out of the blue, Rafael told Mary that he wanted to go to church with her. He did go to church, and he turned his life over to Jesus. He quit the drug business and looked for a job; he found one. This showed me that God had opened up the doors for Rafael just as He has done for me

and others. After hearing their testimonies, I got up to leave; I thanked Rafael and Mary for inviting me over to their house. I let them know I had a good time that night, especially hearing other people's testimonies. It was a blessing to hear about and see the great changes in people. When I left the house, I did not know it then, but that night was the last time I saw Rafael and Mary for a while – they changed churches.

The following Monday morning, I got a call from Burt, who told me that he was giving me a new account. When I went to the office to pick up the paperwork, Burt asked how I was doing so far on my route and if I had any concerns. I told him that everything was great. We went back to his office and for the first time, Burt explained the events that took place, which led to my hiring. It turns out that Mrs. Sanchez did the hiring for the company up until that point. But on this particular day, Mrs. Sanchez was too busy in the office to sit down with Burt not to hire me. As she passes by Burt, she told him to handle the situation thinking he would not hire me based on my polygraph test which I feel.

It happens to be that Burt hired me despite the fact that the polygraph test revealed that I was using drugs. The results of the test were ignored, and I was hired against the company's policies! By the hand of God, He then change the subject and asked about my faith, and I explained how God was using me in the lives of others. I know Burt was pleased.

After my talk with Burt, he handed me the paperwork for the new account, and I did a double take when I read that the new account

was for a strip club. I was not interested in doing this job. However, I had to provide the service. I made the strip club my last stop of the night. Normally, I would arrive a half hour early to talk and get to know the manager so I could explain the type of services that would be performed. Then, I would get my equipment ready and wait for the club to close.

That night, one of the girls was standing outside the club waiting for her turn to go on stage. I casually walked up to her and asked why she had chosen to work in a strip club. I tried to explain that she was a beautiful girl and that she should have more respect for herself. I went on to say that men look at strippers as a piece of meat, and nothing more.

I was also trying to convince the girl that she had more to offer the world than degrading herself by stripping. But soon, it was the girl's turn to go on stage. I thought to myself that at least I had the opportunity to say something to her about her life. I knew I planted a seed of hope. That was all I could do.

As the strippers were leaving for the night, I started my job in the kitchen and then went to the lounge. I knew that the lounge was where the strippers and customers would have sex under the cover of darkness. I started to spray the lounge, but that area gave me the creeps. I then went to work in the dressing room; it felt like a slime pit. I was almost finished when I felt an evil presence. I was scared out of my socks! Personally, I believed that it was an evil spirit

because the business was a strip club. I wanted to get out of the club as quickly as possible. The last thing I had to do was to service the ladies room. As soon as I was done, I packed up my tools and left.

While I was standing outside of the strip club preparing to go home, I thought about the story of Jericho and the Israelites walking around the city walls seven times – until the walls came tumbling down. So, I walked around the strip club seven times and prayed for all the people who worked and spent their money there. My prayers were for the girls – prayers that they would have a change of heart, seek out a different profession and learn about Jesus. My thinking with these prayers was that if finances dried up, the nightclub would have to close its doors. As far as I was concerned, this kind of business can only hurt people! *Can you see me walking around the building that early in the morning and someone thinking that I was a thief?* I then went straight home.

When I awakened in the morning, Walter was sitting at the counter waiting to have coffee with me. I sat down and told Walter about the evil presence I felt in the strip club. I also told him that I walked around the building seven times – just like the Israelites did at Jericho. Later that day, I called my cousin Tony, who was a pastor of a church in Brooklyn and told him of my experience in the strip club. He knew about evil spirits. At the end of the phone call, Tony and I prayed that the strip club would close.

It so happened, every time Walter and I went grocery shopping we passed the strip club and prayed for it to close. Surprisingly enough, about four months later, Burt called me and asked me to come into the office. When I got to the office, Burt handed me a cancellation slip. Lo and behold, it was for the strip club! I immediately called Walter and my cousin, Tony. We all thanked God for answering our prayers. Shortly after the strip club closed permanently, I had the most terrifying experience I've ever had.

The night started out like any other night. I went to work as usual and then came home. After I arrived home, I had a bite to eat, took a shower, and went to bed. But no sooner had I shut off the lights as soon as my head hit the pillow something I can only describe as a powerful presence enter my room and seemed to pin me to the bed. My first reaction was to call out the name "Jesus," but this evil force was overpowering me so horribly that I couldn't even say Jesus' name! No matter how many times I tried – and I tried many times – I was still unable to say "Jesus."

I knew somehow, I had to say Jesus' name to get this powerful evil spirit to leave. So I summoned every ounce of strength I had and belted out "JESUS!" The evil presence left. I placed my head back on the pillow and went to sleep. I must admit, this is the first time I have ever told anybody about this traumatic experience, including Walter.

I now understand what the Bible means when it declares demonic powers are ever present and interact with mankind in powerful ways.

I hope to shed some light on this most powerful subject that many people don't take seriously.

The first event that revealed the reality of demonic powers in the Bible is found in Matthew chapter 4: 1: Jesus was confronted by Lucifer/ better known as Satan the fallen angel who tried to tempt Him in the desert. You may not believe the account of the confrontation between Jesus and Satan, but 2 Corinthians 4:4 states that Satan has blinded the minds and hearts of those who do not believe. Ephesians 6:12 says: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Indeed, Jesus cast demons out of many, using the power of His very Word. There are many Bible verses, which demonstrate that demonic activities and powers were present in the past and are still active today:

- "When the evening was come, they brought unto him/ Jesus many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick" (Matthew 8:16).
- Jesus rebuked a demon that possessed a man and commanded him to come out. He said,

“And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not” (Luke 4:35)

- “When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him” (Mark 9:25),

That’s why there’s so much evil and tragedy in the world. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says Satan has blinded the minds and hearts of those who do not believe. Satan will exercise his supernatural powers on this earth until he is cast into the lake of fire forever, which Revelation 19:20 talks about.

CHAPTER 20

If You Can Use Anything — Use Me!

After that incident, God was preparing Walter and me to enter a new door of ministry. It all started when I was driving home and saw a billboard alongside the road saying, “John 3:16, JESUS LOVES YOU.” I arrived home, but I could not get that image out of my mind. I went to bed wondering how God could use us to spread the good news of the love of Jesus. I couldn’t afford a billboard; the next best thing was the newspaper.

The following morning as Walter and I were having our coffee, I told Walter about the billboard I had seen. I mentioned to him that I was thinking about placing commentaries in the newspaper; he said, “why not?” The next day, we went to the local office of newspaper company and described to the editor exactly what we wanted to do; he was very accommodating. So much so, he was going to design a layout and edit where ever it was needed.

Walter and I left the office with overweening joy that we would reach thousands of people with the gospel of the love of God. We went straight home and discussed how we were going to write the

commentary and the subject matter. Since my vocabulary was limited, I thought to dictate the sentence and let Walter write it.

I wish I could see your face as you are reading this segment of the book, thinking, how these two individuals are going to write and place articles in the daily paper, and eventually write a book. A person who can't spell and is dyslexic and the other person who is a manic depressant, schizophrenic. The Bible states in 1 Corinthians 2:27 that God uses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise.

The printing company we had visited produced articles in a biweekly newspaper. The editor, Joe, said the paper would cover Broward and Palm Beach counties with approximately fifty thousand issues every other week.

You should see Walter and me at work, especially me trying to dictate to Walter. After we finished dictating, I gave the outline of the story to our friend Sam who edited it. Approximately three weeks passed and then the first copy hit the news stand. The first thing after work, I picked up a copy to see how our article looked. The storyline was great and professionally done. I showed Walter and Sam the article, and we were excited. We wondered how many people would be touched by it. I told the rest of my Christian friends. And they were ecstatic.

Six months passed. As I was driving home one day, I saw an ad on a bus stop bench. Instantly, I got an idea of placing a Bible verse on the bus bench where everybody could see it. I told Walter my idea and he liked it. I looked up the company that made those signs and set an appointment to see the person in charge. When we arrived at the publication company and the owner introduced himself as Mike. We sat down at his desk, and I described exactly what I wanted to be printed on the bench. He quoted me a price, and I agreed. So I placed an order with the inscription: “John 3:16, For God, so love the world He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believed in Him should have everlasting life.”

After the ad was placed on the bus bench, Walter and I would drive by just to see how it looked. We prayed that many would be inspired as well. Since our finances were limited, the only other way we could expose the love of GOD to the public was through our lives.

On Sunday, Walter and I went to church. At the end of the service, our friends from church came back to my house; and had a great dinner and fellowship. There were six of us, but it seemed that every week, someone new joined the group. Phil was with us at that time and after dinner; he took me aside and told me that his life was turning out the way he had hoped. Watching individuals like Phil whose lives were changed was something that Walter and I had the privilege of doing. Personally, I believe each of us fortunate enough should help others, especially if somebody extended a helping hand to us.

After everybody left, Walter and I were in my living room when there was a knock at the door. When I opened the door, I saw a man standing there who said he had come to me for help. I had no idea who sent him. However, I invited him in and fed him. I also gave him some money without knowing the circumstances of his life. All he said to me was that he was homeless. The man ended up leaving, I am sure he was feeling very disappointed.

Eventually, I did find out who sent him to me – it was Walter! It turns out that when he went to the diner, he would talk to strangers, find out if they had a place to stay, and if they didn't, he would give them my address. When the man left, I told Walter that he couldn't continue to give complete strangers my address if they have nowhere to stay and expect me to help them. As I continued, I mentioned that if one of our friends from church tells us of someone in need, that's one thing, but talking to strangers at a restaurant does not mean they have decided to change their lives and walk with Jesus. Later on, I told Walter that if by chance he was to meet someone in need, ask that person to join us for coffee. If a person says yes, we could determine how I would help. He agreed.

Walter continued to come over every day and vent about his life if no one else was there. He continued to tell me that he wanted to be normal – wanted to be like everyone else. In response, I told him if he meets a normal person other than Jesus let me know? I explained to Walter, we are all in the same boat of life, each of us has issues.

I think Walter gave a sigh of relief because all of us are in the same boat of life. Some people are sitting in the front of the boat and have major problems. The rest of the people sitting in the back of the boat have fewer problems, and are trying to help those sitting in front of them. With this in mind, I told Walter that he was in good company. I went on to say that there was a man, who was perfect in every way, and His name was Jesus. There was no one like Him.

This conversation was the last time Walter spoke about wanting to be normal. That's how the truth sets people free – the truth set Walter free! It was getting late and he wanted to go out for a cup of coffee to the local diner He did ask me to go with him, but I told him that I did not want to go, so he went to the diner alone. Would you believe it? At the diner, Walter started a conversation with a young guy name Rick who was homeless. This time was different because he called me before bringing the guy to my home for me to help him.

During this call from Walter, I told him that I would evaluate the situation, but by no means should he tell the guy that he could stay in my house. Walter drove the guy to my house. When I opened the door, there was a young man standing there with a strange look on his face. I invited him in and we sat at the counter. He told me his life's goals. The man was aware that Walter and I were Christians, and he saw many pictures of Jesus on the wall. He also saw a Bible in full view on an end table. After spotting the Bible, he tried to impress me by saying that he was a Christian, and went on and on about his faith in Jesus.

To his surprise, I was not buying it. It seemed to me that he was lying about himself to me. I then asked Walter to come into my bedroom to tell him that the strange man, whose name was Rick, could not stay with me. I went on to tell Walter that I heard it in my spirit – a little voice inside me. So we went back into the living room. Rick continued to talk about himself and we listened to what was being said for half of an hour. At that point, I asked Walter once again to come back to my room with me. This time, I felt that Rick was being honest. I changed my mind and told him that Rick could stay. It was amazing that God let me know the truth about Rick! Just like I did with Marsha and Phil, there were conditions given to Rick – no drinking, no bars, get a job and look for your own apartment.

Like Marsha and Phil, eventually, Rick found a job and a place of his own in a trailer park doing maintenance work. We kept in touch by phone because of the distance between my home and where Rick lived. Walter and I went to visit him just to find out if he needed any help from us. As it turned out, Rick was doing very well. It was nice to see that. It's a fantastic feeling to witness another person getting a second chance at life. After the visit, I drove Walter home and called it a night. Two weeks later, Rick called to ask me if he and a friend could come over the following Sunday for dinner with us. I agreed.

Upon arrival on that Sunday, Rick confided in me at the table that on the night Walter brought him to my house, he was trying to con me by pretending to be a Christian. I told Rick that the Spirit of God had already revealed his dishonesty. He also mentioned that when

Walter and I went into my bed room to talk, upon our return to the living room that night, he knew he had to be honest and put his trust and faith in Jesus. We both had a change of heart.

I told Rick that I knew exactly what was going on when I first met him – that everything God does leads to a change of heart. I explained that there is a saying in the Bible, you can lie to a man, but you can never lie to the Holy Spirit. Rick really did know this saying. It also turned out that Rick was well-versed in the Bible. As a matter of fact, he was teaching me some things about Scripture that I did not know! Within months, he had saved enough money to go back North Carolina to his family. I heard from him two years later. He called me and said he was married and had two children. It was a blessing to hear he was doing well.

Nothing new happened for the following six months, so Walter and I just went about our daily routine, going to church and having our friends over for dinner. It was a Friday when God started to use us once again. It all began when I went to the office to pick up my paycheck. I asked Walter if he wanted to go with me to my bank to cash my paycheck. As soon as I left the bank teller's window, I heard the same small voice I mentioned before. It told me to call Rafael and Mary; I had not seen or heard from them in about six months. The voice said that I should give them \$100 of my \$250 check. This would have been a big sacrifice considering I live from paycheck to paycheck. If I did it, I would have very little money to live on until the next paycheck, but I listened to the Spirit.

I called Rafael, and Mary answered the phone. I asked her if Rafael was home. It turned out that he was not there. I told her that the Spirit of God was inspiring me to give Rafael \$100. There was a moment of silence and then I heard joy! She began to tell me that she and a friend were praying all morning for God to help her pay her electricity bill. Mary knew that if the bill was not paid on that day, the power would be turned off. My gift of this money to Rafael and Mary came at the right time, and it was the exact amount of money needed to pay the bill. Mary could not stop thanking me for the gift. I felt even more blessed by giving because I was following God's instructions. My faith in God increased.

CHAPTER 21

An Uncommon Gift

A year or so had passed when Walter and I were sitting in the living room listening to the Christian radio station. This time, however, would be different. By any chance, do you remember me writing about the truth and that the truth will set you free? Well, on this particular morning, I was set free.

The host of the Christian radio show we were listening to was interviewing a man named James S. Evans. The book he wrote was called *An Uncommon Gift*. The host asked the author what the theme of the book was. He explained that it was about people who were affected by dyslexia. Until that day, I had not heard of dyslexia. The author described the symptoms, and then I knew that he was talking about me. That I was dealing with these symptoms for forty-five years. The author continued talking and said that people with dyslexia happened to be very intelligent, but they had a disadvantage in succeeding in life. Anybody who was affected with Dyslexics had to try even harder than the average person to accomplish a task involving reading and writing. Well, this program got my full attention!

I felt that James S. Evans was talking about me and my disorder. Evans told a story about an individual who wanted to start a business of his own, and how his so called friends and family told the individual that he was crazy because they thought he was totally unable to do such a thing. That hit home for me!

After the radio program ended, at that moment, I became totally free. For the first time in my life, after thinking to myself for so many years, I was dumb and stupid, I felt quite the opposite. I sat down on my couch and started to reminisce about one of my own personal achievements. One of them were the year 1970, when my neighbor Tom who worked for New York City's sanitation department, came to my Mons apartment and inform me that the job was great and the pay was greater. My neighbor also explained that in twenty years, he could retire with half-pay. He also made it a point out to tell me that if I wanted a job in the sanitation department, I had to pass a written test and a physical. The day arrived that I went down town New York City to the sanitation department office, and I applied for the job.

There were forty-five thousand applicants. What were the odds of me being hired? You already know that the odds were against me because I saw myself as stupid, and I was only 125 pounds. Thinking that I was at a disadvantage, I tried even harder than many of the other applicants. I was so determined to pass both tests that I worked out at the gym every night until I thought I was ready. When the day arrived to take the written test , I got on a train and headed to the main office in Manhattan.

As I was on the train to Manhattan, I remembered years earlier, I tried to take a written test to join the army, but I failed. This time I pass written test. Two week latter I was notified by mail to take the physical test. As I write this, I recall me walking up a hill, entering the building and standing in line until my number was called. This time, I was ready for the physical test, but I was confident I would pass the test.

After all the preparations I made for the physical test, I was still only 125 pounds. I saw men there that were twice my size. When my number was called, I asked the instructor if I should start with the the maximum weight of seventy pounds. The instructor took a look at me and saw how thin I was, and he thought I was kidding him. I told him that I was very serious. He said I must be crazy – these words were more familiar to me than I would have liked. I had to lift seventy pounds over my head with-it my left hand one hands and then my right hand, and did it to the surprise of the instructor. And after lifting the weights, I had to do one sit-up with sixty pounds behind my head. I tried to lift 60 pounds, and immediately to stop. I then decided to try 50 pounds, and I did it

A week later, the results were posted in the newspaper. There was my name in print. It was amazing! I passed the written test with 95%! To make a long story short, I came in 1,100 out of the 45,000 applicants. I beat 43, 900 men who were much bigger than me. It may not sound like much to anyone, but it was a huge accomplishment for me!

Hearing the radio program let me know that it was dyslexia that caused people to think like me, be stupid, and not accomplish anything. In retrospect, on that day, I accepted Jesus when I truly

became free from rejection and feeling inferior to others. All I know is that Jesus and His love meant the world to me. As I said before, the truth can set anyone free, if freedom is what you really want.

CHAPTER 22

Touching Lives

A year later, I received a call from Phil, saying he was in the hospital after he a car accident. He asked me to come visit him.

The following day, when I got to the hospital, I saw that his only injury was with his leg. I looked at the accident report, Phil should have been dead, but I guess God had another plan for him. God used me in Phil's life for the second time.

I was concerned about Phil because I had not seen him since his wife Mary's funeral. I asked him what had happened to him. He said that he moved in with his father right after his wife's death. As he continued talking about his misfortune with his wife, he started to go back drinking and found hem self-living in a shelter due to his farther passing away. I ask him what was his plans after he was discharge from the hospital, he had none. Since he had no place to live, I offered once again to let him stay with me until he was able to get back on his feet. He was grateful for the offer.

I turned my attention to other beds in the room and saw a young boy

who was in a coma. Right after I saw the boy, I asked Phil what had happened to the young boy, he told me that he had no clue, He seen his mother visit hem all most every day, and if you see his parents, ask if I could pray for hem and his family. Before I left the hospital, and asked Phil to join me in prayer, he said yes.

I returned to the hospital two days later with Walter in tow. As we entered the building through the front entrance and were walking toward the elevators, I saw a woman in the lobby with the young boy in Phil's room. This time, the boy was propped up in a wheelchair. I walked over to the woman and asked her if it was OK for me to pray for her son. A look of amazement showed on her face. She had been praying to God that He would put somebody in her life who was Christian.

I knew that God had something up his sleeve regarding Walter and me. From that time on, we became very close with Irene, and her family. This friendship lasted eight years. She was married to a man named Jim and had an eight-year-old daughter named Carolyn.

I asked Irene why her son was in a coma. Irene then explained that he fell down a flight of stairs when they were living in New York City and that he never regained consciousness. I asked her about her plans. She explained that she came to Florida to live with her mother and they would all move into a bigger house, so Irene's mother could live with them. There would be enough room for her young son, whose name was Johnny to live with his family while getting the needed around-the-clock care.

I volunteered to help Irene and her families move to their new house even though I was having second thoughts about doing so. I was considering an old proverb that says a person should think twice before

Committing to anything – marriage included. Irene gave me the address to her old home and at what time she wanted me to arrive.

On moving day, I drove to her old address, but I could not find her. Somehow, not being able to find them was a relief. But as I drove away, I heard a loud voice yelling, “Barry, we’re here!” I looked around, and there was Irene in the middle of the street waving her hands at me. I pulled up in front of Irene’s mother house and started to move her mother’s belongings into the truck and then drove to the new house to unload the truck. The entire move took six hours. Irene couldn’t stop thanking me for helping them. Her husband Jim had no idea how God would use me and Walter in his future life.

About two months into our friendship, Jim lost his job. I called him and suggested that he should apply for a job with Pest Elimination Services. Jim did take this advice. He called the main office and filled out an application. I knew that this business was different. Jim was hired and became one of the best salesmen within the companies in the south region.

Jim was dedicated to the company and successful in getting new accounts. It seemed like everyone involved knew about his son. Jim told me that Mr. Sanchez the owner of the company gave him his gold ring and watch to sell to help him and his family pay for Johnny’s medical bills, and clear up some other debts. I believed this to be true.

From my perspective, Mr. Sanchez cared for his employees in the same way he cared for his family. In my opinion, he was a great

example of what a man should be. I learned a lot from him. Over

the years, Walter and I brought Jim and Irene food, and helped them clean their house; they had seven dogs, you could imagine what was like. We were like family members – just like Mr. Sanchez and me and Walter. I thought that God was doing amazing things in Jim's life.

CHAPTER 23

God is Always in Control

Two years passed and I had two weeks of vacation coming to me. So I called my mother and told her that I was thinking about traveling to Brooklyn to visit her. This was big, considering that since I moved to Florida in 1978, I had not seen my mother. When I told her what I wanted to do, she sounded as though she was very excited. I made reservations to go to Brooklyn. I was glad to see her, and she was glad to see me. She made my favorite dish – lamb shanks! It brought back old memories.

It took years to save enough money to take the trip to visit my mother, but it was worth it. It was nice to be back home, to see my old friends, especially my old friends from the Sanitation Department. Tom and Vinnie, my close friends, were the people who took me to the airport when I was going to Israel. In fact, we are all still close friends today.

I must say that these two men thought I was crazy to leave my job! When I finally saw them, we had a great time talking about the good old days. We shared some memories, including how I dressed a

girlfriend in an old sanitation uniform, and she rode with me in the garbage truck. While in the truck, I had my arm around my girlfriend as we were kissing, a woman passed by the front of the truck, and she did a double take. She probably thought she saw two men kissing.

Tom and Vinnie took me out for dinner. They treated me as if I was their long-lost brother. And yes, we had a great time!

After my visit with Tom and Vinnie, I spent the rest of my vacation with my mother. We visited my cousins Rita and Tony – Tony was a pastor. We shared with each other about what God was doing in our lives. This conversation went on for hours. We also talked about our experiences as God changed our lives as well as the lives of many people around us. In the end, I felt I was encouraged by another Christian – that other Christian being Pastor Tony.

A week later, I considered going by my daughter Denise house, they did not live too far away from my mom house. I got on the B train to 18 street station, less than 10 minutes away. I knew I needed to proceed with caution because if my ex-wife saw me, she might call the police. I did not want to be seen by my ex-in-laws, either. So, I walked around the block and put on sunglasses and a hat to disguise myself. Peeking from around the corner, I did not see my daughter or my x wife. I heard a small voice within saying, not now.

At that moment, I felt sad, because I did not see her. From then on, every time I went to visit my mother the same thing happened, I

would attempt to see my daughter, but as I approached the house, I would hear a voice from within telling me not today, go home. When I tried to see my son, Barry Joseph, once again, that same still small voice said, not now.

Since I was unable to see either one of my children, I asked God if I could at least have a picture of my baby girl. I went back to Mom's house disappointed. Once again, God answered my prayers. Fast forward to 1985, my niece Liz and her daughter Rebecca traveled from Florida to New York City to visit friends. While Liz was there, she met a young man name Don, a very good-looking man. They became friends, and later, they were married.

Liz and Don decided to settle in Florida, however, it was a matter time that Don could not find a job because of his qualifications as an accountant that paid as well. His previous job as an accountant in New York City paid \$70,000 a year, and in Florida, the same job paid \$30,000 a year. So, Don and Liz decided that Don move back to New York City to his old job and rented an apartment in Brooklyn in his moms houswe. A short time later, Liz, who loved New York City, move back to the city and live with her husband in Brooklyn. They lived on 17 ave and 74th Street – right around the corner from my ex-in laws' house!

It ended up that my ex-wife Marcia and our daughter Denise had moved to New Jersey two years earlier. However, Marcia's mother and father still lived in Brooklyn, and Marcia would visit periodically.

One day, Liz's daughter Rebecca was standing in front of her house.
All of a sudden, her friend from next door yelled, "Hey Larsen!"

Rebecca turned around and she saw the face of the girl called Larsen. She ran inside to tell her mother that Uncle Barry's daughter Denise was outside. Almost immediately, Liz ran outside and invited Denise and her friend to have something to eat. Denise and her girlfriend went upstairs to my niece apartment and had a bite to eat, they stayed for an hour and said to my niece, she had to go to her grandparents' house, and that her mother was waiting for her there.

As soon as Denise and her friend left, Liz called me and describe everything that happen leading up to my daughter visit. I asked my nice Liz if she was able to get a picture of Denise, but she wasn't. Needless to say, my heart was broken. Liz did say that Rebecca's friend who live next door may have had a school picture of her. I knew that was good enough for me!

Many people might believe that I was just a lucky person for Liz and Rebecca to have moved where they lived and that Denise and Rebecca's meeting was a coincidence. But my belief was that it was God's will. He was in control.

My vacation was coming to an end, and I asked myself what else God had up His sleeve for me.

CHAPTER 24

“God Put Laurie into My Life.”

No sooner than I got back to my home in Florida my cousin, Pastor Tony calls me. He told me that he met a girl in the mall whom he had invited to come to his church. She agreed and attended services a few times.

One day after service, Laurie told Pastor Tony that she was moving back to South Florida. Tony gave this young girl my phone number in case she needed a Christian friend. Initially, I thought after hearing that, God was answering my prayers sending this girl for me to marry. Weeks went by and the girl never called, so I didn't give much thought of her after that.

As time went on, a friend of mine named Robert who lived one apartment building down the street from mine came over to my apartment and asked me to pray for him and his new girlfriend, which I did. But to be honest, I felt that there was something wrong with his request. I continued to pray for them every time I passed his house and when I went to church. The guy's prayer request went on

for a couple of months. It was at this time that I received a call from a girl named Laurie, who was the young girl my cousin gave her my phone number, I was static!

Laurie and I talked for a while on the phone, and then I made a date with her. Since she lived in South Florida not far from my house, she was familiar with the churches near her mom's house. So, we decided to meet at the church on Wednesday night. This is the girl I thought God had sent to me!

Laurie was young and very pretty. After church was over, we went out for coffee. I felt that she was the one for me! She asked me where I lived; she told me that she was seeing a guy named Robert who lived near me. It was then I realized that Laurie was the girl I had been praying for! Amazing, isn't it? I must say that God is so good. He took this girl from nowhere, brought her for me to marry her.

Laurie and I began dating, and our relationship became serious. We were already making plans to marry, even though we had only known each other for about two months. My friend Robert, who lived in the apartment next door, was not very happy when he found out I was seeing his potential girlfriend. In my mind, I thought that if Robert knew all about Laurie, he would be thanking me right now.

On Monday, I took Laurie into work with me so she could meet my co-workers. I introduced her to Burt and Ed. A short time later, Ed asked me to come outside. He wanted to know if I was crazy because

God Put Laurie in My Life

Laurie was about half my age at that point in time. But I wanted

Laurie and refused to let anyone stop me from pursuing my dreams. Everyone thought that marrying her was a big mistake. Personally, I did not care.

I drove to her mother's house when we arrive her mother Jean invite us in, we sat in the living room, and to my surprise Laurie mother was very nice to me. She offered Laurie and me something to eat, I said no thanks. As we sat on the couch Jean ask me where I live and what kind of work I was doing! I wanted to end this light conversation, and get to the point about Laurie and our plans. Laurie and I told her mom about our wedding plans; you had to see her expression on her face of disbelief. Like everyone else, Laurie's mother asked me if I knew what I was doing since Laurie was diagnosed as being schizophrenia and manic depressant. My reply to that was, "God put Laurie into my life." I was in denial like most people and was not listening to any advice that was given. I did not want to hear the truth! As time passed, I noticed that Laurie was acting strangely. She reminded me of Walter!

Laurie began to exhibit signs of paranoia – she would hear and see things that were not really there. She would also freak out. She told me that the Secret Service was following her. Eventually, I had to accept the truth – she was not the girl sent by God. I knew that there was a lesson for me in these happenings, whether I liked it or not. I had to accept this lesson-not to be move by our emotions, by the grace of God, we did not get married. Later on, I found out later on from her friends, she was put into a psychiatric intuition, that were

God Put Laurie in My Life

she cut her fingers and was sent to a psychiatric unit. She had schizophrenia and manic-depressive illness (This would probably be called schizoaffective disorder). The Bible states “All things work together well for those who love God” (Romans 8:28).

There were good things that came out of my relationship with Laurie. As God would have it one night, when I was working my last stop at a local bar, I felt confused about our relationship. It was too early for me to start the

bug service, so I sat at the bar and asked the bartender to give me a drink. I normally never drink, especially while on the clock. The bartender told me that the drink was on the house, I replied by saying, Amen!

At the other end of the bar, there was a guy named Ben, who came over to me and said that he was a Christian. He kept talking, and it was obvious that he was drunk like a skunk. For a while, we talked about God and what He was doing in my life.

At one point, Ben told me that he was a backsliding Christian. He went on to explain that he had returned to his old ways of smoking pot and drinking since his divorce. In return, I told him that I lived around the corner and how all of my Christian friends would come to my house after church.

In the middle of this conversation, the bartender interrupted and said it was closing time and we had to leave. This meant that it was time for me to do my job. Just before Ben left to go home, he said that he, too, lived around the corner. So I invited him to join my friends and me for dinner after church on Sunday.

As it turned out, Ben lived in the same apartment that my friend Robert (the Robert who wanted to date Laurie) had resided. I thought this to be very interesting how God brings people together.

It was not until two weeks later that Ben joined my friends and me for dinner, and we welcomed him with open arms. Afterward, Ben took me aside and said that he had been watching us from a distance over the last two weeks because he wanted to make sure that we were really Christians. Unbeknownst to us, he had determined that by the way we interacted with each other lovingly and respectfully.

Later on, we found out that Ben was once involved in the music ministry at a church in Philadelphia. It turns out that he was very religious, and he even belonged to a men's group. He had never known people like us – where the love of Christ was manifested. He never got involved in anything related to homelessness or drug addiction. There is a phrase among Christians – “head knowledge, not heart knowledge.” Your head knows the Bible, but you never take action.

After Ben's divorce, he had lost all faith in God. He spent all his money on women, drugs, and alcohol. He ended up living in a single room. He lived with Robert in a nine-foot by twelve-foot room, and he was still smoking pot and drinking.

Ben, fell into that same kind of trap that so many others have at one time or another. Walter and I wanted to help him get back to living a Christian life – putting Jesus first. I was glad that he asked Jesus Christ to come back into his life in a more personal way. After doing so, he stopped drinking and smoking weed.

Like other people Walter and I had helped, we drove Ben to and from work. Because of his conversion, he stop smoking pot and drinking whiskey, this enabled hem too start putting a portion of his pay check in the bank, for the first time since he moved to Florida, five years previous.

Ben attended church with all of us. And on top of that, he was tithing – giving money to the church. Walter and I were so inspired by how Ben had changed with the help of Jesus.

Since Ben was tithing, I thought about helping him get a better job and an increase in salary. I happened to be servicing the Hilton hotel, and I asked Tom, the head engineer department who happens to liked me if he was in need of a hard-working man. It turned out that he was. I told Ben I inquired about getting hem a job in the engineer department, he was so grateful because he did not like being a waiter in a restaurant. He applied and got the job; he was working in the engineering department within a week. Ben did, indeed, make more money, which was a big plus.

A week later, Walter and I were driving by the supermarket where we saw a car for sale for \$250. We called Ben and asked him if he would like us to lay out the money for the car, and he could pay us later. So, I called the owner and made arrangements to buy the car. He met us at the supermarket and we made the purchase. We tested the car, and it was in very good condition – a miracle sent from God!

Ben kept his end of the bargain and paid us back as promised. Amazingly within a year, He had saved enough money to find a place of his own, this way he could move out of the small room in Robert's

apartment. He also joined my church and went into the music ministry as a drummer. Later, he became an usher helping people to their seats.

Roman 8:28 says that all things work together for good for those who love God; it did in our lives. The Bible also states in Leviticus 23:3 that there is a time to rest from all our work. With that, Walter and I used our time to study the Scriptures more in depth. As I was reading the Bible, I came across a section about the gifts God gives to each one of us. By faith, Walter and I were given the gifts of charity and hospitality. We also read about the gift of prophecy, which caught my interest.

CHAPTER 25

Prophetic Gifts

Jesus said that there are many gifts, and if we ask Him, He will give them to us. This topic was on my mind when I walked to the church the following night. And when I got there, I asked God to give me the gift of prophecy. I was like a child who wanted a new toy, but prophecy is nothing to play with.

I left the church and was on my way home, giving no further thought to the request I had made to God. A couple of days later, while I was sitting and watching the news in the living room, the newscaster announced that Challenger, the first space shuttle to be launched from Cape Canaveral. On its return back to Earth may have to land in California depending on the weather conditions in Florida.

The videographer turned the camera and took a picture of Challenger's potential California landing site. As I was watching, a weird feeling came over me. I received a vision of the earth shaking. It was as if I was seeing future events; I thought the shuttle was going to crash. I immediately called my cousin Tony because I thought he would be the only one who would understand. I told him I had gone

to church, asked God to give me the gift of seeing into the future, and now I'd received a vision that the shuttle was going to crash! Tony did not know what to say; he just asked me to pray that all would be well.

After I had finished speaking with Cousin Tony, I confided the vision to all my Christian friends! I am sure they all thought I'd lost my mind. I wouldn't have blamed them considering the emotional state I was in at the time.

One week before the shuttle took off from Cape Canaveral, I was nearly going out of my mind thinking something was going to happen to the space shuttle because of the vision I saw. Finally, the day of the launch came. I sat in front of the with my friends and watched intensely to see if the shuttle was going to explode upon takeoff. It didn't happen; thank God!

For the next two weeks, the shuttle flew around the earth until its landing date. Again, I couldn't stop thinking about the possibility of it crashing. Three days prior to the shuttle's landing, Phil came by my apartment and asked me if I wanted to attend a Christian revival at the Orlando, Florida fairgrounds. I thought it was a good idea, especially considering the alternative was staying home and being haunted for the next three days.

The following day, Phil and I headed north to Orlando. Four hours later, we arrived at the campground and one of the staff members

there directed us to the camping area. I parked the car, and we walked around. The campground reminded me of Woodstock, but instead of drugs and sex, it was all about the teachings of Jesus.

At night, Christian music bands played until 12 a.m. It was an unbelievable time, and I was glad Phil suggested to attend the revival. We were having so much fun the three days passed before we knew it. We left on Saturday afternoon at 4 p.m... so we could see the shuttle landing on Sunday.

I entered the Florida Turnpike and suddenly, I smelled smoke coming from the engine. I pulled off the road, opened the hood of the car, and wouldn't you know it? The alternator was on fire. I quickly disconnected the wires from the alternator and put out the fire.

I got back into the car, grabbed Phil's hand, and started to pray and worship God! I knew God would get us back home using only the car battery, even though I'd never heard of anybody driving some 200 miles on only a battery and making it home. After praying, I started the car and continued driving. But, all of a sudden, fear set in. The sun was setting quickly, which meant I had to turn on my headlights, that would drain the battery even faster. I figured I'd have a better chance of making it home if I used just the parking lights.

But that night, God had other plans. A police officer pulled me over, got out of his car, walked over to mine, and warned me if I didn't

turn on the headlights, I would receive a ticket. To make sure I kept my lights on, he called his fellow officer miles ahead and told him to look out for my car. However, after four hours of driving with the lights on, we made it home. Remember when I told you my battery was stolen, and my boss sold me this battery? Did we make it back home because of luck or because of God? You decide.

Sunday morning, Walter and I went to church and as usual, I was thanking God for His faithfulness. After church, I invited all my friends to come to my house, have something to eat, and watch the shuttle landing. This time, everyone was on pins and needles as we sat in front of the TV.

The shuttle was finally approaching the landing strip in California; my heart was beating so fast. When the shuttle landed safely, I felt as if God had lifted a huge burden from my shoulders. I was so glad I was wrong this time.

After the program ended, everybody went home.

That night before I went to work, I walked outside to pray, but this time I said to God, "Please do not give me anything I am not able to handle, no matter how much I beg you!" After I finished praying, I went to work feeling much better, especially considering no catastrophes had happened.

Two days later, Ben and Phil came to my house and told me they seen on the news broadcast there was a big earthquake in Mexico

just opposite the landing strip in

Southern California. On the same day the shuttle landed, thousands of people in Mexico lost their lives. I knew deep in my soul, there was an earth-shaking, though I didn't fully understand what the vision meant at the time.

CHAPTER 26

Active Faith

Approximately a year or so had passed, and Marsha was fully established. She had an apartment, was holding a job and raising her daughter. Out of the blue, Boo, her ex-husband showed up at her front door. From my understanding, they talked and since he wasn't drinking or taking drugs, he seemed to be clean. Marsha let Boo move into her home. They went to church together and joined the gang at my house for dinner. All was fine until Boo received an inheritance from his father's estate, which amounted to \$30,000.

With the money in hand, Boo went on a cocaine binge that lasted thirty days. His money dried up! Now that he was without money, he tried once again to put Maggie back to work as a prostitute. It got so bad for Marsha that she jumped out of a third-story window, just to get away from Boo. She broke her back in two places and was hospitalized for months. Diana, Marsha's little girl was put into foster care.

Walter and I went to see Marsha in the hospital. She looked so sad – so terrible just lying in the hospital bed. She had bruises all over her

body because of the fall. I felt heartbroken – she had tried so hard to start a new life for herself and her child.

Boo seemed to have disappeared off the face of the earth.

Over time, Walter and I would visit Marsha throughout her recovery in the hospital. She had been there for eight months and was going to be released soon. Since she had no place to go and recover, I asked her to stay with me for as long she needed to get back on her feet.

At first, it was difficult for Marsha to just get around the house. However, in time, she was able to walk on her own again. She wanted to start over again, and she was hired at the hotel around the corner from my apartment. Once again, we were pleased with her recovery.

Since everything was quiet at home, I asked Marsha if she was able to take care of herself while I took two weeks' vacation. I called Walter and asked him if he wanted to take a trip to Palm Springs California to visit my brother. Without any hesitation, he said yes. I called my brother to let him know we were coming; he was overjoyed. We were on our way to Palm Springs, California.

For the next two weeks, my brother showed Walter and me a great time. "To everything, there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). There is a time to work and a time to rest, and rest we did. We took a tram to the top of the highest

mountain in Palm Springs where there was still snow on the ground in the middle of the summer.

My brother also drove us around to see the houses of the rich and famous. We were having so much fun that before we knew it, vacation was coming to an end, and I had to get back home and go to work. It was great being at home and sleeping in my own bed once again. It may sound strange but I was looking forward to getting back to work. When I returned home Marsha was much better.

Two weeks later while I was home in the afternoon, I heard a knock on my door. It was my next-door neighbor, Laney. The first thing I noticed was the expression of despair on his face. I invited him in, and we sat on the couch. He told me that when he had gone to church the previous Sunday, one of the elders commented on the condition of the shoes he wore to church. Laney like so many of us lived from paycheck to paycheck with barely enough money to buy food.

There was a time when I was barely making it as well, so I knew the feeling. I told him to go back to church and tell that elder if he was so concerned about his shoes, he should buy him a new pair! I think he did.

That incident reminded me of a parable Jesus told his disciples about the Good Samaritan. In brief, the story revolves around a man who was beaten, robbed, and left on the roadside to die. A religious

person just walked by without extending any help. The Good Samaritan – part Gentile, part Hebrew went out of his way to help that poor individual. Sadly enough, I have seen the same scenario unfold in today's society.

For instance, there are many good people who witness injustice and tragedy around the world, stand on the sidelines and complain and criticize those less fortunate. What grieves me most of all, is that some Christians act no differently.

I personally have seen a Pastor fall from the faith, and a portion of his congregation act like werewolves, ready to devour him. “If a brother or sister is caught in sin, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, or else each and every one of us will be accountable for our actions or lack of when we stand before God” (Galatians 6:1).

You may ask, “What can I do?” First, get on your knees and ask God to forgive you, for how you act toward those who have fallen or are less fortunate than you and stop gossiping.

Next, I suggest you stay on your knees and pray for that person or fellowship. Ask Jesus Christ to intervene on behalf of those who have fallen and restore them to the faith. Romans 12:3 warn us against thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. We see the consequences of this attitude in Luke 18:9-14. Jesus told a parable about those who trust in their own righteousness (verse 9). Two

people went to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a publican (sinner). The proud, self-righteous Pharisee prayed in verses 11-12, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortionists, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess.” Meanwhile, verse 13 says the sinner stood far off, so ashamed of his sins that he couldn’t even lift his eyes to God. In a desperate need to be forgiven, he beat his breast and said to the LORD, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Guess which one went home in a right relationship with God? Yup, the sinner, because as verse 14 says, “Every one that exulted himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.” Something to think about.

It was sometime later; I went to the bank to cash my three hundred dollar paycheck. As I was leaving, I suddenly felt a strange, yet, familiar feeling come over me. It was similar to what I felt about Rafael and Mary. This time, I related this feeling to Jim and Irene. When I went home, I asked Marsha if she wanted to go with me to visit Jim and Irene. I explained to her that a little voice was saying to me, “Go, and give money to Jim.” She was interested in seeing how God would work. The Bible states that you need two to three witnesses to verify if what you say is true. So far, every time God used me to give money to help others, there was always a witness. I called Jim to let him know that Marsha and I were on our way to visit them. I said nothing to him about money.

As I was driving to Jim and Irene's house, I asked God how much money I should give. In fact, I thinking to myself about the amount of money more than once while driving to see Jim and Irene. I knew that God would let me know what to give when the time was right.

We arrived, and Jim let us in. We sat down on the couch and he told me how they were trusting God for all their needs. I then got up from my seat and walked over to Jim. I reached into my pocket and handed him the three hundred dollars from my paycheck. Jim took one look at it and told me I was crazy! Irene thanked me, but she and Jim could not take the money. I insisted. They thanked me over and over again.

Just as we were about to return to the couch, the doorbell rang. Jim got up and answered the door. You're not going to believe this – it was their son's medical supplies being delivered at the very moment I gave Jim the money! The truck driver brought in the supplies and handed Jim the bill for two hundred ninety-eight dollars. So, you see, once again, God provided at just the right time! There is no doubt that it is God who gets involved at the right time to strengthen the faith of those who rely on Him. It was getting late, and since Marsha had to go to work in the morning, we left to go home. I knew that Marsha's faith grew after witnessing how God helps others. We finally got home and called it a night.

A number of months passed after that miracle with Johnny's medical supplies. One night, Marsha said she was going out with some friends.

She knew my rules. She got dressed, said that she would be back in a couple of hours, and left.

I stayed home to watch a movie and around eleven o'clock; I heard screaming and fighting near the church. I went outside to have a look, but I didn't see anyone. So, I went back to watching my movie. I then heard a knock on the door. I got up to answer it and lo and behold, there was a policeman with Marsha. She was drunk. It was her who was yelling and screaming outside ten minutes earlier. The officer asked me if I knew her, and for a minute, I paused. I wanted to tell the officer no, but when I looked at Marsha's condition, I told him that she lived with me.

She walked into the house. I didn't want to say anything at that time because she was drunk. I felt that there was no point in talking to a drunken woman. Instead, I told her to take a shower and go to sleep in my bedroom. I made myself comfortable on the couch and went right to sleep within minutes.

Did you ever feel like someone was looking at you while you were sleeping? That was exactly what happened to me that night. I was fast asleep, and when I opened my eyes, there was Marsha kneeling down alongside the couch. The only thing she was wearing was a towel wrapped around her body! She was looking right at my face when she said that she wanted to have sex with me right then and there. I looked straight into her eyes and told her that if I did not truly love her, I would take her up on her

offer. However, I ended up saying, “Go back to my room and go to sleep. We’ll talk tomorrow.”

In the morning, as Marsha and I were having coffee, she insisted that I have sex with her, not because she was attracted to me, but to test me. She was trying to find out if I was a real Christian! At this point, you have read enough of my story to understand that telling Marsha no to sex the preceding night showed that I had changed because of the love I had for her, and the Lord.

Marsha was extremely attractive, and in the past, I would never have rejected an offer for sex. With this in mind, I had a short conversation with her about what happened the previous night. She apologized for her actions and said that she will never do what she did again. I believed her. The topic of drinking never came up again. It was Sunday evening, and I went to a Bible study. I had an overwhelming desire to call my friend Mickey and ask her if I could visit her afterward; she said absolutely.

I went directly to Mickey’s house after Bible study and we talked. It was getting late and I asked her if I could pray for her. She explained there was a constant pain in her left hip over the years. I prayed briefly and left. The following day, I received a call from Mickey stating the pain was completely gone. Footnote: Mickey received the healing, but you, the reader, received something more precious than silver or gold. You have seen God’s intervention in the lives of ordinary people.

A couple of weeks had gone by, and I got word that Boo, Marsha's ex-husband was back in town. With this in mind, I asked Ben if Marsha could stay with him until Boo left town. Ben went home and Marsha went back to work. She returned from work that night, packed her bags and moved in with Ben (Isn't it interesting? Ben is now helping others!).

One morning, that same week that Marsha moved out, I got up at noon and felt that there was something wrong. I looked around my apartment and then I looked out the window. My car was gone! I called the police to report my car stolen. I sat there in disbelief! This was the first time I ever had something stolen from me, except my car battery. As I was pondering the situation, the phone rang. When I answered the phone, I heard Boo's voice. He said, "I have something of yours, and if you give me what I want, I will return your car."

My question to Boo was how he got my car. He said that he climbed through my living room window while I was sleeping. He went on to say that he had fallen asleep on my couch, and when he got up, he made breakfast and searched through my belongings to find Marsha's phone number and address in my phone book. Since he didn't find it and seeing my car keys on the counter, he figured if he stole my car, he could use it as a bargaining tool for Marsha's information. He thought I would do so instantly. But he was wrong! There was no way that I would exchange Marsha's information for my car. She

meant much more to me than that. After this conversation, Boo said, “That’s fine,” and he hung up.

I was in a predicament. I was supposed to pick up Evelyn, my new girlfriend, at the airport later in the day. Weirdly enough, I had never actually met Evelyn. Even stranger was that it was my ex-wife who introduced us via a phone call. Evelyn and I talked via phone all the time; this visit would be the first time we would meet in person. With this and Boo in mind, I called Ben and asked if he and Marsha could come over to discuss the situation.

When they arrived, I told them about my encounter with Boo. I had no idea what to say, and they had no idea what to say either – we were dumbfounded! It was at this time that I said that we should pray to God first by thanking Him for what He has done in our past, and what He will do for us in the present. After thanking God, we asked Him to teach Boo a lesson. Lastly, we asked God to return my car to me.

After we finished praying, I asked Ben if I could borrow his car so I could pick up a friend of mine at the airport; he agreed. The three of us got into the car and Ben decided to go back to his house a different route; we were unsure of Boo’s movements.

As we were driving, I looked out the window – I saw my car! I had no doubt that I was seeing my car because I saw the shiny bumper sticker that read, “Jesus is Lord!” Wouldn’t you know it! My car was

parked in front of a bar down the street from Ben's house. I said: "Stop the car!" When he did, I got out. My first thought was to get Marsha out of the area as fast as possible. I cautiously walked over to my car. I had the spare key with me so I got in and drove home. All this happened before Boo left the bar. On my return home, I called Ben and Marsha and once again we gave thanks to God – He was so faithful. I went to the airport to pick up my friend Evelyn, and I told her what had happened earlier that day.

For the next two weeks, Evelyn and I had a great time hanging out. We went to the beach and, of course, we went to church and had fun with other Christian friends. Like everyone else, she fell in love with Walter.

Shortly after Evelyn returned home, I got a call from Boo again. He asked me if I would come and visit him in the hospital I said yes. The following day, I went to the hospital and the first thing Boo asked was if I would forgive him. I told him I had made a police report and gave the officer who did the report his name. I then told Boo that I would be dropping the charges on one condition – he should never come near my home again. He agreed. Before I left his room, I ask him what happen the night he called me, he first ask me if I had a hitman put on hem, simply because two men walk over to hem while he was in the phone booth and beat me up so bad, he had to be place in the hospital. From that time on I have never heard or seen him since. I just hoped and prayed that he would be freed from his bondage!

At some time after the incident with Boo, Walter and some of our Christian friends met at my house before church. I told the group about a dream I had about two boys – one boy with black hair, and

the other boy had blonde hair – as I was driving to church. I then went on to say that both boys were coming down the aisle for salvation – to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I also saw that the black-haired boy fell away from the faith, while the blonde-haired boy remained in Jesus.

In reality, when we got to church – Lo and behold – I saw a blonde-haired boy and a black-haired boy in front of the church. As my friends and I got out of the car, I walked over to the boys and told them I had a dream about the two of them. After my explanation, the boys asked me what exactly it was that I “saw.” My response was that I couldn’t say anything at the time, but I would tell them the following Sunday when they returned to church.

On the following Sunday morning, we went to church as usual; we saw the black-haired boy standing outside. When he saw me, he came up to me. I asked him about his blonde-haired friend. He explained that after church the previous week, the blonde-haired boy followed some guy to his home and robbed him. The blonde-haired boy left town with the stolen money!

After the black-haired boy explained what happen, I told him about my dream and how I saw that both he and the blonde-haired boy would receive Jesus as they had last Sunday. I then told the boy the very last part of my dream – which one of them would turn away from Jesus. It happened – just as in my dream!

I have no idea why God keeps using me in this way. The one thing I did (and still do) know is that I personally learned to trust and love God. Those feelings are becoming greater and greater with every event that happens in my life.

In 1985, I wanted to buy a new used car. I saved enough money to make such a purchase, and I asked Walter if he would go with me to a dealership near my house to buy a car. I do admit that I'm the kind of person who buys something only if it has Barry written all over it! Otherwise, I wait patiently, no matter how long it takes.

So, Walter and I went to the used car dealer where we saw a 1978 Grand Prix. The car had everything I could ever want – power windows, all leather seats, and a black vinyl roof with a silver exterior! This Grand Prix had my name written all over it. I asked the salesman to hold the car for me so I could get Ben's opinion. I made a small deposit and returned home.

Later that day, I went to Ben's house so I could ask him to come with me to see the car. We went to the dealership, walked straight to the car and looked it over – inside and out! Ben said that everything seemed to be in good shape. After that, I walked over to the salesman, signed the paperwork, and paid \$2,200 in cash. The deal was done. I put my old plates on my new car and drove home. I was in my glory!

“Seek first the kingdom of God, and then you will be given the desires of your heart” (Matthew 6.33). He certainly has given me my desires, time and time again. Do you remember when God had put on my heart to give Rafael and Mary \$100? Well, once again, God placed it on my heart to give to call Rafael and his wife Marie about something God had put on my heart. This time, it wasn't money but my old Volkswagen beetle car! I called Rafael and told him that God had placed it on my heart to call hem and give him my old car. I feel it is a blessing to give to others, especially when you follow God's guidance. Rafael was grateful and told me that he would come over the next day to pick it up.

When he came over to get the car, he thanked me. As he was about to drive off he told me that he was going to sell the car. I told Rafael that selling the car was not what God put on my heart. It was for him to use. My thought was that only God knows the future! Rafael did listen to me, and within a week or so, his car broke down! The engine died, and he had to junk the car. He used the car I gave him until he could buy another one. Isn't it amazing how God works?

CHAPTER 27

Be Careful with Your Words

Like so many times before, I went out to pray and ask God to have His angels present. In the same breath, I said, “I will settle for JESUS!” As soon as those words left my lips, the tears started running down my cheeks, and I cried aloud, “Please don’t take your Sprit away from me!” I had never experienced such loneliness in all my life as I had at that moment, and that included my trip to Israel. I believe Almighty God was revealing to me what the real hell is separation from God, which is far worse than the literal and biblical “fire and brimstone” hell. Words of warning, the Bible stats don’t take the name of God or Jesus vain. Though out my life I heard people used the name of God and Jesus in a profound way, I couldn’t put it in print, that’s how bad it is, there will be consequences!

For a brief time, Jesus Himself experienced separation from his Father – on the cross! Just before He took His last breath! He cried aloud, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus became sin for you and me. “For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness

of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Because God cannot look upon sin, He had to remove Himself from Jesus. Sin breaks our fellowship with God: But your iniquities and mine have separated us from God because He cannot look upon our sins - even in the case of Jesus. God had no choice but to turn his face from each of us as well.

(Isaiah 59:2). It's important to maintain our fellowship with God by abiding in Him and letting Him abide in us. In doing so, our minds will be transformed to be more like Christ. The book of 1 John is excellent in teaching us how to abide in Christ. From that point, I knew God was preparing me for something else!. He was starting to close the door of helping people financially and opening another door. But until the door was finally close, Walter and I kept those who were already in our lives.

Like so many previous Sundays, we went to church, and after service and had fellowship at my house. On this particular Sunday, my next door neighbor who I had never met personally had watched all of my friends walking in and out of my apartment through her window. She probably knew I was a Christian by my bumper sticker that read, "Jesus." I guess she was curious about what all of these people were doing at my house every week. Finally, she came over, knocked on the door and asked if she could join us. I told her that she was more than welcome to join the group.

She introduced herself as Jenny. She was an older woman who was confined to her apartment and was living alone without family. Jenny appeared to be depressed and unkempt. Her face was somewhat pale, she had no teeth, and her hair was not combed. The dress she wore hung down to her ankles. Jenny was poor. She did not leave her apartment unless she absolutely had to. Apparently, she was like that ever since her daughter died.

Jenny told us that her daughter had committed suicide, and she held herself responsible for the death. She could not get past this. We have all heard that losing a child is the worst thing a parent can face. She thought that she had nothing to look forward to and wanted to end her own life.

Despite Jenny's life situations, we all embraced her and accepted her as one of God's children. Her face started to glow. This woman who was depressed started to change because of the love and acceptance we showed her. Her countenance was changing before our very eyes. On the day she came over, I could tell she left my apartment with hope and acceptance. It was God's doing.

A day later, Jenny came to my apartment and asked if she could join us at church on Sunday. Of course, I said yes! I told her to be ready at 8 a.m. It felt so good to all of us because we took the opportunity to help her.

That Sunday, Walter arrived and Jenny came after him. When she knocked at the door, and I opened it, it was quite obvious that she had changed. Her hair was neat; she was wearing makeup, and she was dressed nicely. The biggest change was the expression on her face – you had to see it to believe it!!

We left for church, and we were greeted at the church door by volunteers. We sat in the sanctuary and Jenny told me that it had been many years since she had been in a church. The pastor started

to speak from the pulpit and asked if there was anyone who was visiting for the first time. Jenny stood up and was greeted by the pastor and the congregation. After she sat down, and as the pastor began to preach, she seemed to be so focused on every word he said.

As usual, after church, the group came to my house. We ate and talked about the sermon. Jenny announced to us that she really enjoyed the service and wanted to go back the following week.

The following Sunday, Jenny mentioned that she had been watching a Christian program on TV. As she was sitting on the couch watching the broadcast, she received Jesus when the preacher asked if anyone needed salvation and wanted the Lord to be the Savior of their lives.

Her decision to follow Jesus was an unspeakable joy to me. I knew another life was being changed by Him. I explained to Jenny my first encounter with Jesus and the love that I felt. It was more important than anything else I could ever want. After giving this explanation, we spoke for a while longer before she decided to go back to her apartment and rest.

When Walter came to see me later, I told him how Jenny received Jesus. He was so happy for her. We met on Sunday before the service at my apartment. Jenny came to my door and looked entirely different. She had teeth and was dressed up. The best way to describe her change is the word “metamorphosis.” It was like a caterpillar going through its stages, transforming from a cocoon to a

butterfly. In my estimation, Jenny had become a butterfly. This is exactly what happened to me and many of my friends. Metamorphosis for me represents a physical change, but the most important changes in people are those of the heart and mind – the parts that are invisible. Gradually, Jenny went through a metamorphosis physically, and God changed her mind and heart as well.

Months past, and I met a Christian woman named Ann. I invited her to join us after church; she was more than happy to do so. But there was jealousy between Jenny and Ann. Jenny said mean and improper things to Ann. I confronted her with the truth about her actions, but not in a Godly manner. After that incident, Jenny refused to join us.

Now it was my turn to be obedient to God's institutions, that was, I had to go over to Jenny's apartment and apologize for my behavior. I did not act in love, but anger. I went over to Jenny's house to apologize for my actions and asked her to forgive me. I knocked at the door. "What do you want?" she asked. I asked her to forgive me. "I want nothing to do with you!" was her responded to me. Well, that was the end of the matter – or so I thought.

The second night, God inspired me to go back and ask Jenny to forgive me once again before I went to work. I looked up to heaven; and said! I already ask for forgiveness once, and you want me do it again. I wasn't going to argue with God, so I did, I receive the same response from her; I want nothing to do with you. . Three days later,

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God said ask for forgiveness once again! I went over to Jenny's apartment. This time I said: "I am sorry." I got the same response. You are not going to believe this.

Be Careful With Your Words

I think God was showing me Jenny was more important than my pride, and He was right. The most important thing for me was to please God and restore our friendship. Stop and think about what God did for all of us. Luke 22:34 states that Jesus went to the cross and said, Father forgive them; they do not know what they do! That's true and unconditional love. It was just a matter of time before Jenny started once again, to fellowship with us, so you see, asking for forgiveness can free anybody from bondage, this time it was anger.

CHAPTER 28

The Changing Scenes of Life

Later, I received an unexpected call from my brother Arthur who lived in Key West, He wanted to visit me. On the Sunday he came, the first thing he noticed was that all of my friends were eating and having a good time. He stayed for three days and went back to Key West. He wrote nasty letters to me and was extremely upset with me for helping people who were down and out. Plus, he wanted me to participate in cheating the credit card companies by purchasing four tires for my car and then going bankrupt. I said no thanks. I guess, he was offended I didn't take him on his offer about the tires. After he arrived home Key West, I started to receiving two of his letters that stated, he was not going to have anything to do with me ever again. From that from that point on, decided to throw out every letter from him without reading it. His letters finally stopped, and I found out he had moved back to Palm Springs, California.

At the age of nineteen, my brother Arthur moved to Los Angeles, California. He learned the hairstyling business. To make a long story short, he became very successful and prospered. Arthur started two hair salons in downtown Los Angeles within a very short period of

time. He then sold his businesses and moved to Palm Springs, California – the place where the rich and famous lived. He opened

two salons in the heart of Palm Springs – in two different top-rated hotels. Both salons closed three years later; that’s when my brother moved to Key West. After four years living Florida, he decided to move back to Palm Springs and start another salon.

When he returned to Palm Springs, he found himself homeless. He had leased his Palm Springs home to a friend when he moved to Florida, but on his return, his so-called friend refused to leave. My brother was actually sleeping on the streets, and he worked at McDonald’s. I prayed that God would let my brother understand how I felt helping those in need.

By the grace of God, somebody saw my brother and that somebody allowed him to sleep on his couch. God was working on Arthur. Now, Arthur needed me! He asked me for my help – he asked for \$1000 so he could hire an attorney to reclaim his house. *Isn’t that ironic?!* I prayed that God would let my brother understand how I felt about the situation. After he moved back into his house, he wrote me a letter saying he now understands why I help people regardless of who they are.

Before experiencing God – twenty-five years prior to my conversion, I was visiting my brother who, at that time lived and worked in a salon in Lake Tahoe, California. He thought that it would be a good idea if I went to work with him and after he finish work at the salon, from there, we would go to one of the casinos on the Nevada side of the street- that were we got drunk and finally made it home. The only

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thing I remember was falling on the carpet floor and my brother stepping on my hand. On the following morning my brother asks if I wanted to go to work with him again, I said yes. On our way to the salon he mention one of his male co-workers harassed him in front of my his customers I didn't much thought until we arrived at the salon. The first thing done was to sit chair, and then it happen! I heard my brother.

male co-worker insulting my brother, I jumped out of my seat and grabbed a pair of scissors. I ran over to him and said, "I will cut your F N heart out of your chest, if you keep bothering my brother." His co-worker was twice my size, but I didn't care. After that scene, he never harassed him again.

Which one of the times was I helping my brother out of unconditional love? Did I show love when I forgave my brother even though he wrote me hateful letters, that he didn't want to see me ever again, or was it when I receive a latter from my brother asking me for \$1000 so he can hire an attorney to get his home back that he rent out. Question? did I exhibit love when I was about to commit murder on my brother's behalf? Here's something to think about: Is it easier to kill someone, than to forgive them! Once again, something to think about!

Do you remember reading how God was preparing me to close one door and opening another? Well it started when I receive a call from Irena and Jim's saying son Johnny Boy wasn't feeling to good, I went over Jim house to see Johnny Boys condition, it wasn't good. . Later that same year, I received a call from Jim who told me that Johnny had died while he was in the hospital. I immediately drove to their house knowing the emotional state Irene would be in.

When I arrived, Jim led me to Irene. Just as I thought, she was sitting on the couch and crying uncontrollably. I walked over and sat next to her without saying a word. She put her arms around me, and I started

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to cry with her. When she stopped crying, I stopped. I knew there was nothing I could say or do to diminish her pain. The longer I sat with her, the more composed she became. I gave Irene a big hug and said to Jim, “If you need me, call.”

Irene and Jim thought that they had no reason for staying in South Florida because there were too many negative memories about their son. They decided to move North Carolina to start new lives for themselves.

Then there was Walter, the man whom God had put into my life to help me to truly understand what life was all about despite his mental illness. He moved up north after his mother died. He made his decision so he would be closer to his sister's house in Chicago, just in case of emergency.

After Walter moved away, Phil moved back to his father's house. Marsha was reunited with her daughter and started a new life of her own. Ben met a young Christian girl and got married. Many of the others who were very special moved away as well. I knew that God was behind all these shifts – things started to unfold in my life.

For instance, the year was 1988. I was not able to service commercial accounts due to my physical condition. The upper management of the company placed me in the residential service. This type of service was totally different from serving restaurants, but the outcome must be the same, to eliminate the pest. To be honest, I liked this end of the service; there was more interaction with the customer. But I missed my co-workers. The residential business lasted until 1990. That's when the upper management of the company decided they were going to end residential side of the business. I was given two options,

first, they offered to let me buy the residential part of the company!, or resign.

You would think that I was being offered the chance of a lifetime to own an established business without doing anything. If I was to accept their offer, they would give me \$10,000 in severance pay, and I would have to contribute \$10,000 of my own money. In exchange, they would supply me with a fully equipped truck and all the existing accounts that were on the books. The best part of this was that Pest Elimination Services would manage all the books and service receipts, which I would hand into the main office, and they would turn any new accounts they received over to me, I refuse the their offer.

I know you may be thinking to yourself, “Why didn’t I take the offer?” For some strange reason, my inner voice was telling me no. So with that, I turned in my resignation papers and left the company. I forfeited my severance pay of \$10,000. August 1990, I left the bug business almost ten years to the day that I started. When I left, I had no idea what to do to earn a living. But I knew for sure, God would provide as He did in the past.

CHAPTER 29

New Friends! New Adventures!

It wasn't long before God started replacing my old friends with new ones. I attended church and noticed that on Labor Day the church was going to Pompano Beach to have a beach party. Since I was unemployed, I had something to look forward to. The day arrived, and I made my way to the beach. It was crowded with church people. As I made my way to the water, I met two girls from a different church, Mo, and Barbara. It was like God had orchestrated our meeting. The weather was great, and I had the best time with my new friends. As the day was ending, Mo invited me to her house to meet a young man named Bill. So the following day, I went to Mo's house and met the rest of her Christian friends, including Bill. We had so much in common, both of us were unemployed at the time, we blended in perfectly.

Before I continue, I think God has a great sense of humor. He always seems to put the strangest and most beautiful people in my life. For instance, Barbara and I went to Bill's house to help clean up. Barbara dusted, while I was moving furniture. Bill was sweeping when all of a sudden, I turned around and saw smoke coming from the kitchen stove; he put bread in the toaster, and it started catch on fire. I yelled out loud! "The

toaster is on fire!” Bill turned around with the broom in his hand and as he turned to see what was happening he knocked over the lamp stand. Then he turned to see what I was doing and knocked over a vase on the coffee table. With a loud voice, I said: “Stop! Don’t move!” I walked over to him, grabbed the broom out of his hands and made him sit down on the couch. Barbara and I finished cleaning.

You will like this one. Bill asked me if I wanted to take a ride. I said: “Sure, where to?” New York City. He had to drop his nephew’s car off, and return with his brother’s medical van. Since I had nothing better to do at the time, I went along. If I knew what condition the car was in, I would not have gone.

Bill arrived at my house at 12 midnight, which was perfect. I liked to drive at night. Apparently, the car wouldn’t start so he had to get a boost. That’s why he was so late. These types of problems are not so unusual for old cars. However, as I entered the highway, the car started to shake so badly, I didn’t think we would make it out of Florida. By the grace of God, I drove 7 hours straight to Savannah Georgia without the car breaking down. I can’t believe Bill slept throughout the night in spite of the car shaking so badly. I woke him up and we made our way to a restaurant and had something to eat with coffee. After we finished eating, I sat in the passenger’s seat and was about to sleep. When all of sudden Bill turn to me and said whenever he drove any length of time, he would fall asleep behind the wheel; you know what that meant. I had to stay up while he drove

the car. To be honest, I

was afraid to go to sleep the rest of the way to New York City. I could go on and on about how precious Billy's friendship was to me. It wasn't long after meeting Bill that God had another surprise for me. It all started when I went to get a newspaper in search of a part-time job. As I was on my way home from the stand, I saw a girl moving into the end unit. What caught my attention was that as she was entering her apartment, two men followed her. My first thought was that she was a prostitute. While pondering this situation, I walked into my apartment and decided not to give any thought to what I saw.

A few days later, I was standing outside near my car. When my new neighbor drove up and parked in her parking space, which happened to be right next to mine. As she got out of the car, I went over to introduce myself. I told her my name was Barry, and she said hers was Sue.

The conversation continued, but she changed it and asked: "Are you a Christian?" I asked her why she would ask me that. Sue told me that she had seen the bumper sticker saying, "Jesus Loves you" on my car. I went on to tell her that I had been a Christian for some thirty years. In response, she revealed she was a Christian as well.

Isn't that something? As I have said repeatedly, God removes one thing in our lives, and then He replaces it with something new!

We had that conversation in front her apartment. It was getting late and she wanted to go inside. Just before we parted ways, I invited

her to join me for a cup of coffee when she was up to it. she thought it was a great idea.

A day hadn't even passed when I heard someone knocking at my door. It was Sue! I invited her in; it turned out we had many things in common in, that was our relationship with Jesus. I spoke about my experiences with God, including how he used Walter and me to help people in need. I also tried to describe how God put Walter in my life despite his mental illness – manic depression. Sue was fascinated to hear about Walter's life and wanted to meet him, I mentioned that Walter pass on a number of years ago! She was sad to hear that.

Before Sue left, she told me that after she was fully settled into her apartment, she introduced herself to her next door neighbor and asked about me as she had seen my bumper sticker. The neighbor thought I was gay because Walter was always around me. I could imagine what Sue was thinking – how I could be a Christian, be gay, and love Jesus. Honestly, I probably would think the same thing.

After Sue asked me the questions regarding Walter, I confessed to her that when I saw the two men who helped her move in, I thought she was a prostitute, ironically they were her brothers. That night I learned not to pass judgment on anyone until I had all the facts. As it so happens, Sue and I became good friends.

As time passed, Sue got involved in a ministry that fed the homeless. At times, she would invite me to join her so I could see how she

served the food to the homeless people. I was amazed that there was

someone like me who got involved in helping those in need. Not much longer after this event, Sue found out that I was looking for a job. She told me that she had a friend who was about to leave his job on the nightshift as a security guard. As it turned out, this was a part-time job – exactly what I wanted!

Once again, God kept putting things in my life to meet my needs. People might think all the events that took place were all coincidental. However, I know and others know that everything is truly from God Himself!

Sue called her friend John, who was leaving his job and told him about me and that I was looking for a job. She then asked him if he would recommend me to his boss, and he did, they said have me call the office the following day and make appointment and filled out an application for the job, That night I went out to give thanks to God for opening a new job, especially part time, and night shift. When I arrived at the office for my appointment, I was hired on the spot! I must say that I was in all my glory, to say the least! After I was told I was hired, they said the job paid \$300 a week. That was enough to cover all of my expenses. I was also informed that it was a part-time job and the work to be done was at night. Right away, I knew this job was for me! Personally, I could not ask for anything better!

When I returned home, I told Sue about the interview and that I was hired on the spot. She was very happy that I got the job so quickly.

Once again, everything seemed to be on track. I got a good job and made new Christian friends. What more could I ask for?

As time went on, Sue and I got closer. I even went with her and her friends to feed the poor, whom we prayed for, every time she came over to my apartment.

I want to end this chapter with a foot note, isn't it amazing how God put the right people or things into our life at the right time.

CHAPTER 30

Duty Bound

Seven months passed and the office informed me that my job was being terminated. Shortly after I was terminated, my cousin Tony called and said, while he was checking in on my mother from time to time, she was no longer able to manage her own affairs. Since I was terminated from my job and had no obligations, I made plans to move back into my mother's home. I wanted to be there so I could take care of her physical and financial needs.

I informed my friends and family members of my intentions to move back to New York City and help my mother. I am sure they were thinking to themselves how I could give up everything in Florida to go back to New York City, which was filthy, cold, and dreary.

I concluded going back to New York City to help my mother who was in need as a privilege and an honor. As I was planning my return, I remembered Ed, my co-worker, who had encouraged me over the years to save part of my salary, which is exactly what I did! I can illustrate this by telling you that by the time I left the bug business, I

had saved and banked over \$20,000. With this money, I was able to provide for my mother and her needs.

In this event, again, you cannot deny the fact that God knows the future, and He prepared me for the time when I would need to return to New York City.

The day arrived, and I started giving away my possessions to various charities. I was having mixed emotions, but they had nothing to do with the move. I was remembering all the wonderful times I had over the years I lived in Florida and most of all, the presence of God I felt there.

When the last of my possessions were gone, I was sitting on the steps in front of my home; I cried uncontrollably. I was leaving all of the most important things I had ever had – including what was the most important in life – my intimate relationship with Jesus. I felt that I was losing a loved one – this being the only way I can think of the relationship I had with people and God.

After my car was packed with my belongings, I drove over to my sister's house and stayed with her for two days. It was Sunday midnight and time to leave. I got on to I-95 and once again, I cried uncontrollably. I was crying out to God to help me for hours and hours as I was driving north. All of a sudden, my crying stopped. It left as fast as it started. I put on some Christian music, and the excitement of the trip overshadowed all of my emotions.

This trip was a big event for me. As I said elsewhere, I feared driving long

Duty Bound

distances. I was making a 1500-mile trip from Florida to New York by my self.

To me, this is one of my biggest accomplishments!

Time passed. And around 4 a.m. and 300 miles later, I made my first stop for gas. While at the gas station, I went inside for a cup of coffee. After I paid the cashier, I went outside and looked around. It was like something I would see in the movies. In that moment, a flood of different emotions came over me. However, these feelings are difficult to explain.

During this time, I was drinking my coffee. I couldn't wait to finish, get into the car and continue my trip. As I entered the highway, there were only a few cars on the road because of the time of the day. It was perfect for me in every sense of the word. I did not go very far before I saw a sign that said, "Welcome to Georgia!" It was a fantastic feeling to enter another state all by myself. This feeling led to adrenaline pumping through my body, and I felt like I could drive for hours.

I drove an additional two hours and found myself in Savannah, Georgia. It was about 8 a.m. I stopped at the first rest area just to refresh myself and get something to eat. After washing up and eating, I sat at a table next to a window and watched fellow travelers entering and leaving the restaurant. While I was people watching, I wondered where they were going and looked at license plates to see where people were coming from. Since I was taking a trip like this for the first time, I was amazed at everything I saw.

A short time later, when I was finished eating my food and heading back to my car, I just stood there and looked at the landscape.

Compared to Florida, what I was seeing in Georgia was totally different! In Georgia, the earth was red; there were no mountains and hills – it was just as flat in Florida!

Before I left, I filled up the car again with gas. And to my surprise, within a few minutes, I was at the Georgia/South Carolina state line. Driving into yet another state, I found myself amazed once again.

After crossing the state line, I set my cruise control to 60 MPH. That was when I really started to enjoy the ride. It was better than when I first began my journey to New York City. My new-found excitement and enjoyment increased with every mile I drove.

I found myself on a straight road for 200 miles. As I was driving along, I heard my tires making a “dumpy dump” sound – just like the roads in Brooklyn that were embedded in my memory.

Time passed, and I saw a sign that said the South Carolina/North Carolina state line was 200 miles away. That state line also happened to be the half-way mark between where I was living in Florida to New York State. I had been driving almost 13 hours straight; fatigue was setting in. At this point, I remembered what my niece Liz told me. I should try to get as close to or actually cross into Virginia before resting for the night. To put everything in perspective, I was about 4 hours from the North Carolina/Virginia state line, and I really wanted to get some rest; my back was starting to hurt.

I managed to do the four-hour drive, and I crossed into Virginia at about 7 p.m. It was then it hit me. I had been driving 16 hours straight. Needless to say, after I crossed the state line, I went to the first hotel I saw and got a room for the night. But I was hungry so I asked the front desk person if there was any place around where I could get something to eat. I was told I had to go down the road. As tired and sore as I was and because of the shift in weather from Florida to Virginia, where it was 38 degrees, I went straight to my room and slept for 12 hours.

The following morning, I was well rested and ready to drive the remainder of the journey to New York, which was only another 400 miles north. I felt that driving another 400 miles was nothing considering that I had driven 800 miles the previous day. I freshened up, checked out of the hotel, and drove to the nearest restaurant to get something to eat. After I finished eating, I filled up my car with gas and about to continued my journey home.

As I was about to leave the gas station, two women came up to me and asked me if I knew Jesus. I told the women that I knew Jesus and that I am a Jewish Christian as well. The women and I spoke briefly, about my relationship to Jesus that inspired me so much. As I started to drive off onto the highway, I decided to only stop once for gas and maybe for a cup of coffee. Seven hours after leaving the hotel in Virginia, I arrived at my mother's house.

CHAPTER 31

Matters of Life and Death

I was expecting her to greet me with open arms as she usually did when I visited her while on vacation, but she didn't. I came to the conclusion her attitude changed because she felt I was taking away her independence because I wanted to help her with her day-to-day decisions. She did not want to feel useless – having no life purpose.

The first thing I did when I entered the house was to say hello to my mother. I explained to her I was there to help and then gave her a big kiss. I immediately went back to my car to get the rest of my belongings and brought them into the house. It was only 40 degrees outside so I picked up the pace to unpack the car so I could get inside as quickly as possible.

After I unpacked my car and brought all of my belongings inside, I sat down next to my mother at the dinner table. Once again, I tried to explain to her that I was there to help her. But to no avail. Nothing I said changed her mind about me and my reasons for coming home one bit. She kept telling me that she did not need any

help. She turned to me and said, “What am I - some kind of retarded person who cannot take care of herself?” Nevertheless, I refused to let her words deter me from helping her.

The following morning, I went over to my mother and gave her a big kiss on her cheek; then I sat down at the kitchen table with her. Over a cup of coffee, I tried to tell her what I was going to do – things like paying off all her outstanding debt that she had acquired over the years and then opening a bank account in my name.

I cleaned the house starting with my room, which needed to be painted and the carpet needed to be shampooed. I also had to discard a bag of outdated and/or broken items. There were some other items, including three vacuum cleaners in the closet – one worked, and the other two were broken. As I was going through the door to throw out one of the broken vacuums, my mother had a fit. I tried to explain to her that the vacuum was broken, but she did not understand or care. I took the vacuum outside and placed it next to the garbage can and went back into the house. But that night, while I was asleep, my mother went outside, brought the vacuum back into the house with her, and found a new hiding place for it. What she did helped me understand exactly what I was up against.

Liz, my niece who moved back to Brooklyn with her daughter where she met my daughter for the first time, still lived in the same house in Brooklyn. She knew what I was up against and volunteered to help me clean my mother’s house. On the first day, Liz and I removed

seven bags of unwanted and unusable items. I thought that removing these things was a good start. As time went on, I painted the house and removed the old flooring to make it look more presentable.

I ended up staying with my mother for a year and a half. During this time, I got sick trying to help her. It got so bad that I could not even sit at the same table with her because of the stress and anxiety I felt. When I did eat, food got stuck in my throat. I knew that the main factor for my ill-health was that I wanted the best for my mother. And for over a year before she died, I tried hard to give her the best. I did everything I could. After my mother's death, I had one regret – I did not spend enough time with her.

I mentioned elsewhere that my mother did not have an easy life. She gave up her first child, named Peggy, who was adopted by her sister Rose and her husband, Lou. My parents never said anything about this event. I was not told the family secret until I was 18 years old.

In retrospect, my mother must have dealt with extreme emotional pain throughout her life, especially when Peggy came over with her son, Paul, her son to visit Mom and me. Just think about how hard it must have been for Mom seeing her and not being able to let the daughter she birthed know she was her mother. That must have been unbearably painful. While Mom was still alive, Peggy and I were finally able to be brother and sister. I am led to believe that my mother was happy to see Peggy and I having that type of relationship. When I was not with Peggy or my friends I took my mom to her

doctor's appointments and we'd visit family members and friends, as well.

Twice a month, an aide came to assist my mother, which afforded me the freedom to walk to the bay and reflect on the past. I not only thought about how God had opened and closed doors in my life, but I also began thinking about the life God had planned for me after my mom passed away.

One day, I left the water's edge and went to the store and bought some food for my mother before I returned home. After I finished shopping, as I headed to my car, I saw another car parked alongside the curb. It had New Jersey license plates and a bumper sticker that read JESUS in bold letters. I couldn't understand why in the world someone would travel from New Jersey to Brooklyn to share Jesus.

I stood watching as a woman pulled a table and chairs from her car and placed them on the sidewalk. Then she placed tarot cards on the table! I was dumbfounded to see someone who was obviously professing to be a Christian, with the JESUS bumper sticker on her car, dealing with the occult. So I approached her and politely asked if she really was a Christian! She looked at me with fear in her eyes, grabbed the table and chairs, and put them back into her car. I understood why she drove from New Jersey to Brooklyn. The people from her church wouldn't discover what she was doing.

I went straight home, astonishingly grieved. I want to warn every one of you: you have no idea what you are playing with when you're dealing with the occult! Deuteronomy 18:19-22 says that anyone who practices these things is an abomination before God, which means you will stand before him and he will judge you with everlasting punishment. Don't say I didn't warn you!

Since everything with my mother seemed to have quieted down at mons house, I had to decide if I wanted to see my father- or not. At that time he was living with another woman who name Sue; that's the same woman my mother was taking care of when she was homeless. Beside from living with another woman while mom was still alive! I had to make another difficult decision, to see my dad or not. Over the years my father had said cruel things to me, and even though I had forgiven him earlier in my life, I could not forget the things he had said. At one time, he told me I should have been flushed down the toilet! *Do I need this?* I pondered. *Do I really need to be subjected to that kind of hurt again?*

I had to consider that my father, like every other human being, will have to face God at his time of judgment and give an account for his life. Knowing this, I had no other choice but to express the love of God in me. That would be the only way my dad would ever know Jesus is the Messiah! My father never believed in anything he couldn't see, so I proved that God existed by giving him an example he could not refute. I said, "You feel the wind, Dad, but you cannot see it!" He had no words.

Born into Bondage

During the time I stayed with my mother, my father received me with open arms. So I visited him as often as I could. I played around with

him as if nothing had ever happened in the past. He helped me work on my car. We worked together around his house. Sometimes, we even went fishing on his boat. For the most part, he did not say any of those cruel things to me.

.On July 4, 1993, I went out to see the fireworks display along the ocean side. After the fireworks were over, I went straight home. This way, I could spend some time with Mom before she went to bed. I sat at the table with her and told her everything about the fireworks display. When the conversation ended, my mother said that she was going to bed. I gave her a good night kiss, and she went to her bedroom. At the same time, I went to my bedroom.

The following morning, I went to my mother's room and saw her kneeling alongside her bed. I ran to pick her up from the floor; she told me that in the middle of the night, she tried to get up for some water. But her legs gave way when she was getting out of the bed. All she could do was grab and hold onto the edge of the bed, which eventually led to her to the kneeling position. I picked my mother up and lay her down on her bed. I did what I could to make her as comfortable as possible. I kissed her on the cheek, and put her oxygen mask on her face, and then I left the room. I thought everything was OK. I thought that she would be fine when we got up in the morning. I never imagined that when I left her room that night, it would be the last time I saw my mother alive.

I went back into her room later that morning and immediately felt that there was something wrong. I saw a little bit of white on the side of her mouth, and the oxygen mask was next to her, not on her face. Seeing this, I thought that I had forgotten to put it on before I left her room the previous night, for years I thought I was responsible mom's death! what a head trip that was. I went over to her to see if she was still alive. The first thing that crossed my mind was to go next door to get a friend. When he saw my mother lying there, he went into shock, ran right out of the apartment and left me alone.

At that point, the only thought that came to me was to call my sister and the rest of the family. As soon as they arrived, I went into my room and turned on the radio as loudly as it would go. I did this to block out everything that was running through my head. I remained in my room until an ambulance came and took my mother's body away to the funeral home. When everything quite down, my sister and I sat at the kitchen table and reminisced and cried about mom's life, we called it a night and went to bed. The following morning my sister and I sat at the kitchen discussing about the funeral and burial arrangements.

My sister Marion wanted to leave it up to me to choose the inscription on the headstone, she only requested a black headstone with the name Tillie – our mother's name, in big letters, nothing else. I told my sister that I would like to place an inscription on the headstone. Marion was well aware that I was a religious person and would choose a fitting inscription for our mother. I chose the

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following: “To a mother who was faithful in her prayers on behalf of her children and grandchildren.” I truly believe that my mother’s prayers for me were answered – Thank you, Mom!

There was so much more I wanted to put on her headstone. I wanted to let the people know that my mother would help strangers and friends who were less fortunate than us in times past, I wanted to describe moms epitaphs in more detail, What I wanted on the headstone was what I felt reflected my mother as she was before she died.

After all was said and done, I was left with the responsibility of discarding my mother's possessions and paying off her outstanding debts. When I finished cleaning the house, I decided to stay with my father for a month or so. In a relatively short period after my mother died, my father decided to marry Muriel. They called my cousin Tony and asked him if he could perform the ceremony, and Tony said yes.

Since I was staying with my father and Muriel, they asked me to come to their marriage ceremony. We drove to Tony and Rita's house. After the bride and groom exchanged "I do's," all of us went out to eat to celebrate the union between a man and his wife.

CHAPTER 32

An Uncertain Future

A few days after the wedding, I decided to move on. At this point in my life, I wasn't sure what to do or even where to go. Remember, I gave up everything in South Florida to be with Mom. So in a manner of speaking, I was homeless when I decided to return to Florida and stay with my sister, Marion, for a year. I'd spent everything I had and now had no other choice.

Not long after I moved in with my sister, I began looking for a job. I saw an employment ad in the newspaper for a pest control operator with a company located in the warehouse district of Coral Springs. So I called the company and made an appointment for an interview for the following day. After I arrived at the office, the receptionist gave me an application to fill out and the owner immediately hired me based on my previous experience. He told me the work I was to perform was at a home for the elderly, but since Mom had just passed away, I had to refuse the position because I was still grieving. The owner understood

Not long after that, I got a call from one of my co-workers Glen from pest services, who asked if I wanted a part-time job in the pest control business. I said "Sure." I was paid \$1200 hundred dollars for two weeks work. Amazing! Six months passed, and I had two weeks off. I decided to visit my friend Walter, who lived in Springfield, Missouri, approximately 1,500 miles away. When I called and told him I was coming to visit, he was overwhelmed at the thought that I would travel 1,500 miles just to see him. So with a bag in hand, off I went to Springfield. After 15 hours of driving, I arrived at his home.

You had to see Walter's face when I got out of my car; it was worth \$ 1 million dollars to see him so happy. After I rested, Walter introduced me to all his friends and made it a point to say that I had traveled 1500 miles just to see him. I guess he was bragging that he had good friends. From that point on, we had the greatest time. He showed me all around Springfield, and we visited the GRAND OLE OPRY. After ten days of my visit, I had to return to work in Florida. As I was leaving, I saw an expression of sadness on Walter's face because he was so happy to see me for that short time we spent together. I didn't know it, but that would be the last time I would see Walter alive.

I returned to Florida and continued to go about my everyday life. Two weeks after, I received a call from Walter's sister in Chicago, telling me Walter had died from a massive heart attack while visiting his brother. Remember what Walter requested of God – that he'd

rather die of a heart attack than return to a mental institution? Well, God answered Walter's request.

I immediately got into my car and drove to Chicago to attend Walter's funeral. I stayed with his sister for a few days and headed back to Florida. Halfway home, I stopped at a hotel for the night. I was completely exhausted, both physically and mentally. After checking into the hotel, I went for a walk. My heart was hurting desperately, and I cried out to God, "I do not want to love anybody anymore because love hurts!" At that moment, it was almost as if I had a vision of Jesus as He was nailed to the cross. I heard Him say, "God forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

God was revealing to me that He knows love hurts. I ceased my walk for a moment and said to Him, "I really didn't mean that I never wanted to love again!" Then I walked back to the hotel. While I was lying in bed, I started to reflect on the areas of my life that had changed because of Walter. I learned to patiently understand others, keep control of myself, be a good listener, and most of all, how to love unconditionally in spite of who someone is or where he or she comes from.

One time, Walter and I drove around, looking for a restaurant. Walter had said he wanted to treat me to dinner, and I replied: "No, thank you." Then he looked at me and said, "Why would you take a blessing away from me?" I stopped and thought about what he had said; he was right. From that point on, anytime anybody offered to

treat me to dinner, regardless of his or her financial situation, I just accepted the invitation.

Another time Walter and I went to an African-American church that was featuring a guest speaker who supposedly had the gift of healing. Wouldn't you know it? We were the only white people there, but that never bothered us in the least. Toward the end of the service, the preacher asked if anybody wanted to be healed. Walter wanted to stop smoking so badly, so he walked to the altar where there were two lines for healing: one for \$10 and the other for \$20, depending on the person's need. Walter went to the \$10 line. After the service was over, Walter threw his cigarettes away.

Three days later, he came to my house and was smoking again. "What happened?" I asked. "I should have gone to the \$20 line," he said. "Maybe, the healing would have lasted longer." Like I said, this man was precious.

One day, when Walter came to my house, he was dressed in a suit and tie. I asked him what the occasion was, and he said he'd gone to the bank to apply for a million-dollar loan to start an outreach ministry. Oddly enough, the bank manager handed Walter an application for the loan. He filled it out and handed it back to the manager, who told him to return the following day. Of course, he did not return, but that was Walter. He also used to apply for different types of jobs and would never accept the positions. I know his actions may sound strange to anyone who doesn't have a mental

illness, but people with mental disorders go through different stages in their lives.

The next morning when I left the hotel, I felt much better. When I finally arrived home, for the next six months, I just worked and saved money. According to Jewish tradition, one cannot return to a burial site for a year. My mother's unveiling took place on July 5, so the whole family returned to New York. After the unveiling, I stayed at my dad's house with Muriel for a month. My dad and I had a great time together, and our relationship grew even closer. I did not want to live in New York, however. Walter's sister in Chicago, at Walter's funeral, had extended an invitation for me to stay in Chicago anytime. So I called Loretta and told her I might move there. She thought it was a great idea.

The following morning, I drove about fifteen hours to downtown Chicago. The weather was overcast and drizzling. I pulled into the first gas station I saw and tried to call Loretta, but there was no answer. *Now, what do I do? Wait?* I started panicking. Then I got the idea to call my brother in California, but he didn't answer either. Then it really hit me! I was homeless! The only two other options I had were to return to Brooklyn where my father lived, or return to Florida and start all over again.

Well, I tried to call Walter's sister one more time. I reached her – thank God! I met her at her house and we went out to eat. I explained to her that I wasn't certain where I belonged or if I should

just start my life over in Chicago. In the end, I decided to go back to Florida and wasted no time getting there! I called Barbara, a friend from my former church who lived in South Florida and let her know I needed a place to stay. She told me I could stay at her house until I found a place of my own.

When I arrived In Florida, I went to Barbara's house and rested for a day or so, comfortably. Then I saw an ad in the paper that someone had a cottage for rent. I called and asked if it was still available. The woman said yes, so Barbara and I went to see it.

When we arrived, I thought it was perfect! It was fenced in, and it had shrubbery, which made it much more private, just what I needed at that point in my life. It was a God sent! And on top of everything else, there were fruit trees, which I could use. Right then, I asked the woman what she was asking for the rent. I gave her a deposit and moved in the following day.

I had a couple of friends who helped me clean the cottage. Since it was small, it didn't take much time for Barbara and a few of my friends to clean everything so I could move in that day. It felt good to have my own apartment again. But when everything was said and done, I needed to get a job as quickly as possible because the money I had saved was almost gone.

I was looking for any kind of job. After two weeks of placing applications all over town with no response, things started to look

bad. I had exhausted most of my saved money. I specifically remember looking up into the heavens out of my side window telling God, I needed a job as soon as possible or I would have trouble paying my rent. You're not going to believe it. An hour passed, and I received a phone call from one of the pest control companies I had submitted an application to; they wanted to hire me. What a coincidence that was!

So, for the next two years, everything was great – the job was great. I loved the cottage, and I was able to save almost \$7,000. It was like I was starting a new chapter in my life. I was going to a home church, which was great. But like before, I did not know what God had in store for me. About a year later, I decided to visit my dad and stepmother. I called my dad and asked if I could visit him and Muriel – and of course, he said it was OK. I immediately called the airline and made my reservations.

CHAPTER 33

Ronnie and Me

I did not know it then, but four weeks prior to my trip to see my dad and stepmom, Muriel and my dad went to the local beauty parlor so Muriel could have her hair done as she had done many times before. On this particular visit, things were different. While Muriel was having her hair done, out of the blue, one of the hairstylists named Ronnie asked, “Does anybody know a good man out there? And if so, I want to meet him.”

Muriel looked at my dad and loudly told Ronnie that I, Buster’s son, was coming to visit from Florida, and asked if she would like to meet me. Without hesitation, Ronnie said yes. Muriel called me asking if I would like to meet Ronnie, her hair stylist. I said sure. Muriel gave me Ronnie’s phone number, and I called her the following day; we talked for a while. Ronnie mentioned that she had mixed emotions about our meeting. It was basically the same type of thing that happens with blind dates. And like me, Ronnie had no idea what God had planned for us.

The day I was to leave for my vacation, I was very excited to see my dad and Muriel. It had been over two years since I had seen them. Not only was I very excited to see them, I was also looking forward to meeting Ronnie for the first time. In the back of my mind, I was thinking that she might be the woman God had for me.

When I arrived in New York City, I got my bags as quickly as I could and hopped into a cab to my dad's house. A short time later, I was there, standing in front of the house. I rang the doorbell and my dad and Muriel invited me in. They treated me well.

We sat and talked about the past and how my dad and I had so much fun on his boat in the old days. Up to that point, the best part of my trip was my relationship with my dad – we started to bond like never before.

We ate dinner and afterward, we talked about how I was doing in South Florida. I gave them a brief outline of what was going on with me. Shortly after that, we called it a night. They knew I was exhausted from the trip. I went to my room, started unpacking my things and went to bed. The following morning, we picked up from where we left off the previous night – just to get to know each other. I knew without a doubt that Muriel loved the idea of my dad and me making up for lost time. It was on that day I called Ronnie and made a date to meet her. I could tell she was nervous about meeting me by her voice. For the next four days, we went out and had a great time.

We went to Chinatown, which was one of Ronnie's favorite places to eat. Then we took a ferry downtown to Staten Island. We were like two little kids – playing on the ferry. It was a night to remember!

The second night, Ronnie and I went to my Cousin Toney's house. I wanted to introduce Ronnie to them and get their opinions about her. I wanted to show her off. We ate dinner and then went to the living room to talk and get to know each other better. The night came to an end; Ron and I said our goodbyes. We both had a good time at Tony and Rita's house. I drove Ronnie home, and I went straight to my dad's house.

The following day, my dad invited me and Ronnie out to dinner with him and Muriel. As it so happened, they knew Ronnie and her ways for ten years or so from the beauty parlor where Muriel got her hair done. Five o'clock came, and it was time for me, my dad, and Muriel to pick up Ron at her house. From there, we went straight to the restaurant. Muriel had made sure that the restaurant she had chosen was well-known for their cuisine and their specialties.

Shortly after dinner, we left the restaurant, and I dropped my dad and Muriel home first, and then I drove Ron home. I mentioned that my vacation would soon end. You could see from the expression on her face that she didn't want me to leave so soon. I told Ron that I would call her when I got home. She was glad that I was interested in her and wanted to keep in touch.

I kissed her goodbye on the forehead. Later, Ron told me that she thought I was gay because I didn't kiss her on the lips – that was a first for her! As I was leaving her apartment house, I knew she was looking at me through the window as I was getting in my dad's car.

I returned to my dad's house and started to pack my things. When I was finished, I sat down with my dad and Muriel, and we talked about my time with them. They were happy to hear that I had such a great time, and they were part of it by introducing me to Ron. Bedtime came early because I had an early flight to catch.

When I got home the next day, I called Ronnie and told her that I had such a nice time with her. Since that phone call, Ron and I kept in touch. During one of my calls to Ronnie, out of the blue, I asked her if she would like to visit me in South Florida; without a second thought, she said yes. I called my dad and Muriel to tell them I had just invited Ron to come visit me. They sounded perplexed because I had invited Ron to visit me so quickly. They knew she was irresponsible with money and the perception of life.

It wasn't long after inviting Ronnie that she was boarding a plane and heading south to Florida. When I met her at the airport, she had a smile on her face – a smile you wouldn't believe. She looked like a kid eating ice cream for the first time.

For the next two weeks, in spite of the cottage being very small, she had a great time. And at that time, my perception was that Ronnie liked nice things, and expected these nice things from the men she

dated. I didn't think she would marry me. I couldn't give what I thought she wanted because of the lifestyle I had. Up until that time of her life, her idea of true love was considered receiving things or having things done for her. But she was no different to many of us. Unfortunately, that's only a small part of it.

There is so much more to love. But for the most part, some young couples believe that's as far as true love goes. Honestly, this is how I used to think as well. I truly thought by expressing the love of God in my life, Ron would somehow see that is the most important thing in a relationship between a man and a woman. I'm sorry to say, this did not happen in the early stages of our marriage.

On the fun side of Ronnie visit to Florida— I remember one night in particular when Ronnie and I went for a walk to the convenience store; I bought ice cream cones, and sat down on the curb that overlooked that highway. All of a sudden, she started to jump up and down with a loud voice yelling that ants were walking up her leg. She was so afraid of ants making their way up her leg and getting into her panties. Her feet were jumping up and down so fast that I couldn't stop laughing. I tried to brush the ants off while laughing at the same time.

After we finished our ice creams, we walked home. We were still laughing so hard, that Ron wet her pants. Luckily, it was late at night, and we weren't far from the cottage. We had lots of fun while she was here. There were so many other times, but there are too many to

put on paper.

It seems that when people have are having so much fun, time passes quickly. Ronnie's two-week stay with me in South Florida was coming to an end. I know Ronnie did not want to go back home by the look on her face.

The day before her departure, Ron packed her suitcase. That night was very sobering; we both knew she had to leave. On the morning of her departure, I put her suitcase in the trunk and drove her to the airport. This time, instead of kissing Ron on the cheek, I kissed her on the lips and said goodbye. I stood at the airport watching her plane take off. I felt bad that she had to leave as well. I went home and continued about my business, but I couldn't get her out of my mind.

After Ronnie returned to New York, we kept in touch by phone and talked about the good times we had while I was in New York and her trip to South Florida. After two weeks, our conversation changed. It became one about getting married.

As much as I liked Ron, we were in two different worlds about our religious beliefs. Ron insisted that we both believed in Jesus, and that should not be a problem. After considering things for a while, I agreed to get married. So, we set a date for her to come back down to Florida and then get married.

As we talked over the phone, Ron was on cloud 9. For me, it was a new beginning in life – to share my physical and emotional needs with someone other than a friend.

The day arrived when Ronnie gave all of her belongings to her friends – just as I had done many times in the past. With just bag in hand, she arrived in South Florida. We were so excited that we had finally found the right person to share our lives with. Nothing else mattered. When Ronnie arrive it was like God answered my prays for a wife. From the time Ron arrived we had a great time sighting.

Two days prior to taking our marriage valves, Ron and I got caught up in the lust of the flesh as we sat on the couch. I thought since we were going to be married in two days, it wouldn't matter, you would think I would know better being a Christian for 25 years. In spite of all my head knowledge we became intimate, and after would I got dress and went to work. As I was driving on the highway, I had this overwhelming feeling of sin and shame and uncleanness. It wasn't long I put the thought out of my mind. When I returned home later that night, Ron was waiting up for me, the first words out of her mount were “after I left for work, Ronnie immediately walked into the shower and tried to scrub and shame she felt on her body.” The following day we didn't think of it anymore. The day arrived, we went to pick up Bernie my brother-in-law, then I drove to city hall, Bernie asked where are we going? We then told him he was going to be the best man at our wedding. You had to see the expression on his face of unbelief. As we approach courthouse, Bernie was shaking so, I thought he was going to have a heart attack.

I parked the car, and then we all went in before the judge. Within two minutes, we were married. After the judge said that we were man and wife, there was another expression on Bernie's face that would make anyone laugh.

Right after the marriage took place, the three of us drove to a local diner for our reception; we celebrated with a big breakfast. Bernie was still in shock, to say the least. After our reception, we drove Bernie back home. Then my wife and I went on our honeymoon.

We went to Sanibel Island, which is on the Gulf of Mexico. For the next three days, we had such a great time just being with each other. On our honeymoon the strangest thing happened!, as Ron and I was lying on the bed, I was kissing her face softly then out blue, we both pull away from each other, she looked at me and said, did you feel that! I said yes. It was like being intimate without intimacy, all I could say was that it is beyond anything either one of us is experiencing. Thinking back to the previous encounter Ron and I had, reminds me what the Bible states in Galatians 5:19: works of the flesh, sexual immorality. For the following few weeks were fantastic. Slowly but surely, reality crept in, and we knew that marriage was not all fun and games especially when I went to church and gave some money as I had done throughout my Christian life. Ron had a problem with this. She called her daughter and complained to her that I was giving money to the church, Her daughter told her that she had no right to demand that I stop giving to the church – and that it was my money!

Nevertheless, we tried to resolve our differences whenever they arose. For the next three months, I would go to work while Ron would stay at home and prepare my meals. I am sure that this wasn't so easy for her staying at home all day by herself, with no friends to speak to.

Around the same time, unexpectedly, the landlord gave us notice that we would have to move because the owner couldn't make her payments on her mortgages anymore. We offered her more money, but it wouldn't have helped her meet all of the expenses. The only option she had was to sell her place or the bank would foreclose on

the property.

With no time to spare, I went out looking for a new home. The time was drawing near for the house to be sold, so with every spare moment, I was looking for an apartment. I asked Ronnie if she

wanted to see where I used to live before leaving everything to take care of my mother. She did.

After driving around my old neighborhood, I went around the corner to see if there were any apartments to rent in that particular area. Not far from where I previously lived, I turned down a street, and Ron saw a sign for Cross Fox Apartments.

Ron turned to me and said that she would like to live in the Cross Fox complex. I liked it too. It looked like a great place to live. It was a nice neighborhood and was not far from the beach. Unfortunately, there were no signs indicating that an apartment was available. So, we drove around the complex. Without giving it any more thought, we went back home and continued to look for an apartment with no success.

Two weeks passed. I searched the classified ads for rental apartments every day. Then I saw an ad for an apartment for rent that jumped out at me. I called the number listed and spoke to the owner about looking at the apartment. After she said that it was available, I made an appointment to view it the following day (Monday) at 10 a.m.

Monday came, and Ronnie and I woke early in the morning. We were hoping that the apartment we were going to see would be exactly what we wanted. Before we left to see the apartment, I was thinking that the address sounded familiar, but I could not place it. When I took out my notes, I saw that it was across the street from my old

apartment and that it was in the Cross Fox Apartment Complex – the same complex that Ronnie told me she wanted to live in!

We met Ann, the owner of the apartment, and she liked us so much, that she lowered the rent – the rent quoted was much less than what she was getting from the other apartments she owned in the building. And after everything was done, I went to the bank, withdrew \$1800, and returned to the complex with Ann's money. We wanted to move in as quickly as possible.

When we returned home, we told Irena that we had found an apartment and would be moving the following week. Once again, Ron offered Irena more money in rent so she wouldn't have to sell her home. Despite Ron's offer once again, there still wouldn't have been enough money to make the mortgage payments. In the end, Irena sold the house. She wished us all the best.

We finally moved into our new apartment. It had the most magnificent view of a garden with waterfalls and palm trees, which ran alongside the clubhouse. The complex also offered a pool, a Jacuzzi, and a barbecue grill. And at night, the lights made me feel that I was in paradise.

Ronnie found a job shortly after we moved into the new apartment. We both thought that we were on track. Our friends visited us, and Ron was in all her glory now that she had a place that she could call her own.

Three months or so passed, and it was Ron who went to work while I was sitting at home. One day, I unexpectedly got a call from Ron. She told me that she was smelling gas coming from the car engine. I paid no attention to what she said because she had an acute sense of smell; it wasn't the first time she complained about smelling something. But as it turned out, gas *was* leaking from the engine. She was driving and stopped at a red light – all of a sudden, her car went up in flames. By the grace of God, Ron was not hurt – that's what mattered.

I went to pick up Ronnie from work, and we went straight home. After she winded down, she went into more detail about the fire and the car. I called the salvage company and a worker came over and took the car away.

I have to be honest – a few days prior to Ron's car catching fire, I was thinking about getting Ron a new car if her car could not be repaired. I never expected that I would have to buy one so quickly. I found myself in a dilemma. I didn't know where to find a new car. I knew my time was limited. I knew that Ronnie needed a car to go to and from work. I wasted no time – I went to the place where I bought my first car in the 80s, but I did not find anything suitable.

The next day, Ron and I went to my sister's house for dinner. My niece, who was also invited, knew that I was looking for a car. As we were eating, she gave me some advice about car shopping. She told me not to look at any cars made by Kia. She considered Kia cars

were the most unreliable ones on the market per consumer reports. I ended up acting like a madman running to various dealerships and avoiding the Kia dealership.

After two days of running around, I felt discouraged, so I asked my sister if she would help me find a car. We went from dealership to dealership. But once again, there was no success.

As I pulled up to a Toyota dealership in Pompano Beach, I told my sister that if we did not find a car, I was going to take her back home and call it a day. We looked and looked, and we found nothing. As we were leaving the dealership –wouldn't you know it – there was a Kia dealership across the street. Since my niece suggested *not* buying a Kia, my sister and I headed home.

The next day, Ron and I was invited to dinner over my sister house once again. And after dinner, I picked up the classified section of the newspaper. A car I was interested in was for sale. I called the number and asked to speak to the sales representative listed in the ad

When he picked up the phone, I told him that I had seen the ad in the paper and wanted to know if the car I read about was still available. The man said yes, but the dealership was closing for the evening. He told me to come by the following morning.

Ron and I woke up early that morning and went to the dealership. Guess what? It was the Kia dealership that I had avoided the previous day.

When we arrived, I introduced her to the salesman. We went straight to the car that was on sale. It was beautiful, clean, had low mileage, and was still under warranty. We wanted the car, so we tried to bargain with the salesman, but he would not reduce the price. I agreed to buy it at the initial price. We went to the salesman's office, and as he was putting all the papers together, he received a phone call about the car we had just bought. He had a big smile on his face while talking to the caller.

After the salesman got off the phone, we signed the paperwork. He told us that the call was from a woman who wanted to buy the car the previous day. She was giving the salesman such a hard time about the price, that she picked up her pocketbook and walked out of the dealership. He told her it was sold. Weirdly enough, this was the same type of situation I was in when I initially moved to Florida and needed to buy a car.

We left the dealership and went straight home. It was a relief that we had finally bought a second car; one that was safe for Ronnie to drive without having to worry if it would break down. When we got home, we rested and thought how fortunate we were, and knowing that God was in control.

Time passed. We considered inviting my dad to visit us since we had a spare bedroom. I was totally surprised when he said that he was willing to make the trip; he was 88 years old at the time.

All the arrangements were made for my father's visit. I could imagine what was going through his mind having to travel on an airplane at his age. But to my surprise, he got on the plane! When he arrived at the airport, I was there with open arms. For the first time, we actually embraced each other. And when we got home, he gave a big hug to Ronnie.

We had such a great time for the next two weeks. My relationship with my father was starting to grow. I knew that the relationship I wanted with him was impossible, but I couldn't ask for anything else. We made a trip to see my sister, and he was the life of the party.

Just like everything else, all good things must come to an end; that included my father's visit. He packed his bags, we took him to the airport, and he went home.

CHAPTER 34

What a Happy Ending!

Later that year, I received a phone call from a young boy whom I did not know at that time. During the phone call, this young boy asked me if I had a daughter named Denise. I told him yes, that I do have a daughter named Denise. The young boy then told me that he was calling on her behalf of her. She was very interested in meeting her father for the first time, but she was so afraid that I might say no over the phone. I told the boy, tell her that I wanted to meet her and that I was looking forward to getting a call from her as soon as possible.

The following day, Denise called, and we had a long talk over the phone. I had mixed emotions, and I'm sure that she was having the same feelings. To make things easier, I put Ronnie on the phone, and they hit it off!

Denise and I spoke to each other for the next three weeks, and then I invited her to visit me. I asked her to visit me thinking that my wife would make it more comfortable for her to be under the same roof as her father for the first time. Right after I extended the invitation, she

accepted, and I made her travel arrangements. I was beside myself – for the first time in 25 years I would be seeing my daughter!

The day of Denise's arrival, I went to the airport, and there she was! She was not the young baby I remembered; she was a young woman. As she exited the airport she walked toward me, we embraced for the first time. It was something to behold. Denise and I walked to my car, put her bags in the trunk, and we were off!

As soon as we entered the apartment, Denise took to Ron as though she had known her for her entire life. I am sure that it was much easier for Denise to talk to another woman. That was not unusual since women have so much in common. It didn't hurt that Denise and Ronnie had talked over the phone several times prior to her visiting us.

After Denise got settled, Ron and I took her out to a nice restaurant. As we were on our way, Denise seemed to be so overwhelmed with how beautiful Florida was. We arrived at the restaurant, we were seated, and we ordered our dinners. As Denise was eating her steak, I got Ron's attention and pointed to Denise as she was eating, moving side to side, and humming at the same time. It was amazing. It happens to be that I did the same thing, and still do. In my eyes, it was a sign of being happy. I looked at Ron and told her there was no doubt that I was Denise's father.

We had a great time together. What made Denise's stay more exciting

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was that before she came down to visit she had met a young

man who was interested in her. To me, it seemed that Denise and the young man spoke every night of her visit. It was so nice that for the first time, I was seeing her having a great time. I was also sure that she was looking forward to going back home to see her new boyfriend.

Fast forward two years – I was invited to Tony and Denise’s wedding. It was now like a fairy tale come true – happening right before my eyes. The wedding was taking place in Maryland, which is where they were living, and I made all of my travel arrangements. I was so excited that I packed my bags way ahead of time. I did this to ensure that I wouldn’t forget anything.

The day I was to travel arrived, and I was on my way to see my little girl. When I reached the airport, Tony was standing at the pick-up exit. He gave me such a warm welcome. He then drove us home and then went about his business preparing for the wedding, which was the next day.

There was so much excitement going on in the house. I decided to get out of the way, so I sat on the patio. Then out of the blue, a woman came up to me and said, “OK, let’s get this over now.”

I looked at the woman and wondered who in the world she was, and what was she talking about. That’s when Denise came over to me and said that the woman with whom I was speaking was Marcia, her mother. I didn’t recognize Marcia at all. She sat next to me and

Insisted I bring up the past and have it out with her. I looked at her and told her that there was nothing to discuss. We had made some bad choices and that was it!

I knew that it was a big relief for her because she had lied to the judge. Later that evening, Marcia said she was hoping I could come back to her. With that out of the way, we had a great time at the wedding. We danced most of the night. We spoke about the man she married after our divorce. She also told me that she lived across the street from my mother's house. To this day, I do not know the man Marcia married, but he made it clear to Marcia and Denise that if either of them were to go by my mother's house, they were in for it – and he meant it.

The ceremony was beautiful and I saw for the first time that Denise finally found someone who loved her. After the wedding, I walked Marcia back to her hotel room and kissed her goodbye. Her face told me that she did not want me to leave, but I knew that staying was impossible. I returned to my hotel room, packed my bags, and flew home. What a happy ending! Despite everything in the past, it all ended up perfect! Now, 2 years later, I became a grandpa twice. You have to admit that God kept his promise from way back when.

CHAPTER 35

Our Big Step

Later on, my landlord's husband died. This meant that we had to buy the apartment or move again. Miss Smith liked us so much, that she was willing to give us a break on the sale price of the apartment, which was very nice of her. However, the price she wanted was still out of our reach. That meant that once again, I had to look for a place to live.

This time, we had put enough money in the bank, just in case we had to move. When considering our options, we determined that we did not want to rent again; instead, we wanted to buy a house with the money we had saved.

As usual, it was up to me to find a place for us to live. This meant that I had to take the incentive to search for our new home – wherever it may have been. It seemed like I spent every spare moment doing so. We had a set time to vacate the apartment.

As in the past, I looked at the classified ads and saw that there was a condo for sale. I called the real estate agent listed to find out if the

Condo was sold already: it was not. The agent asked if we could wait until the following week when his brother would be in town to come and see the condo. I didn't have a problem with waiting. When I told Ron, she was very excited that we were going to own our own home! It was a big step for us.

The following week, Jim, the real estate agent, called just like he said he would. We made an appointment to see the condo. We met at Jim's office and drove together to the complex. Along the way, we were so overwhelmed by the landscaping. It looked as if we had left the city and entered a resort town – that was how beautiful it was to us!

We went from condo to condo. Ron was determined to buy the largest condo in the complex because it came with an extra room that was big enough for a washer and dryer. There was one apartment we saw that we thought to be nice, and the price was right. However, it was missing something – it did not offer a view of the landscape. Instead, the view from the condo was another condo.

Jim told Ron and me that there was a smaller condo available, and it had a beautiful view overlooking the lake and the clubhouse. We each got into our own cars and went to see the condo that had been described. Before Ron even looked through the entire place, she asked if it had a washer and dryer, but it didn't. With that, Ron turned around to leave. Instead of arguing, I did the same.

We went home and said nothing about the condo we had just viewed. That night while in bed, I was thinking to myself that the condo was perfect; I was stuck in these thoughts until morning. I got up and drove to see if there was a lock on the door of the condo we had seen. And yes, there was a lock.

The first thing I did that day was to call Jim and ask him if he could meet us at 3 p.m. at the condo we had seen the previous day. Jim was OK with this. So, I called Ron and told her we were going to see the condo again and that she needed to be ready to go when I got home.

We met up with Jim, and he let us take our time looking around to see the pros and cons of buying the unit. Ron told me that she was on the fence as to whether the condo was right for us. The three of us left and went down stairs and said to Jim I was interested in this property, he handed me the contract and I sign it. I ask Ron to sign on the dotted line, she ask me what did she sign; I said she is the proud owner of the condo; you had to see the expression on her face. We left and went home to ponder what took place.

I really wanted this condo. I wanted to live in a place where I could do whatever I wanted, not having to answer to anyone. I called Jim the following day and made an appointment to see him and to discuss the price of the unit.

I asked him what the owners wanted for it. He told me the owner

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was looking for \$55,000, which was on the high side at that time. The \$55,000 was also the price of one of the larger units in the complex. When I mentioned this to Jim, he understood what I meant and suggested that I ask for the reduced price of \$45,000. I

told Jim that the extra money didn't faze me and that I would buy the condo for the asking price. He again suggested that I negotiate a reduced price; I insisted that I did not want to take any chances of losing the condo; I did not want to complicate the sale. In the end, he offered the owner \$45,000 and they accepted.

The day we were closing the sale on the condo came. Everything went as planned. We owned our home. The reality of that began to settle in. The first thing we did after the closing was to get into the car and drive directly to our condo. We were like two little kids – we went from room to room and looked around. After we looked into every nook and cranny, we went back to the apartment we were leaving and we rested, it was a long and tiring day. The next day we called a moving company and before we know it, we were finally settled in what a feeling.

Because we were the friendly type, we made many friends with our neighbors within a short period of time. It seemed like everything was going well. We bought the condo furnished so we were able to save some extra money. This meant that Ronnie and I, when the time was right, we could go on a Bahamian cruise.

I invited my daughter and son-in-law to Florida to take the cruise with us. Denise was excited; she accepted, but her husband could not get time off from work to go. So, I asked her if she wanted to invite her girlfriend to join us for a free trip to the Bahamas. Denise asked, and her friend said yes. Denise and her girlfriend arrived at my house.

Our Big Step

The following day, we packed and set sail for the Bahamas. It

was great to see Denise having a great time once again – a great time with someone of her own age rather than us old people.

The years went by quickly, and before I knew it, I received a call from my dad and Muriel. They explained to me that a major company was buying all the surrounding properties in the area to build a Home Depot. This meant that like the other property owners, they would have to move. And at their age, it wasn't going to be easy for them to pick up and move. Besides the fact that they had to move, there was the question of where they were going to move to. It was quite apparent that there were two options – one, they could stay in Brooklyn or the other option was to move my dad and Muriel to South Florida where Muriel's daughter and I lived. In the end, there was really only one option – both Muriel and my dad would move to South Florida.

Sue, Muriel's daughter offered them the opportunity to stay with her until they found an apartment of their own. So with that, they packed up most of their belongings and gave away the remainder. After the personal belongings were packed, everything else was shipped via truck to Muriel's daughter's home.

The day arrived when I had to take my dad and Muriel from the only home they had ever known and bring them to South Florida. I could not even imagine what they were going through at that time. And like when I first left New York City, they only had their bags in hand. They called a cab and went to the airport. They made it to the

terminal without incident and boarded a plane to South Florida. The trip was not easy for them because of their age. However, they arrived safely; they moved into Sue's home and stayed there for two months while looking for a place to live.

They eventually found a place in a development near Sue and stayed for a year. Towards the end of their lease, Ron heard that there was a condo next door to us up for sale. We thought it was a good idea for them to live close by in case of an emergency.

Since I had experience buying property, it was easier for me to guide them through the processes involved. Moving for people of any age is difficult, but I saw it to be more difficult for them because of their ages. However, when dad and Muriel moved into their condo, they did not seem as enthused as we were to have their own home.

To be honest, my dad and Muriel hated Florida with a passion, but they made the best of it. And after they settled in with Ron's help, they seemed to adapt to living in South Florida, even the heat.

I was glad to have them living next door to us. They were always invited to dinner and could come as often as they wanted. I would invite friends over, and they made it a point to join us. Well, who doesn't like a party!?! And when my friends met my dad, they were fascinated with him because of his good sense of humor and that he was the picture of perfect health at 85 years old.

CHAPTER 36

Miracles Do Happen

The years went on, and life couldn't be better. However, everything changed in 2008 when Sue was diagnosed with lung cancer.

As it turned out, when Sue was given the lung cancer diagnosis, she thought that there was no way she could have lung cancer. And because she could not accept the diagnosis, she refused professional help. Instead of facing the diagnosis, for whatever reason, she turned to self-help groups and people who told her they could cure her with pills and magic. All of the people she turned to basically told her the same thing – to stay positive and forget that she was given a lung cancer diagnosis. Needless to say, Sue did not change her lifestyle. However, she tried to do one thing – stop smoking.

After two years, I received a call telling me that Sue was in the hospital in critical condition. She was on oxygen and had many IVs in her arms. Her condition was so bad, that the paperwork for her cremation was already done, and her power of attorney was to take care of her living will.

Friends and family showed up to see Sue. They were crying and saying that she was going to die. There was so much drama there that I had to tell everyone to stop putting Sue in her grave before she was dead!

As I was about to walk out of Sue's hospital room, her doctor entered to ask her if she would like to be put in the hospice unit at the hospital or if she wanted to go home to die there. To be honest, she actually looked like death was knocking on her door.

Sue requested that she be discharged and sent home to die. The hospital made the arrangements to get her home and to make her as comfortable as possible. These arrangements included having an aide staying with her for 24 hours a day.

When I arrived at Sue's house, the aide was waiting for her so she could immediately help give her oxygen and administer morphine. I saw Sue when she was brought home. You could see the pain and fear on her face as people were trying to put her in bed. I truly believe that there were thousands of things in her head. And when everything was done for her to be comfortable, I left. I went home to try to comfort Muriel.

I stayed with Muriel for a while and then went to my own home. I prayed for all of the people who knew Sue. And that night, for some strange reason, I felt I had to go to Sue's house the following day and pray for her to get well. I felt she needed to ask Jesus to come into

her heart. In the morning, I called Sue to ask if she was well enough to have me over to pray with her. “OK,” she said.

I didn’t know what Sue was thinking, and I did not understand what was about to happen. I just had this deep-seated feeling within me. It was about 7 p.m. when I arrived. She had eaten dinner, was made comfortable for my visit and was ready to pray with me.

Upon arrival, I sat down on the couch with the aide, and we put Sue to sit between us. Before I started to pray, I asked the aide to put her hand on Sue’s chest while I had my hand on her back where the lungs are. After the aide and I put our hands in their respective places, the first thing I did was ask Sue to invite Jesus into her life, regardless of whether she was to be healed or not. At some point, all of us will pass on from this life and go to the next one. It’s in times like these when people grab onto anything that would bring them hope. As far as Sue was concerned – she sincerely asked Jesus Christ into her life and for her sins to be forgiven.

The second thing the aide and I did was to go into a heartfelt prayer asking God to heal Sue from her lung cancer. The prayer wasn’t long, and as I said, it was heartfelt. And when I was done, I stayed for a while and tried to explain to Sue what happened. All she had to do was to believe God heard our prayer, and He would cure her.

Sue asked me if we aren’t all children of God. I opened the Bible and directed her to John 3:16 where Jesus is referred to as God’s only

begotten Son. I tried to explain we are all God's creation. According to the Bible, when we accept Jesus Christ into our lives, we are adopted into the heavenly kingdom being born again spiritually. When I finished talking, there was an expression on Sue's face as if a light of understanding was turned on.

Just before I left, I advised Sue to go out the next day and have a good breakfast. And after I left, I didn't think anything at all about it until the next day when I went back to Sue's house to see how she was doing.

When I arrived, I got the surprise of a lifetime. As I was sitting on the couch, Sue told me that she had followed through with my advice to go out for a good breakfast, but she threw up when she was done, and then went home. As she went on, she told me that she brought Jesus into her life and then got sick. At that moment, I had no idea what to say. I was speechless. Not knowing what was going to happen, I left. On my way home, I continually asked myself why it happened.

The next day, I called Sue to find out how she was feeling. And to my surprise, she told me she was feeling much better than she had in some time. As time passed, Sue felt stronger and stronger every day since the day the aide and I prayed for her. Not only did Sue get stronger and stronger, she felt better and better, to the point where she was out and about and eating real food. Sue gained weight and was able to walk on her own, around the house. Everyone was

amazed to see her recovery.

Three weeks later, Sue made an appointment to see a doctor about her condition. She was checked by the doctor who treated her while she was in the hospital. He too was amazed at her recovery. He immediately ordered X-rays of her lungs. When the results of the X-ray came back, the doctor said that the tumor shrank. He was perplexed by the results. The doctor did not know what to make of what he saw, because the last time he saw Sue, she was at death's door. When Sue's appointment was over, the doctor asked her to make an appointment to see him in four weeks. In fact, after Sue saw the doctor, she continued to gain more strength every day. She gained so much strength, that she was able to get back into her car and drive again. In my eyes, you would never think that Sue was a woman who had cancer.

The day Sue went to see the doctor to get the results of a new set of X-rays, we all waited anxiously to hear the results. And to everyone's amazement, Sue's tumor once again shrunk in size. Within a short period of time, she returned to her former lifestyle.

Unfortunately, I was not in contact with her until the day she called to ask me out for lunch, and to thank me for being at her side when she was ill. Since I never turned down an invitation for a meal, I agreed to go. I knew that this was a celebratory meal.

We met for dinner, ordered our food, and engaged in light conversation. Everything changed when she told me that if Jesus did not heal her completely, she would have nothing to do with Him.

After Sue made her comment, I looked at her with great astonishment. I looked straight into her eyes and told her that she was an ungrateful person. I wanted to say more, but I kept quiet. What I finally said to her was that if it wasn't for the love of God, it would be quite possible that she would have been dead. Sue responded to what I said by apologizing and agreeing with me. We finished our dinner and went our separate ways. I did not see or hear her much from that point on. Like I said, she was living her old life!

Sue's mother was very much in touch with her daughter. And for the following two years, she kept me informed of Sue's health. Sue and Muriel both became involved with a woman who claimed to heal people with supernatural powers. That was right up Sue's alley! And Muriel, who was afflicted with chronic pain, turned to this healer who charged over \$200 a session versus trusting God. This went on for three months to no avail; there were no positive results.

Sue then introduced Muriel to a different kind of healer. This time, when Muriel did not feel well, all she would have to do is pick up the phone and call the healer. Once the call was received, the healer would turn on some kind of machine to transcribe the caller's illness and then heal it! This healer charged her callers \$75 for every call. Muriel would sometimes call three times a day. I am only estimating that she spent tens of thousands of dollars over a two-year period with no positive results!

I said nothing throughout those two years following Sue's illness. However, I did hope and pray that she would go to church as a testimony of how all things are possible with God – even to cure cancer. I know that would definitely encourage others, but Sue never went to church. Her health was in God's hands.

One night, when Muriel was in horrific pain, she called me and asked if I could keep her company to take her mind off it. I went to see Muriel and stayed with her for about an hour or so. I tried to make her laugh by telling her some of the silly things I did. As I was about to leave Muriel's home, I spoke to her about the miracles Jesus performed while on Earth. And before I started to pray, I said, "All you have to do is just believe in your heart that all things are possible." I said my short prayer and left.

As I was walking back to my apartment, I was asking God to show Muriel how He could heal her pain. I prayed that she could experience fifteen minutes free of pain after I prayed. The day after, Muriel called to tell me that no sooner had I left her house, the pain in her hip was gone. She went on to say that she was able to get out of bed and walk around the house. She was so happy. She was actually jumping up and down in the middle of her living room! Are you ready for this? – Muriel said that the absence of pain lasted fifteen minutes! And after these fifteen minutes, she had to go back to bed because the severe pain returned. Despite the fifteen minutes of no pain, she called her healer. She had such little faith. It was discouraging. I then went about my own business as before.

Weeks later, Tom, who was in New York City, called me to say that our friend, Vinnie was in the hospice. He asked me if I would come to see him before he died. I had to see Vinnie; my friendship with him had lasted more than 27 years. I told Tom that I would be at the hospice within 24 hours. Immediately, I packed my clothes and off I went. The only stops I made were for gas when I needed to.

While driving to see Vinnie, I prayed to God to please keep him alive until I got to see him for one last time. I wanted to pray for him to be healed like Sue was and to receive Jesus into his life. I also was thinking about how our friendship started.

When I first met Vinnie, I did not like him one bit. Our friendship began when I was about to sign out at work. A guy named Vinnie was ahead of me in line, drunk, and bothering me. After he signed out, he wouldn't give me the time sheet so I could sign out. He was playing games with me by holding the sign-out sheet above my head. Vinnie was 6'3," and I was 5'11", which makes him taller than me. He and his friends were juicers too. Vinnie liked his alcohol. I backed off rather than mess with him. I wasn't sure what he was capable of doing, and I was afraid. He finally gave me the sign-out sheet, and I left to go home.

Two months later, I was transferred to a different district. I thanked God for Vinnie being out of my life. It turned out, I was wrong. Weeks later, I was assigned to be the driver of the day. The first thing I did was to check the truck to make sure that everything was

working before leaving the garage. I got into the truck and started it. Lo and behold, Vinnie and Jim appeared – the two alcoholics who I thought were permanently out of my life. My thinking was that I was going to have the day from hell.

Halfway through the day, he started drinking and got drunk! Vinnie was so out of control that I chose to leave the truck and wouldn't move it until both of them stopped messing with me. They were dangerous! Thankfully, the day ended without incident.

It turned out that Vinnie liked to smoke pot – and that's what we had in common. With pot in the picture, we became friends. As time passed, word got out that I was selling weed. Tom, Vinnie, and I developed a lasting friendship.

Vinnie had two car accidents in which he nearly lost his life. He woke up and stopped drinking and drugging. He worked out in the gym every day and changed his eating habits. So, much so, after making these changes, you could say that Vinnie became the perfect specimen of health. The only thing that I thought was missing was a personal relationship with Jesus. I tried to tell him about women and AIDS and to change his sexual lifestyle.

Interestingly enough, he went to church every Sunday because of tradition. After church, he would visit his four children, who each had different mothers. He was a single father who devoted this Sundays to his children. There aren't too many fathers like Vinnie.

After driving for hours, I finally arrived in New York City about 10 a.m. The first stop I made was at Tom's house and from there; we went to see Vinnie at the hospice.

On arrival, I went to Vinnie's room. Before I entered, I peeked inside to see if he was awake. Vinnie had his back toward me, and I said, "That's nice of you, Vinnie. You turn your back on me after I drove 1500 miles!" Vinnie was eating; he turned around to see me and laughed. His smile was worth a million dollars! I then went over to him and gave him a kiss on the cheek and a hug.

When I took a good look at Vinnie, I saw that he had a tumor sticking out of his chest that was the size of a golf ball. Well, Vinnie had lung cancer. I was so glad to find him alive, to spend time with him and comfort him until the end. I asked for a bed to be put in Vinnie's room so that if he needed any help, I would be there to help him. Tom concluded coming from Florida to New York to see Vinnie showed that I was a true friend! And Vinnie's family was glad I was there. As the days passed, Vinnie's cancer worsened even after chemotherapy and radiation treatments. The day came when he was unable to get out of bed on his own. I did my best to help him for as long as I could. It finally came to a point that he needed a nurse to help him to the bathroom because I was not able to lift him. Vinnie was in so much pain; his doctor put him on a morphine drip.

On the fourth day, I went to the cafeteria to get a cup of coffee. While in the elevator, I said hello to a young girl and thought nothing of it. The following morning, I got my coffee and decided to sit in the courtyard. As I was going to the courtyard, I saw the girl sitting there with her hands covering her face. I went over to her and tried to comfort her; she said that her sister, like Vinnie, was dying from cancer.

The girl went on to say that her sister was giving up, and she was disappointed with her decision. As we talked, I found out that she had traveled from Texas with the hope her sister could be healed. As a Christian, she prayed for her sister's healing. I realized that I was dealing with the same thing with Vinnie. I asked this girl if she would talk to Vinnie about the love of Jesus and how He died on the cross for us. It's strange, but God puts people into our path as divine appointments.

Later that morning, the girl came to the room and explained to Vinnie how Jesus loved him, and he needed to receive Jesus into his life – and Vinnie did!!! It was amazing that after twenty-five years of trying to get him to give up his women and receive Jesus into his life, it took a perfect stranger to convince him to accept Jesus.

I was planning to stay in Vinnie's room for another two days, but on the sixth day his friend came over to stay with him so I could leave because I was in so much pain from lifting him up out of bed. I drove to uncle Herman house where I could rest and go back to

Vinnie the next day.

When I arrived at my uncle's house, the first thing I did was take a hot bath and then I ate. At about 10 p.m., I received a call from a friend of ours who was with Vinnie; he told me that Vinnie had just passed away. To be honest, I was glad I was not present when it happened. I am not sure how I would have handled watching my friend die before my eyes. I remembered leaving my mother's room right before she died. However, I was glad that Vinnie accepted Jesus before his demise.

The next morning, I left Brooklyn. Just as before, I drove straight home without stopping except for gas and a cup of coffee to keep me awake. I made it home in 24 hours.

I rested for 2 days after I arrived home. I was totally exhausted. I then learned that Oscar, another friend, was in the hospital in Fort Lauderdale. When I walked into his room, I was so heartbroken to see the tubes in his arms and down his throat. He was unconscious. And as I sat there, I prayed with such intensity that tears started rolling down my face. I told God that he couldn't take this one from us; we needed all the Christians we have. Every day after that, I went to see Oscar as he lay in bed not knowing anyone; I prayed for his recovery.

A few days later, Oscar was awake and sitting up in bed! What a relief for all of us who had prayed for him. It seemed he would be on his feet once again to glorify God like he had done throughout his life. Oscar's life was restored for a year and his faith kept him going

until he had a heart attack and died. God uses me to help others and to pray for their healing. Faith is necessary to trust in God.

CHAPTER 37

How the Tables Turn

My father thought God didn't exist since he couldn't see or feel God. Dad was 95 years old and he started to have difficulty maintaining his balance when walking from room to room. There were many times when he would fall to the floor and start to scream at the top of his lungs saying to Muriel, "Get my son Barry to help me!" My father would actually bang his hands on the floor and walls until I came over to help him up. This would happen at least once a week. Every time I went over to his house, I would lift him into a chair. I would laugh to myself when I noticed how the tables had turned! He needed me and that was OK because I understand now what is most important in life – a personal relationship with Jesus. Regardless of the past and how my father's words affected me, I forgave him a long time ago.

My father had to go to the emergency room because he fell and cut his head. After he was treated, the doctor suggested that he be placed in an assisted living facility where he would receive the proper around-the-clock care that he needed. Muriel and I agreed that it would be the best alternative rather than staying at home and risking

the possibility of him falling and hurting himself even more. So, we made the arrangements for his admission. However, my father refused to go. But the hospital took him there – he did not have a choice.

While he was in the facility, he gave the aides hell! I would not put on paper what my father said to them – it was that bad! Nevertheless, the aides and nurses loved him. They would tell me stories how after he finished his dinner, he would go from room to room looking for more trays of food. Weeks turned into months, and my father's health worsened to the point that he wasn't eating at all. It was very evident that he was almost at his end.

I was going to the temple to celebrate Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement. According to Jewish tradition, Yom Kippur is when every Jewish person would ask God to forgive them for their sins of the past year. As I was just about to leave for the temple, a little voice moved me to go visit my father and ask God to forgive him of all his sins. My father had many sins, but if he received Jesus into his heart, he would be forgiven. It was getting late and the service was to begin at sundown.

I rushed to his room, and I asked the aide who was sitting next to his bedside to pray with me. We prayed that my father would accept Jesus. I placed my hands around his ear so he could hear me clearly. Since it was the Day of Atonement, it was a perfect time to ask God to forgive him and accept Jesus as the Messiah. As I was speaking to

my dad, I noticed at the corner of my eye that his lips were moving. However, I could not hear what he was trying to say. After I stopped speaking, I looked at the aide and asked if she thought my dad heard me. She said that he did. I left my father's bedside.

On my way to the temple, I remembered when Walter and I went to this same temple on Yom Kippur many years ago. I had fasted 24 hours and asked God to forgive me. During that service, the rabbi said, "Fasting or giving up something just to honor this tradition doesn't impress God because it was already taken care of when Jesus went to the cross and was crucified." After hearing the rabbi's words, I felt disappointed because I thought I was doing something great for God. However, with deeper thinking, I began to understand that our works truly do not save us.

The following day, I returned to the hospice to see my dad. I kissed his head and he moved slightly. He then closed his eyes and passed away. I think he was waiting for me to show up before ascending to heaven. My unsaved family was devastated at the loss of my father. Muriel had lost her best friend and husband. She was totally out of it, and she needed tranquilizers just to calm her down. She only had her daughter and me, her stepson. When my mother and friends died, I withdrew, and this time, I couldn't help Muriel at all. It was so sad because my father was her only friend. My sister, her daughter Lynn, and my niece Liz still felt the loss in spite of the way my dad treated us.

My father, too, had no close friends throughout his entire life. So, there was no need for a memorial service. Muriel decided Buster would be cremated. She made the arrangements and his ashes would be delivered. The thought of having Dad's ashes in his room was unbearable to Muriel, so she asked me if I would take them. I did, though, I really did not want to keep them in my house, either. I decided to give his ashes to my sister, Marion. And as time passed, my sister and her two girls, Lynn and Liz put my dad's death behind them. On the other hand, Muriel was devastated by his death. I tried to comfort her as much as I could, but no matter what, she was never the same.

Six months later, Muriel called me to say that Sue was in critical condition. When I visited Sue at the hospital, she was unconscious. I had the same vision I had two years prior when I visited Sue the first time. She had tubes in her arms and down her throat to help her breathe. Her remission lasted two years, but Sue had chosen to go back to her old ways – smoking cigarettes and pot. I am sure that these behaviors did not help one bit!

Just as the previous time Sue was in the hospital, she was told she could go home and hospice would be provided. Her pain would be kept to a minimum. This time, a hospital bed was delivered to her home because her condition was even worse than the first time she was diagnosed with cancer.

At home, Sue was unable to be comfortable. This time, I was not optimistic about her recovery. I did try to encourage her. I bought the foods she liked. She tried, but she couldn't eat. On the bright side of all this, the aide and I had the opportunity once again to share the gospel of Jesus. We told Sue what she could expect after she passed on from this life to the next. She received Jesus in her heart and began singing aloud the love songs of Jesus. She prayed with the aide.

Days turned into weeks, and Sue's cancer was worsening. I got so mad at Sue for not trying harder to stay alive. At one point, I stayed away from her. I really wanted her to get well. The witch called Sue to ask if she wanted healing. Sue refused because she had Jesus as her healer and Savior. Two days later, the aide called to say that Sue had passed away. I went to her house and her family and friends were grieving her death. Just before she passed, the aide said Sue sang her favorite song to Jesus and closed her eyes. Muriel made arrangements for her body to be cremated. Sue's friend followed her instructions and cast her ashes into the ocean. Shortly after Sue's death, Muriel went into a deep depression. First, she lost her best friend, and her husband, and now her child. It has been said, the worst thing a mother could experience is watching her child die.

Muriel's health deteriorated. About two years later, she too passed away. Since I was the only family she had, she had made me power of attorney. After I fulfilled her requests for her burial and the disbursement of her assets, God opened a new door for me. This

time it was to write my memoirs about how the LORD has interacted with me and others throughout my life.

CHAPTER 38

Barry Joseph — My Son

I’ve never written a book, I thought to myself. *Even if I could, I have to contend with dyslexia and my lack of vocabulary.* But 1 Corinthians 1:25 says, “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.” He sure picked a good candidate in me. I must admit, this has been the most difficult and challenging thing I’ve had to go through up to this point in my life. The year was 2014. I was in the middle of writing my book describing the faithfulness of God.

Out of the blue, I received a call from a strange woman who introduced herself as Ann, Barry Joseph’s mother. She asked if I would like to meet her son Barry Joseph. Without hesitation, I said yes. She disclosed no other information except that he had issues. I had been searching for my son for the last 15 years. I *wasn't* going to let his issues stop me now from finally meeting him. Months before Ann’s call, I had already booked a flight to Brooklyn to visit Uncle Herman in September 2014. I mentioned those plans to Ann. I was so excited and overwhelmed; I had no problem changing my flight to

meet my son the following week. But Ann said it was only a month away from my original plans, so there was no need to change. I agreed.

Finally, the day came for me to fly to Brooklyn. After boarding the plane, all I could think about was seeing my son for the first time in over 45 years. The airplane pulled up to the airport terminal, and I got out of my seat as fast as I could. I was overwhelmed with excitement. I waved down a cab, and as soon as I arrived at Uncle Herman's house, I called Ann. We decided a time and place to meet for dinner, and we hung up.

You can't imagine my emotional state. I was thinking, what does my son look like? What will I say to him when we meet for the first time? I love you, or what? Nobody could comprehend what I was feeling, except those who had the same experience. After settling down, Uncle Herman prepared dinner for the both of us. We talked for a while and then called it a night.

As planned, Ann and I met for dinner. This way, Barry Joseph would recognize me sitting with his mother. I was a wreck. I kept turning around looking at the door to see him as he entered. And he finally did. Ann stood up as Barry walked into the restaurant. He came over to me, kissed me on the cheek and said, "Hi Dad." Boy did that take me for a loop.

After a brief introduction, we ordered food. Our conversations were very light and simple. I didn't go into the details other than how his mother and I met for the first time, small talk about Florida, and the weather. Dinner was finished, and Barry asked if I could walk with him and go into more details about my relationship with his mother. I said sure. A few minutes into our conversation, Barry asked me why I abandoned him as a little child. I could see from the expression on his face and the tone in his voice, this was not going to be easy for either of us.

I told him I met his mother in a bar and we had a brief encounter. I didn't see or hear from her for over five months. Then I received a call from her saying she was pregnant with my child, I was taken back by the news I was going to be a dad. We meet once again at a restaurant to discuss your future; the only thing your mom asked was the right to use my last name, that's all. From that point on, I didn't see or hear from her up until your birth. There were a number of times your mom brought you over to graham's house for dinner, but that's was the extend of our relationship. A couple of years had passed and I meet her in front of her house as I was looking from a distance to see you. That's when I saw your mom coming home from work. I walk up to her and she said there was a man in her life, and was getting married. From that time on, I didn't go by her house thinking she got married after all, I never heard from her again. His question of why I abandoned him was the most potent and heart-wrenching question to answer.

Born into Bondage

I tried to explained how I was searching for him for over 15 years. I had a friend who was a private investigator. The first thing he asked was his mother's maiden name or her social security number. I didn't have either. The only advice he gave was trying the hall of records, or the hospital where my son was born. I tried without any success. Every time I went to Brooklyn, I visited different agencies including

marriage, and adoption agencies, with no success. Trying to find him without knowing his mother's maiden name was a fruitless endeavor. I told Barry that I even tried the internet with no luck.

We walked for nearly 20 minutes when Barry started heading in a different direction. He asked if we could meet another day. I said sure. He gave me directions to a diner, the date, and time he wanted to meet. We went our separate ways. I thought the next time we got together; it would be much easier for my son. I made my way back to my uncle's house. Herman was just as excited to hear what happened between us. I told him I met Ann first, and we talked about Barry. I didn't go into much detail about Barry's other issues. I told him my son was glad to see me, and we made plans to meet again.

Barry and I met at the restaurant as arranged. It was only a mile or so from Uncle Herman's house – that was great. I made it to the restaurant much earlier to make sure I didn't miss him if he got there early. I didn't want him to think I did not show up. As I sat at the table having coffee, Barry entered. Once again, he said: "Hi Dad," and kissed me on the cheek. That's an Italian custom. We talked for a while about my family and my life; it was a light conversation. And then came the question about his mom and me. After explaining in more details, there was a sigh of relief.

You are not going to believe this. Barry said he lived around the corner from the diner. Over the years that I visited Uncle Herman, I could have passed my son and never known it. Wow! In the middle

of our conversation, Barry told me how he was verbally abused by his stepfather.

His stepdad was a career military man and demanded the same discipline from his kids as the soldiers under his command. As a result of Barry's upbringing, he had to go through psychiatric treatment. To add insult to injury, like I did in the past, Barry started to hang around bad company. He told me that at the age 25, he was hanging out with his friends selling drugs. Someone struck him in the head with a baseball bat. He was left partially disabled. In spite of the past, since Barry and I met, his hatred towards his stepfather was replaced with my love and acceptance, which was the start of his healing. We spent an hour talking about my family and my past. That's when my son said he had to meet a friend. As we left the diner, I noticed my son's sneakers were worn out. I offered to buy him a pair. At first, he hesitated then he said ok.

As we departed and went our separate ways, I couldn't stop thinking about my son's upbringing. It broke my heart knowing I had similar experiences. When I arrived home, I told Uncle Herman all about the conversations I had with my son. He was pleased to hear our time together went as well as it did. I mentioned I wanted to take my son to King's Plaza to buy him a new pair of sneakers. He smiled and said sure.

The following week, the three of us went to the mall. My son was like a little child walking up and down the aisles trying on different sneakers. It has been said that one picture is worth a thousand words.

Watching Barry Joseph so excited was a precious sight. I think the biggest gift was that he finally found his biological father.

Uncle Herman and I would visit my son in Brooklyn, and I made a point of spending quality time with him. We went to Coney Island with Uncle Herman and Liz, his cousin, and we had great times together as father and son.

My son asked me if I would join him and meet his friends at the bar next Friday night I said: “Of course!” The following Friday I meet my son at the bar, no sooner that I enter the bar, my son introduce me to all of his friends. You should have seen the pride and joy on his face for the first time as he acknowledged me as his biological father. Wow! That was a sight to see.

After everybody had introduced themselves to me, I sat at the bar observing my son and his friends. It just so happened that this particular bar had karaoke on Friday nights. If you are not familiar with the term karaoke, it's when people go on stage and sing to the background music they requested by the D J. As I sat at the bar, the DJ called Barry and said it was his turn to sing his favorite song, “Sweet Caroline.” My son then turned to me and asked if I would join him. I hesitated at first, but he insisted! Everyone in the bar stopped talking as my son and I stood on stage singing. Boy that was something for both of us, especially for my son.

I know without a doubt, one of the most important things for him was to meet the rest of the family. It was April 10th. My niece Liz was hosting an Easter party at her home; she invited all the family and

friends. Of course, my son and I were invited as well. Barry was overwhelmed just to meet his extended family. When we arrived at Liz's house, everybody loved him so much. You could see a sigh of relief on his face as he was accepted as one of the family members. The healing process was being completed.

Like Barry, I went through a period of adjustment. When I called my son the first words out of his mouth were: "Hi Dad," and at the end of our phone conversations he would say, "I love you, Dad." Thinking: *Dad – are you kidding?* At the time, I had no idea the meaning of the word "Dad." Only the words "responsibility" and "commitment" flooded my mind. I had a guilt trip thinking that if I didn't go to bed with Ann in the first place, there would be one less person going through pain and suffering.

I emphasize the word "choices." Like my mother, I too made the same mistake as well. Unfortunately, Barry Joseph is paying for it. In spite of it all, I am glad to say that over time, Barry Joseph and I have developed a father and son relationship. It feels so good to see my son and hear him say, "I love you, Dad."

Isn't it ironic that during the second half of my life I was reaching out to the poor and hurting, some of whom were physically, verbally, and sexually abused? You can say, I was on the job training program in the lives of others, especially Walter, the gift of God. In turn, I learned so much about myself. God prepared me for such a day as this. I would meet my son. In closing, the common denominator is that each of us is to be loved and cherished.

I decided to end my memoirs and the testimony of God's interaction in my life, with a discussion of heaven, hell, and demons, as they are at the forefront of people's minds. Unfortunately, these subjects had also been misunderstood throughout the centuries. Everyone seems to have their own concept of heaven, hell, and demons, for the most part, the people I spoke to never do any research on this serious subject matter. Since there is little physical evidence to go by, other than people who claim to have had near-death experiences, we have to go by the Scriptures. I hope to shed some light on these subjects.

CHAPTER 39 XXX

God, Heaven, Demons & Hell

GOD

Who created God? What does He look like? These are questions we have all asked at some time in our lives and from the beginning of humanity many theories have been presented. However, what's interesting is that the Bible does not attempt to explain who God is or who created Him. As a matter of fact, the book of Genesis begins by saying, "In the beginning God." It simply presents God as existing supremely over all.

On the other hand, the Bible does teach a lot about His character, His nature, and His work. God is the Creator of the earth and all living things. He is self-existent, which means He was neither created by any other being nor does He depend on anything or anyone to exist. He does so without any help. The Bible presents God as a fact, not a theory to be proven.

Nothing exists or will ever exist that compares to God: "With whom, then, will you compare God? To what image will you liken him?" (Isaiah 40:18). He is the supreme Creator and the ultimate Sustainer of the universe. In fact, if there is anyone or anything like Him, His

supremacy will cease. All other gods are idols according to 1 Corinthians 8:4-6:

We know that an idol is nothing in the world and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as there be gods many, and lords many, But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him (KJV).

God is spirit; therefore, by His very nature, His presence is not physical; it is not seen. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 1:18). However, although with mortal eyes we do not see God, some people have seen manifestations of Him. In other words, He revealed Himself to them.

God’s spirit nature does not prevent us from knowing Him or developing a relationship with Him. We can be close to God. In fact, James 4:8, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” Human beings are not only made up of the physical body; we also have spirits and souls. It is through our spirits that we commune with God. We do not have to see Him or feel Him to know Him.

In the book Genesis, it reveals that God exists as three Persons, also known as the Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17).

God the Father

The first person of the Trinity is God the Father. He is merciful, holy, eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and self-existent. God the Father shares these attributes with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. They are coequal and coeternal. John 10:30 reveals that God the Father and God the Son are one: "I and my Father are one." God the Father was manifested in Jesus. John 14:9: "Jesus said unto him... he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?"

God the Son

Jesus Christ is coequal and coeternal just like the Father and Holy Spirit. He was not created; He existed from the beginning. He is God in totality and has the same attributes of God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

Jesus came to earth in the flesh to redeem us from our sins. He lived among sinful men to show them the way to the Father by performed miracles. Jesus' ultimate purpose on the earth was to be the sacrifice for the remission of mankind's sins. It was fulfilled when He was crucified on the cross.

On the third day after His death, just as He had predicted, He was resurrected from the grave, returned to heaven and now sits at the right hand of the heavenly Father. "And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ when he

raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 1:19-20KJV). The time will come in the future when He will come again to the earth as promised.

We can only have salvation and access to the Father through Jesus Christ. There is no other way: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is equal to God the Father and God the Son. He has the same divine attributes as Jesus and the Father (Psalm 139:7-10). He is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. The Holy Spirit leads and guides us into all truth. We can interpret and understand the Word of God through Him, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come" (John16:13KJV).

He is a person, not an active force as some would propagate. In Ephesians 4:30, we see that He can be grieved and Revelations 2:7 reveals that He speaks. Jesus calls Him the Comforter who would also empower us for life and for ministry. He dwells within us and gives life to our entire beings. "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Romans 8:11).

God is a personable being. He is not some distant character or a

figment of our imagination. Rather, He intervenes in our affairs and is not only universally present but also actively present in the lives of those who let Him. Mercy, justice, love, and forgiveness are all part of His character.

God loves us so much that He made provision for us to repent of our sins and be forgiven if we desire. Those who believe the message of salvation that Christ was born, crucified, and resurrected will inherit eternal life when, by faith, they accept Him as Lord and Savior.

HEAVEN

Heaven is a real place with many mansions, where Jesus is now preparing a place for us as God's children. Jesus says in John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Revelation 21:18 (NIV) describes the entire city of the New Jerusalem as made "of pure gold, as pure as glass," and 21:21 (NIV) describes the "great street of the city" as "gold, as pure as transparent glass."

In the midst of heaven stands the throne room of God, described in Revelation 4, in which four heavenly beasts and twenty-four elders surround God's throne. After the beasts give "glory and honor and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who live it forever and ever" in verse 9; and the twenty-four elders bow and cast their crowns before Him in verse 10; they say in verse 11, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to

receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

Many people claim they once died and were transported to heaven. They claim the air smelled like a fragrance. They also claim they could see a light in the distance that seemed to radiate such an overwhelming love throughout the heavens that they didn't want to return to their bodies. Some of these folks were atheists' no less who didn't believe in the Almighty God, and after their own life and death experiences! They accepted the reality of the God so much so; their lives were transformed into believers.

One day every one of us will pass from this life to the next. When this happens, we will be clothed with a new spiritual body. Paul describes the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:42-45:

It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

When we finally arrive at this stage, Revelation 21:4 indicates this will be a time of celebration though the heavens: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

The question is who is qualified to enter heaven? y doing good works or keeping the law? I would like to submit a hypothetical question. Suppose a good friend visits your home. You and your friend are sitting in your living room talking, you ask your friend, would you want something eat; yes! While you were preparing a snack in the kitchen, out of the corner of your eye you see your friend going through the purse you've left on the coffee table, and takes a penny and puts it in her pocket, is that person still a good and trusted friend,? Remember it's not the amount that matters, it's the act. I am sure you would not let that person back into your house and probably end your friendship.

When we pass from this life to the next, we stand before God, and He opens the book of life, which has all our good works recorded. But if you took something that wasn't yours, God, and most of us I think, consider that stealing. While that one act might end your friendship with another human, however, it does not end your friendship with God. Even in the Old Testament God provided animal sacrifices for the people to atone for the sins they committed each year. Then once a year, Aaron, the high priest, offered one goat for a sin offering, and another as a scapegoat, which he presented live before the LORD, laid hands on its head to transfer the sins of all the people, and let it go into the wilderness. This is all recorded in Leviticus 16.

The problem with the animal sacrifices is identified in Hebrews 10:1 (NIV), "The law is only a shadow of the good things that are

Born into Bondage
coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by

the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship,” and in 10:4, “For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” Even after the sin offerings were made, verse 10:2 says the people “should have had no more conscience of sins.” Unfortunately, 10:3 says the sin offerings only reminded people of their sins year after year.

The Good News is that Jesus became the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of all mankind, forever, according to verses 10-14 (NIV):

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

And unlike the sin offerings under the old law, verse 17 says Christ remembers our sins no more. That is true love.

DEMONS

According to Isaiah 14, Lucifer was one of God’s most beautiful creations, mighty in power, but because he wanted to be equal with

God, he was cast out of heaven and a third of the angels followed him. Verses 12-15 provide the description of Lucifer's rebellion and subsequent fall from God's glorious grace:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shall be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.

Now, he roams the earth, causing chaos and destruction in the lives of people like you and me. In Job 1, when Satan approaches God under the accompaniment of His angels, and God asks him where he's been, Satan replies, "From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it." Revelation 12:10 calls Satan the accuser of the brethren: "for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."

I meet many people both within the body of Christ and without who don't believe that devil and his demons exist, neither did I until I personally experienced demonic powers. While many of you might think I was in some kind of tormented emotional state or hallucinating, Jesus and His disciples all had encounters with Satan and his demons. Mark 5, for example, describes a demon-possessed

man from the region Gadarenes, living in the tombs. Upon seeing Jesus, he runs to Him, worships Him, and begs Jesus not to torment him in verse 7: “What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the highest God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not.”

Jesus replies in verse 8, “Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit.” In verse 9, Jesus asks the demon his name, and he replies, “Legion: for we are many.”

After this legion of demons begs Jesus once again not to send them to their eternal torment in verses 11-12, they instead ask Him to send them into a nearby herd of swine, which Jesus does in verse 13.

The bottom line is either Jesus is a liar or it really happened. Don't let pride stand in your way of knowing the power of God, like it did with Lucifer. After all, even this demon in Gadarenes awareness' knows who Jesus is and knows the power of God.

HELL

While the Bible doesn't specify where hell is, we know it is a place of torment and pain, occupied with all kinds of hideous creatures (i.e., Satan and his aforementioned demons) who have rebelled against God. The Old Testament word for hell is *Sheol*, which actually just means “the place of the dead.” The New Testament terms for hell are *Hades* and *Gebenna*. Both Sheol and Hades refer to temporary places for the dead.

Until Christ died to pay for the sins of all, the righteous souls of Old Testament saints passed into a place known as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16), or the “heaven” part of Hades (or Sheol), because according to John 6:46, no man had seen the Father, except Christ. So Old Testament believers had to wait for their sin debt to be paid. Once that happened, they passed into the presence of the Father and all souls of the saints from that point on pass into the presence of the Father. The wicked souls, on the other hand, passed into eternal torment, or the “hell” part of Hades (or Sheol).

Psalm 9:17 describes the “hell” part of Sheol as the place where the wicked man and all the nations who forget God will return. The “hell” part of Hades is the place where the rich man of Luke 16 went after he died. Across the great chasm between Abraham’s bosom (heaven) and Hades, the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus back in verse 24 to “...dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”

Gehenna, on the other hand, is an eternal state of punishment for unbelievers who have died. Mark 9:43 describes it as “the unquenchable fire.” Hades will one day give up its dead into Gehenna, indicated in Revelation 20:13: “And the sea gave up the dead who were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead who were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.”

Angels and demons are fascinating supernatural phenomena among many. But as soon as the subject of hell enters the conversation, everyone just seems to stop talking. People do not want to hear the truth about the judgments of God and the consequences of sin, death, and hell. At one time, I didn't either.

As we have just discussed in the past few pages, hell is a place where fire and smoke will burn throughout eternity, and where demons will occupy the same space as those who have rejected God. The real hell, however, is the hell that will be playing over and over again in the minds of those unbelievers throughout eternity, the knowledge that they have rejected the King of kings and LORD of Lords! God gives us multiple chances throughout our lives to accept the Messiah Jesus, who gave His life as a ransom so that we can enter the kingdom of God. Each day we live on this earth is another day of mercy God has given us so that we can enter into a right relationship with Him. Life and death is literally in your hands!

If there is no God, heaven, or hell, and there are no consequences of disobedience, then what's the point of being good? If that's the case, I'd rather live my old lifestyle indulging in drugs, sex, and any other pleasures that leap to mind. After all, if I never have to pay for my sins, because if there is no God, heaven, or hell, then there would be no sins to pay for, then I can just do whatever I want without any repercussions on anyone, including myself.

If, on the other hand, there is a God and I pass from this life into the other and stand before Him, and He asks me, “How do you plead?” I would have to plead “Guilty” because everything I’ve ever done is written in God’s book of life. But because I have accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and I have a personal relationship with Him, my defense attorney, Jesus Himself, would stand up and say to Judge God, “I paid for Barry’s crimes when I went to the cross on his behalf.” How will you answer God when you stand before Him?

Are you really willing to risk being separated from God throughout eternity? In spite of all the difficulties I have been through, and the challenges I have faced and continue to face, I wouldn’t change a thing. If someone offered me a hundred million dollars to denounce my faith, I wouldn’t do it.

I have found something more precious than silver and gold (or a hundred million dollars) -- love in its purest form. Hosea 4:6 says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shall be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” So please consider the consequences of not doing anything. Get on your knees and ask God to reveal to you whether Jesus is the Messiah before it’s too late! We are not guaranteed tomorrow.