

GOD *in the* MIDST



FROM DERELICT TO VICTORY

ROSALEE HINDS

GOD *in the* MIDST

(SAMPLE)



God in the Midst: From Derelict to Victory

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Some names used in this book have been changed but all the events remain true.

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CONTENTS

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES..... 6

47. To Rejoice in Hope	7
48. A True Sister's Love.....	9
49. New Move.....	13
50. The Wedding Smile With A Love Connection	15
51. Appreciation Visit	18
52. The Downfall	21
53. Faithful Friendships.....	23
54. Tough Decisions	29
55. Working Mum	32
56. Unplanned Relationship	34
57. Open To Abuse – <i>A New Role</i>	37

58. A Marriage	40
59. A New Career Working with Children	43
60. Bro Allen – <i>Divine Invitation for Change</i>	45
61. The Compassionate Power of God	52
62. The Holiday with No Return.....	57
63. Stress Ahead – <i>Return Home to London</i>	62
64. Big Sister Support.....	68
65. Silent Killer.....	70

A faded, grayscale image of a rose in a field of tall grass and a stream. The rose is the central focus, positioned in the upper middle of the frame. The background shows a stream with rocks in the foreground and tall grasses on either side. The overall tone is soft and ethereal.

PART 4

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

TO REJOICE IN HOPE

On the Monday of that week, my sister contacted a single mother's unit, which was for homeless families, and to support women and children. I stayed there for a short time in a small room with my two children and shared the kitchen with the other women. Thank God, not long after, the council gave me a derelict property at 70 Charlton Lane. God opened a new door for me to walk down a new lane; they told me it was a temporary accommodation for my children and me. Although the property needed repairs, downstairs was suitable to live in as I was only occupying one room which was big enough for the three of us. I was happy as it was better than sharing with different women; I no longer needed to share the kitchen and toilet with others. However, the upstairs needed some repairs; it was very scary, so we never went up there, but thank God the room we slept in, and the front door, were secure, and we had an outdoor toilet. This

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

was definitely a step up from being stranded and homeless. It was a property in my sister's borough, still temporary, but I was grateful for somewhere to live.

After a few months of staying there, I was offered a suitable property outside of my sister's borough: 33 Ellington House in Elephant and Castle area on the top floor. We had to climb the stairs with the pram and shopping but, again, I was so glad to have a nice place of my own, somewhere to call my home. So, we went from Lane to House, from House to Way, from Way to Drive, from Drive to Close, and then from Close to Avenue—*what a victory, GLORY TO GOD!* Strength doesn't come from what you can do, strength comes from overcoming the things you go through and what He can do through you.

A TRUE SISTER'S LOVE

My sister Cherry has been, and still is, a great support in my life and a great example; we would do everything together. I remember when we once visited our uncle's home, when I was heavily pregnant, and lost track of time, leaving extremely late. We hadn't anticipated fog that night, and leaving to go home was dreadful as, when we got off the night bus, the night was thick with dark fog. It was so hard to find our bearings, and we got lost because it was very foggy in late December. Now, as adults, we often reflect on that event and laugh, seeing how we were exposed to danger; anything could've happened to us that foggy night. Cherry said she remembers her head raised (I think this was with fear); we were scared, but thank God, He brought us out, and we eventually found that we were going in the wrong direction to get to Greenwich.

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

There were times I would go to Bingo with my sister, even though Bingo wasn't really my thing. I watched how excited my sister would get playing her game. She was so happy; she would listen to the numbers being called out to shout "BINGO!" It was a delight to be with her to share her joy; I would wait keenly for my numbers to come up, building up a sweat of excitement; those days were fun times.

My sister is very special to me; I always looked up to her because we grew up together, sharing special memories. I would always shadow her; anywhere she went, I was not far behind her. Reflecting on when we were growing up, we never bickered or fought with each other; I literally have no memory of us fighting or hurting each other. We had a little disagreement when I was getting married, but that was all. As adults, we would spend hours chatting on the phone, laughing, joking, and reflecting on our childhood; those days were so amazing. I always pictured my sister's marriage as the perfect marriage; she had five beautiful children like me. Our children grew up together; I loved them all and had a close relationship with them. Sadly, two of her children passed away which broke our hearts, but God knows

best. Although I loved them all, I had a special bond with her youngest daughter, Marsh, who was very supportive and encouraging to me throughout my marriage crisis. I never dreamed that Cherry and her husband would ever separate, but when it happened, I was so shocked and saddened to know of the challenges; she had worked so hard in her marriage. In my mind, they were inseparable, the ideal couple, but these things happen; only God knows why. A few years on, who would have thought that my marriage would end up the same way? What's so beautiful is that we supported and strengthened each other throughout our crises.

Cherry is always there for me, so I always prioritise being there for her in whatever way possible. I was thankful to God that I found myself in a position where I could book a two-night, three-day break for a spa day at Champneys, in Hampshire, after the death of her two children. The purpose was to get her away from all the stress of the passing of her son and daughter. We stayed in our hotel room and talked and talked for hours to relieve her mind of the loss and to relax; I thank God for her life. I would always encourage her to think of the story of Job, how he lost everything, but despite

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

everything, he never sinned, and how God restored him twofold. She truly has a heart of gold and is always willing to help others; she has always been so kind and patient with me. She could've turned her back on me after listening to her friend Shelby, but she didn't. Even when things weren't working out for me, she took me in. I cannot count the number of times she helped me over and over again; she supported me in my trials which gave me a new start. Throughout her crisis, she never lost hope but held on to her strong faith in God. Hallelujah to Almighty God!

NEW MOVE

Our new council property, 33 Ellington House in Elephant & Castle, in the borough of Southwark, was on the road where I went to school, so knowing the area was a bonus. I soon settled down with my two children on the top floor, there were no lifts in those days, but I was so content. This area brought back so many memories: 'Trinity House Girls', which was my secondary school, was just across the road. Being familiar with the area made finding a local school, nursery, and doctor's surgery for my children easier. My first son had challenging behaviour, so I had to attend his school almost every day to talk about his behaviour with the teachers. I reflect and wonder if he may have witnessed his father hitting me, and if this contributed to his behaviour in school.

I thank God for blessing me with a loving sister who would put money in my hand on weekends, which helped me so much as they were the hardest times. I

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

found that after I paid my rent, there wasn't much left to live on, especially with me trying to raise my children as a single parent. I reflect on the times I found myself going down the back of the sofa to find a penny to make up the money to have enough to buy something for dinner. I look back and smile thanking God and seeing His provision. Even though Paddy never maintained his children or cared to see whether they were dead or alive, we were never without Jehovah Jireh, God my provider.

Over the years, I have learnt that nothing I've been through has been a waste because God has a way of taking my past disappointments and experiences and using them to bless and enable my future. In the story of Moses, God put him in a position to live a life of luxury to fully understand the protocols of the palace. God's purpose and plan were to use Moses' palace experience to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. Throughout all my challenges, I have learnt to trust in God, Jesus, my example.

THE WEDDING SMILE WITH A LOVE CONNECTION

One day Cherry invited me to a wedding which I gladly accepted. It was a break for me to get out and enjoy different scenery. In the church, when I looked across the benches, I saw this person looking and smiling at me as if he knew me. I felt a connection and smiled back; I liked something about his smile; his name was Steve. We talked, and he met my two children, I thought he wouldn't be interested in me because I had children, but that wasn't the case. Meeting someone decent and genuine was a blessing.

After the wedding, we communicated via phone, and during weekends we would meet up. Our relationship began growing, and he introduced me to his parents and met my mum. As our relationship progressed, he moved in, and God blessed us with two lovely children. Steve was such a lovely person who

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

accepted my two children from Paddy as his own. I stayed at home to look after the children while he worked; he was in a good job working for Honeywell as a computer engineer. He provided for us as a family and organised for us to do lovely family things together, like weekend trips to different beaches, picnics, and parks; he was a true family man. He would often take me to his work functions and always considered the children's well-being. I was in my early twenties, and he was in his mid-twenties, a relationship we had both consented to, which progressed beautifully over the years.

The memory of leaving a two-bedroom flat, which was on the third floor at Ellington House, to a bigger property was a blessing. I was happy to see the back of that flat because I dreaded the times we had to climb the stairs with the pushchair and shopping bags. Thank God, the new maisonette property at Tawny



The Wedding Smile with a Love Connection

Way, Surrey Quays, had three bedrooms giving my four children more space. We lived there for fourteen years.

APPRECIATION VISIT

In 1980, my grandfather was getting on in age, so my sister and I decided to take a trip back to Jamaica to visit him. I managed to make arrangements for my children to be cared for by my sister Cherry's husband, Derick. He had his four children to look after but agreed to care for my four children as well because Steve had to work during the week. Fortunately, Steve would take our four children at the weekends to relieve Derick. Steve was so thoughtful as he would get my children to write letters to me during the weekends whilst I was on holiday and send me some money for the two weeks.

When Cherry and I arrived in Jamaica, we had the opportunity to build new memories with our grandfather (unfortunately, Atelda had died). We ensured he had good food and clean clothes and was well looked after. It was such a blessing to be back in the place where we once called home and to see his expression of joy to live to see us again; We felt so much

gratitude and appreciation within those few days of looking after him; we were finally able to give back a fraction of all the love he had given us as children. We also spent some time at our sister Blossom's house.

At the end of our holiday, it was time to say goodbye to our grandfather and return to London, adjusting to everyday life. On the 2nd January 1981, we received the news that, sadly, our grandfather had passed away at the grand age of ninety-six years; he died four months after we had returned to London. We were so thankful to God and so happy that He gave us this opportunity to give him a good time of love and tender care; not many live to experience this occasion. He died, leaving me a small plot of his land, which was registered by my aunty. After a few years, I sent for my sister Blossom so she could have a holiday in London and to build a relationship with her. I wanted her to feel at home, so I worked three jobs (my full-time day job, plus two cleaning jobs before and after work) in order for her to have some spending money for herself. Throughout the years, my sister Cherry also sent for Blossom to have a holiday break as well. Blossom would remind me of the times she would carry me on her back when I was

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

small; this was when our mum instructed her to care for her younger siblings.



THE DOWNFALL

Throughout the years that Steve and I lived together, and things were great, he was a good role model, one who knew how to provide for a family and appreciate a woman. We celebrated some good times together; he would often spoil me with extravagant gifts and money to buy new outfits when we would go out on the weekend. But unfortunately, it was not to last; the downfall was that Steve loved going to parties.

Going to a party on the weekend became the norm, and each time I had to find a babysitter, otherwise I couldn't go; this was consistent. Steve and his friend, Patrick, would go out partying at weekends; this caused me to dislike the weekends because I knew he would say, "Let's go out." I was not a party person; I just wanted a quiet life. This became burdensome for me, always having to find a babysitter, which put a strain on our relationship, so, we broke up. I thank God for him

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

because he is a good father; he supported his children and was good to my children, even though we were not together. I thank God we still have a good friendship. Wayne Dyer (2011) once said, *“Happiness is not something that you get in life, happiness is something that you bring to life.”*

FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIPS

When we were together, Steve would give me driving lessons in his car in anticipation of my driving test. He was so lovely because he loved me for who I was. Although we broke up, I continued to build a beautiful relationship with him and his sister, who was a very kind and loving person, a true blessing to me and her niece and nephew. She would take her nephew, Mark, and niece, Sophia, to spend weekends with her, and they always returned home feeling excited to have spent time with their aunty, who played a big role in their lives. Steve's sister is a great support, and I see her as a friend! She has such a considerate loving heart because when we moved out of our house, she sent an envelope in the post to cover the cost of the removal; it was an unexpected gift but was much appreciated! God saw the need and used her to fulfil it – God truly uses His angels to bless others; I thank God for her life.

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Moving to a new area at 7 Tawny Way, on the Osprey Estate, was great because my children's school was within walking distance. My youngest two went to the nursery, and the older two were in the main primary school. It was in this area that I met two parents and became good friends with one, Estelle, a true friend, and we've been good friends ever since. At the time, Estelle had one child, and I had four; we would often encourage each other to attend courses to brush up on our maths skills, which is my weakness, like many others. I completed the computing, typing, and communication course, which all added as skills to help in my secretarial career for a while, but I realised my great potential was working with children, which was more rewarding. Our children were in the same class, so after dropping them off at the nursery and completing courses, we would take turns visiting each other's homes to have lunch, which was often smoked kipper, peppers, and freshly toasted bread, followed by a refreshing drink. At the end of the school day, we would collect the children after our morning of relaxation and take them on trips to the park. Our friendship has been so strong over the years; we would always look out for each other, and when she had

two more children, I became a guardian to her youngest daughter. When we went on holiday to Jamaica and Swanage, we had a fabulous time together as a family. We have such a great friendship connection because whenever we go to the markets and see a bargain, we always exchange information. At times we would spend hours on the phone chatting and laughing, reflecting on memories. We have so much in common; we are the same age, we retired the same year, and we both like a quiet life.

THREE TYPES OF FRIENDS

Bishop T.D. Jakes identifies three types of friends: confidants, constituents, and comrades.

Confidants – You will have very few of these. They love you unconditionally; they are in it for the long haul, whether up or down, even when you're in trouble, getting you out of jail; they are with you all the way. You can share anything with a confidant, but you will never inherit your kingdom until you find your confidant. You can't be a David until you find your Jonathan (covenant companion) because you need a true confidant who can

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

mentor you for what God is going to do next in your life. You will find few people who are for you, you are blessed if you have even one confidant.

Constituents — They are not into you; they are for what you are for. As long as you are for what they are for, they will walk with you. Don't think they are for you, they are for what you are for, they will break your heart and will hook up with somebody else, they are not for you.

Comrades — These people are not for you, they are against what you are against, they team up to fight a greater enemy. But don't be confused by their association, they only stay by you until the victory is accomplished and then they remove themselves when the scaffolding is removed. Expect the constituents and the comrades to leave and desert you after a while because they were never with you anyway.

A FRIEND IN JESUS

"What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!"

What does the Bible say about true friendship?

“A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” (Proverbs 18:24)

“A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.” (Proverbs 17:17)

In John 15:12-15, Jesus outlines what friendship in Christ and with Christ truly means:

“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.”

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Friends are there for you when you need them; in good times and bad, whether to comfort, support, congratulate, or just listen to you.



TOUGH DECISIONS

I thank God for all my children; I have a great friendship with them, but especially my last three who would take time out for me and discreetly help me with pronunciation and correct words ending in 'ed' and 's.' This was due to me missing out on the later part of my school days which meant I had to teach myself further. I also discreetly played spelling games like scrabble, word test games, and word search races with my children while teaching myself to tackle tricky words. I found this helped me to monitor my children's learning and development whilst adjusting mine. Those days were so much fun because my children had no idea that I was actually improving my learning as well as theirs, but I thank God because they learned tricky words they would need later in life.

With all this extra learning in place, my first son still displayed challenging behaviour, which meant I

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

had to always go to his school to deal with issues of him hitting other children. Marshall, being my first child, was quite stressful with all these complaints; I was inexperienced in parenting, so I sought advice from my sister Cherry and her husband to help out.

In the end, his behaviour became too much for me, and I felt that the other children would copy his bad behaviour. I found disciplining him tricky because whatever I did seemed not to work. Every week, something would happen, I just could not cope with his behaviour. His misbehaviour started from primary school and continued to secondary school; it felt never-ending.

I was encouraged to send him to his dad to let him feel some of the trouble. This was a very hard thing for me to do because I loved all my children and always tried to do the best I could for them, but Marshall wasn't changing, so he gave me no choice. Enough was enough, I had decided. With my sister's help, we went to look for Paddy, who was living in East London, so he could face his responsibility rather than being just a DNA dad. I cannot remember much about what he said, but I reminded him of his responsibility, although this was

extremely hard for me because this was my first child. Nevertheless, I had to try something because Marshall was not listening or improving. I was at my wits' end, trying to teach him how to use kind hands by not hurting others at school. He would even display this kind of bad behaviour at home, sometimes hitting and kicking his sister.

WORKING MUM

On January 28th, 1982, I failed my first driving test, but although I was disappointed, I didn't let that failure stop me. To get back on track, I had to take a break to get enough money to pay for my lessons, and to retake the test. I was determined

because travelling on the buses to go out, especially shopping with four children, was a real struggle; this gave me more determination to focus on passing. God opened many doors for success as I



I passed my business studies and got my qualifications giving me a secretarial role. This was the new me, qualified and now working as a secretary for two bosses in a small office of an Architectural firm. My everyday

role was typing invoices and writing letters to different architectural firms, unions, and other businesses.

UNPLANNED RELATIONSHIP

A new chapter had begun in my life, and everything seemed to be falling into place. As I would go back and forth to collect my children from nursery, one of the parents mentioned that she had a friend she wanted to introduce me to. I told her I wasn't interested and did not wish to start a relationship with anyone. I felt comfortable as I was, but she insisted, not listening at all, and then she turned up on my doorstep, bringing Alburgar to my house. After a while, I felt obligated to have a relationship with him; now he knew where I lived! Although I had told her 'No', she went against my wishes and brought him anyway; I guess these things happen. In this case, the flesh got the better of me; he said the right things, and I got involved with him. In time, he introduced me to his mother, with whom I formed a good relationship; she was a lovely lady. I also met his three children from his previous marriage, who got to know my four children

over time. The following year he moved out from his mother's house, as he was living there after the divorce from his previous wife, and into mine. When he moved into my home, he came with a few boxes but nothing really to offer.

I felt sorry for Alburgar as he was going through a lot of issues, and I felt I wanted to help him. However, I did not know the full details of his issues until I got involved. I tried encouraging him as he was going through some rough times. He was a very angry man who would often smoke and carry a knife around as he wanted to hurt his ex-wife's partner; this was extremely hard to deal with. I tried to persuade him to put the knife away the best I could, as I didn't feel comfortable being with someone who carried a knife around with them. From time to time, I would celebrate his children's birthdays, although one of his sons died, which was so painful for him, and us as a family, and then his mum died not long after. I tried to make a go of our relationship as I was now pregnant with my fifth child.

After a long break, I reapplied to retake my driving test in the summer of October 1987. I was ecstatic as I passed my driving test and was able to buy

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

my first car before my fifth child, Matthew, was born in November. No more struggling on the buses with a baby, which made getting around so much easier. It took discipline, determination, and drive to achieve it – the three Ds – this has always been my motto thanks be to God! Once again, *God in the midst*.

OPEN TO ABUSE – A NEW ROLE

After having my fifth child, I started another secretarial job, working for a bigger firm, The Metropolitan Building Company, with three male bosses in a bigger office. Although this office had a lot of male workers coming in and out every day, I thought nothing of it; I was just so excited about this opportunity.

One day, I was blessed to have my picture taken in my new role as a secretary by a career officer who visited the office for a local magazine. Though I was excited to be in this new secretarial position, I felt there was so much to accomplish that, during the evenings at home, I would ponder whether I had given the workers their wages and contemplate the number of invoices I had to send to the companies. There was one thing that broke my heart, though, and this was having to drop my baby off at a childminder, even though his dad was around. This was very painful and brought tears to my

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

eyes to know that someone else had to look after my child. But I had no choice, I had to find a way to make ends meet; unlike when I was with Steve, who knew how to provide for a family. What brought me great joy was finishing work and seeing my baby, who I had been thinking about all day.

Unfortunately, in this job, I was exposed to more abuse. One day, as I was at my desk typing, minding my own business, the older manager in charge crept up behind me and clasped both his hands over my boobs! In shock, I pulled away as if to say, "What are you doing?" No one else witnessed this as the other two managers had gone out of the office on another job. From my reaction, he pulled his hands away, and fortunately, someone walked into the office, and he then went out to lunch. At the end of the day, he came up to me with gifts, offering me a silver brooch and a bottle of perfume; maybe to keep me quiet, but I didn't make him any wiser that I was annoyed. I just accepted the gift as an apology for inappropriately touching me. I didn't make any complaints against him because there wouldn't have been any point, as they were all friends. It would've been my word against his; it would've been so hard to prove,

so I decided to leave it. This job was an experience, but it wasn't fulfilling because each day I would go to work thinking of the workload, plus I kept thinking about the antics of the older manager; what would he do next? In the end, I decided to work out my notice and leave.

A MARRIAGE

The day had finally arrived for me to get married, May 22nd, 1988, which Cherry and Dorrette played a big role in. I thought getting married to Alburgar would make me even happier, so this was my day to see it happen. Dorrette made arrangements so I could get dressed from her home, which was a great help. So many things were happening, and everything seemed to be going wrong, which almost caused a problem between my sister and me. At one stage, I was having second thoughts; I wanted to change my mind, I almost didn't turn up at the church. However, after much encouragement from Dorrette, I started to consider all the expenses and preparations which had been planned for the day, so I just went ahead with it.

It's such a blessing knowing that we grew up in the same household, travelled to another country, and still keep in touch with each other. After my last son,

Matthew, was born, Dorrette became his guardian; I am so grateful to God for her life, and the life of her husband.

A few months after we got married, I applied to the council for a bigger property, this time desiring a garden so my children could have space to play outside. The council offered us a Victorian property with four bedrooms and a small paved-off garden, but I was still desiring a suitable spacious garden for my children; nevertheless, I was grateful. Here I was again, living in Old Kent Road, Elephant & Castle, where I went to school—*memories, memories, a lot of memories*. However, moving back into this area and living at 169 Brook Drive gave us new experiences and opportunities; we lived here for fourteen years.

At this address, my brother, Sonson, gave us a puppy which we called Sheba. Our dog was a lovely addition to our family as she was so gentle and kind; we also had two cats. When I reflect on the first few years of our marriage, it was not great, but it was okay. Some of the anger and rage Alburgar showed after we got married had dropped off, and he cut down on smoking, eventually stopping. He stopped carrying a knife

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

around in his car; there were some outward changes, but the inner man was still hurting. In the beginning, I thought it could work, but as the years went on, I thought it was strange that he had no relationship with the child we had together; there was no bond. Throughout my entire marriage, I didn't experience any level of love; it was as though I was single with a married title. I thought I could help him move away from his habits to support his overall well-being, and help him to love, but I was wrong.

A NEW CAREER WORKING WITH CHILDREN

After that experience, my second daughter, Sophia, encouraged me and said, “Mum, why don’t you work with children?” This was where my new career began, and afterwards I went on to study further, qualifying as a nursery practitioner in childcare. During my studies in childcare, I learned about child protection and child abuse with a deeper awareness. The teacher displayed an article showing graphic images of a dad changing his daughter’s nappy and molesting her, his own daughter. I was disgusted after reading that article, and it immediately brought back memories of that burning feeling I had experienced as a child. I was grateful to have studied childcare as it helped me understand my childhood abuse and to be observant in my newfound career.

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

It was such a divine opportunity when I dropped my children off at school that their teacher, Miss Kent, who later got married, said, “Rose, you should come and work with children here at my school.” This was a confirmation by God, although I didn’t know it at the time. So, I decided to do some voluntary work in her class with my children Sophia and Mark next door. We became very good friends and kept in touch; she even attended Mark’s wedding when he married his lovely wife. The Rotherhithe Primary School was the beginning of my blessings before getting qualified. God used Miss Kent to open many doors for me. I found this to be the best career because it was so rewarding at the end of each day.

BRO ALLEN – *DIVINE*
INVITATION FOR CHANGE

One day, when I came out of my maisonette flat at Tawny Way to go shopping as usual, I met an elderly gentleman going towards the lift who lived in flat 23 on the same estate. He introduced himself and spoke to me about the Sabbath Day; from that day on, we became friendly neighbours. The next time we met, he introduced me to his wife and invited me to come to his house to study the Word of God with them. I was a bit reluctant at first because I wanted him to prove that Saturday church was God's commandment instead of Sundays. At the time, Saturdays were my market days when I would meet my sister Cherry to look for bargains at Deptford market, and there, she would put some money in my hand to help me out. So, this was new to me as I did not know any different, I only knew Sundays as a day to go to church. However, meeting Bro

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Allen was the beginning of my new understanding of God's Word in a deeper light. He taught my family and me with passion about the true Word of God and how to keep God's holy day. He proved God's words to me through the scriptures, showing me how I was not keeping God's holy Sabbath. All this studying proved to me that Jehovah wasn't through with me yet, as I had a lot to learn – the true Word of God!

This new knowledge enlightened us as we became aware of how the Catholic church changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday; the true Sabbath day is Saturday. I must be honest, at first, this was a bit hard to accept, but I realised I needed to be set apart. Thinking Sunday could be my Sabbath, proved to be wrong, knowing that this is the day the Lord hath made, I will be glad and rejoice in it. I was in the dark about the Sabbath day, and Bro Allen opened my eyes through much research and study. I soon applied these changes because with wisdom comes change as I now acknowledged the importance of the Sabbath. Exodus 20:8 says:

“REMEMBER the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.”

Here we see that God rested on the seventh day, and in the book of Mark, chapter 2 verse 27, it states that *“The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore, the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.”* Bro Allen taught us so much and encouraged me not to have pictures of Jesus Christ in my house because he said that no one had ever seen Jesus or knew what He looked like; again, Bro Allen proved this with the scriptures. We studied the paganism of Christmas and how they cut the tree with the axe, decorated it, and then worshipped the tree. It was hard to accept it at first because I was so used to putting up all the decorations and celebrating Christmas, but with conviction came change. It all started to make sense, the paganism, and the traditions of man.

These studies made me question why I spent time, like many others, looking forward to one day when no one knows the day Jesus Christ was born! When I began to understand the truth about Christmas, I

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

declared that every day was my Christmas because I have the breath of life in my nostrils, and I am in my right mind, celebrating the Christ who lives in me! Jeremiah 10:3-4 tells us that the customs of the people are vain:

“For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.”

This pagan holiday is in honour of the agricultural god, Saturn; it’s the worship of the sun-god. The Romans would spend the week of Saturnalia much like how we would spend the Christmas holiday today, feasting, drinking, giving gifts, and being merry.

Proverbs 4:7b teaches us to *“get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”* Proverbs 2:10 also says that *“when wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.”* Bro Allen also taught us how to study the Bible and that it was to be understood

precept by precept and line by line. I can recall some of the scriptures he would have me read; one scripture which stayed with me was Revelation 22:15. It states:

“For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.”

I would keenly visit his flat, which was a few doors along the corridor on the same floor, to do Bible studies with my children. I thank God for his life and for helping me to come to know more about God for myself. There were times I would long to find the right church, but all I used to do was send my children to St Luke’s Church of England down the road from where we lived. Then I would stay at home and listen to Songs of Praise on BBC1 every Sunday and listen to my Jim Reeves’ tapes, but within, I felt that there must’ve been more to living for God. I would take my children to different churches in search of the right one to attend, so, the day I met this lovely old man was a blessing when he took time to pray over my children and taught us so much through our weekly Bible studies.

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

We started to attend Croydon Derby Road Church with him and his wife before she became unwell. As time went on, unfortunately, his wife's sickness worsened, and when she died, he asked me to dress her body for the burial. Over the years, we became very good friends; meeting him changed the way we lived and sought to understand the Word of God. We got more understanding of the Bible and I started to seek the purpose God had intended for me. I continued to attend Pastor Hendricks' Church of God Seventh Day, Croydon branch. I was so happy to attend a nice church, but because it was a bit of a distance, Bro Allen introduced us to the Peckham branch which was nearer. Attending the Peckham branch church in Commercial Way with my children, I met a lovely lady; I'll call her San. She stood out as she was the only one that gave me such a warm welcome to the church, she was very kind to my children and me; I formed a relationship with her and her family.

Even though we moved away from the Tawny Way, Osprey Estate area, we still kept in touch by visiting Bro Allen, and in the last few days of his life, we visited him in the hospital, singing songs, hymns and

reading scriptures to him. Just seeing his face light up when he saw us brought me profound joy, and he hummed along with us and smiled. Although Alburgar didn't like him, I knew he was a true man of God. Alburgar would discourage me from talking to him, but that was nothing new with Alburgar because, later in life, I would learn that he never liked anyone who liked me.

One day, I told Bro Allen I was going to get married to Alburgar, but he advised me not to marry him. I didn't understand his advice at the time, I thought I could help Alburgar get through the hard times he was experiencing with his ex-wife. I didn't ponder on Bro Allen's advice much but went ahead and married Alburgar anyway. But truly, I lived to regret not taking his advice and had to face the consequences; everything happens for a reason. Reflecting on my thirty years of marriage, I would define it as years of unhappiness; I just made do.

THE COMPASSIONATE POWER OF GOD

When we were still living at Tawny Way there was a situation in my life where I saw the power of God move. This was unknown to me at the time, but, as the years went on, God revealed it to me. It was a time when my daughter, Maxine, was going through her teenage years and was showing rebellious behaviour; she often told lies and wanted to have her way, and she was beginning to take an interest in boys. It was so unfortunate that she could not understand that all I was trying to do was to protect her from harm and danger. I wanted her to see that she deserved better, to value herself, and not end up getting pregnant and having to raise a child at a young age; I just wanted the best for her. But she was so disobedient; she would not listen, which stressed me out as a single parent, and to make matters worse, I didn't have the

strategies to deal with a rebellious teenager. There were things she did that degraded her and showed me she had no self-respect, but because of my love for her, and desire for her to have a better life, I responded without thinking and hit her. However, in my latter years, when I studied and was qualified in childcare, I learned how to deal with rebellious teenagers using different strategies. This helped me to deal with rebellious behaviour better because with knowledge comes understanding.

Her rebellious behaviour was so extreme that she didn't want to abide by the house rules. She was so easily influenced by her friends, being a follower rather than a leader; she wanted to go to parties and stay out late. On one particular occasion, I allowed her, but on one condition, which was that I would pick her up from the party. This caused her to rebel further. It was so unfortunate that what I expected would happen to her, did happen, and had I not come when I did, only God knows what would have happened to her because she was stoned out of her mind on the floor.

There was another occasion, in her tantrum of rage, where she climbed out of her bedroom window. I

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

tried to grab her as I saw the extreme danger, but she slipped from my grasp. It was only God's mercy and power that the neighbour's window below us was open. Due to the window being tilted outwards, she bounced onto the window, breaking her fall before hitting the ground. God is in control of our lives; He gives life, and He only can take it away. God in the midst.

The doctors kept Maxine in the hospital for a few weeks, and she had a visit from her dad, who came down with Marshall our son. Paddy seemed to have manipulated Marshall to hate me, turning him against me as he did not respond to me as his mother. But that was not a problem to me as I had Maxine to focus on at the time. It was so unfortunate that I had to send Marshall to his dad, but I had no choice. Paddy came with his conceited and bullying attitude as if to blame me for Maxine's fall, he didn't acknowledge that things could have been different, had he have taken responsibility for his children.

I wanted more for my daughter, but she did not understand why I didn't like the friends she associated with. Maxine couldn't see the danger or the influence they were having on her; she eventually moved out of

our home in disobedience, and later had a baby. I was disappointed because I did not want that to happen to her, but it is all a part of our learning, God's miraculous power in action. Proverbs 9:11 says, *"For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased."* The enemy distorted her mind allowing her to believe she was missing out on all the fun with her friends and lured her to climb out of the window. But God let the enemy go only so far (like in the story of Job, the enemy could not touch his life). It was the same with Maxine; God saved her life. Sometimes things can seem appealing, the grass may look greener on the other side, but we must be careful; it can be a camouflage. Wait on the Lord, be of good courage, or you will end up facing the consequences. Like Maxine's case, after hitting her head, it caused her to suffer from seizures. When I read the story of King David's affair with Bathsheba, the consequence of that sin was the death of his son. My daughter, since that day, has had to face living with seizures; I give God thanks for saving her life and for giving me insight into what happens when we are disobedient, we have to live with the consequence.

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Revelation 12:10-11 reveals that the devil is most commonly a tempter and the accuser, but believers can and will overcome him through the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. Therefore, if we feel the enemy present, we need to rebuke him so he cannot take a foothold. When I reflect, I see the miraculous power of God at work and His plan for our lives. God revealed this insight to me: Maxine could have broken her arms, broken her legs, she could have even broken her hips and other bones. But instead, she hit her head. Why? Because all these bones could heal, and she would have forgotten. However, hitting her head gave long-term damage, so each time she had a seizure it would be a reminder.

THE HOLIDAY WITH NO RETURN

Even when I had a family of my own, I was still able to make time for my mum. As I reflect on this, it brings me so much happiness knowing I was able to give her valuable time. I would often take time out to ensure my mum's needs were taken care of. At times I would visit her to wash and plait her hair, take her out on day trips to the West End, and to family time functions, like the so-called Christmas. My sister once took her to Jamaica some years before because she hadn't been back since she came to join her husband in London.

In 1994, I visited my mum, which I did from time to time, but this time something was different. Normally, I would do her hair or help with some spring cleaning around her house, but as I got to her room, and we started talking, it was then that she confided in me,

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

telling me she had felt a lump in her breast, close to her armpit on her left side. I felt something abnormal, but not knowing what to look for, I suggested we needed to go and check it out. I had no idea how long it had been since the lump appeared. I went with her to King's College Hospital; the result was not good news; the doctor said the lump was cancerous. With this shocking news, I had so many different emotions going on inside that I asked the doctor what could be done. The doctor said to me, "She has about six months to live as it has already spread to the glands." Only God knows what was going through my mum's mind, maybe there was something she wanted to accomplish but didn't get to do. I didn't know what to say or do, I was thinking so hard about how I could fix it.

All I could think to do was to suggest if she wanted to visit her sister in the USA. I said, "Mum, if there was one thing you would like to do, that you had never done before, what would it be?" I gave her some other options as well, but because she had never visited her sister in Washington DC, she said yes. So, that's what we did. Before the go-ahead I made sure I asked the doctor for her travel permission, which she gave, having

already considered mum being a diabetic using insulin and now being diagnosed with breast cancer.

Before we travelled, I took her to church with my children with the intention of giving her an opportunity to surrender her life to Jehovah, but she didn't. However, she received prayer a few Sabbaths before we travelled. On the flight, she seemed so happy; she didn't express how she was feeling after the results from the doctor, I feel she blocked the thought of death out of her mind. I avoided the 'C' word and tried my best to make her feel happy that she was going abroad to see her sister. Arriving in America, in July 1994, in Washington DC, she was excited; it was so good to see the two sisters chatting away happily.

The hospital had supplied me with dressings that needed to be changed daily. At first, I was a bit squeamish about dressing the raw, red wound every day, as it sometimes oozed. But thank God for my cousin, Pat, who was a nurse; she was able to help me do the dressing and advise on how best to manage my mum's pain. At my aunty's home, all went well for the first few weeks, and I was happy that the sisters could be together to catch up on lost time; however, in the later

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

stage of the visit, things took a terrible turn and went downhill. My mum became very angry with her sister and started to pick fights with her, getting confused with her sister's clothing, saying it was hers. This caused her a lot of distress, putting more pressure on the healing process and weakening her body, as she was meant to be resting. I put this down to the medication she was taking, as it may have caused her to be so angry, being in so much pain.

At the latter stage, each time I bathed her, there were areas tender to the touch: her hands, her body, and then her head. She would say, "Don't touch my head," and would flinch to alleviate the pain. The cancer was working its way through her system as it had now spread to her brain, which I hadn't realised at the time. I could see how, eventually, the pain would move to different parts of her body; all I could do was to give her more painkillers to help ease the pain. I tried not to touch the painful areas, but it was so difficult, especially when helping her out of the bath.

Nearer to the end of our stay, when we were all in the room, my mum pointed to the wall in the corner of the room and said, "Look at the man, he is coming!"

When we turned to look, there was no one there; I never understood what was happening to her at the time, I thought she was joking and wanted us to laugh. But after studying and doing my research, I realised she was going through a hallucination stage, as a person nearing death sometimes shows these signs; I now understand. When we were in the UK, the doctor had told us that my mum had six months to live and was fit to travel; instead, it wasn't six months, it was six weeks. God in the midst.

STRESS AHEAD – RETURN HOME TO LONDON

Arriving at the airport in America, the flight attendant took one look at my mum and said, “She can’t board the plane because she is dying!” He didn’t hesitate, he just said it in front of her; I’m not sure if she heard or understood what the gentleman had said. I most certainly didn’t want to accept it; all I was thinking in my head was if I could just get her on the plane and get her back to London, everything would be okay. I just wanted her to sit up and show them they were wrong; it was so hard to accept. I know God was in the midst of it all.

Acceptance – acknowledging what’s already happened.

The word ‘accept’ is also significant because to *accept* means that you receive the present moment

without resistance of any kind; I had no power to change their decision. Having the ability to accept hardship is aided by meditating on the Word of God because Jesus said, “*My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.*” (2 Corinthians 12:9). This aided ability supports the goal of overcoming and experiencing the present moment.

I had no choice but to *accept* that my mum was not allowed to board the plane. My plans had been turned upside down in a flash, in the blink of an eye; I had to make some painful decisions by sending my children on their own back to London. Placing all the responsibility on Dean and Sophia’s shoulders, the eldest taking the lead and being in charge of the younger one, little Lawrence, who was only seven years old at the time. His remarks to me as an adult were, “Mum, I remember you were lifting up the very heavy suitcases and crying.” Here again, my inbuilt adrenaline kicked in, helping me to cope with the situation that I couldn’t do anything about; I had to accept what was happening. Making this decision, I didn’t waste my time or energy arguing or pleading with the airport staff about the situation, but with tears in my eyes, I said goodbye to my lovely

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

children. Though the situation was so hard, I knew they had to go back to London because they had to go to school in September, and I had to stay back in America. The only thing I could change was myself; this took a lot of effort, discipline, determination, and drive, along with pain, but whilst personal change was possible, it wasn't easy. Focusing on receiving the news that my children had arrived safely back in London was my main concern, more than the effects all the stress was having on me. Sending them away from the stressful situation was my responsibility for their safety and wellbeing.

Feeling so broken, being separated from my children, and having to return to my mum's sister's house; my mum died. The flight attendant had been right to say that my mum wouldn't survive the flight because, within an hour, my mum passed away. She died on the same day, the 5th September 1994, dying not at the airport, not in the vehicle, but in her sister's house on the same day we had planned to return home. The ambulance was called, and they pronounced her dead. I was told it was meant to be, as someone said, "It was where she wanted to die, not at the airport, not in

London, but with her sister!” God’s will be done. God in the midst.

After this, things became very stressful for me because there was so much paperwork with the hospital, and having to sort out the financial costs, being in America, was extremely expensive. My mind was on an emotional rollercoaster because although I was grieving the loss of my mum, I still had to deal with all the funeral arrangements and arrange for the body to be flown back to London. I had to get a loan to pay for the hospital costs because this was the end of the holiday, and the money had run low. I am so thankful to God that I had taken out travel insurance for her because, once the insurance claims came through, all the finances were paid in full. My mum died leaving the five children she had with her ex-husband, myself, Cherry, Blossom, who lives in Jamaica, and many grandchildren. I tried building a relationship with my younger siblings, but they all separated themselves from the three of us. Out of all my siblings, my sister Cherry is the only one I am close to. Some years after my mum’s death, my youngest sister, Precious, also had breast cancer, but thank God it was discovered early, and since then, she has recovered. At

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

the time, I was able to give her some support in that season, though she too later distanced herself from me. Reflecting on the events surrounding my mum's death, I think we all should've had some form of therapy, especially for the children to express themselves about what had happened when we were in America on our holiday. I hadn't realised this holiday journey would be one of no return for my mum, but God knows best in all things.

"God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble." (Psalms 46:1)

There is a prayer of serenity written by a Protestant Theologian (Reinhold Niebuhr) who wrote:

*"God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
Courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.*

*Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is,
Not as I would have it.
Trusting that He will make all things right
If I surrender to His will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life,
and supremely happy with Him forever in the next.
Amen."*

Although I was on my own physically at the time, I now know God was with me spiritually, as He used my aunty and cousins to help and support me throughout this unforeseen circumstance. After a few days, when all the paperwork was sorted, I had to rearrange my flight back to London, which was a strange experience. The thought of my mum's body, which was sitting next to me six weeks ago, now stored in the cargo bay in a casket below me, was hard to comprehend. Being on the plane alone and filled with grief, I felt so alone, and it took me back to my journey when I was fifteen on my own to meet my mum. God in the midst.

BIG SISTER SUPPORT

Arriving back in London was a blessing. When the plane landed, I felt so lost and numb; however, I thank God for my loving sister, Cherry, she was amazing. She was ready and prepared to support me by taking over. She made the funeral arrangements here in London, relieving me of the stress. It's strange that the family never really talked about my mum's death or asked how I coped with the situation in America.

Looking at the pictures I had taken of my mum, when I took her to different functions, revived wonderful memories of the life we shared together. As I reflect on the pet names my mum would call us, it seemed she liked flowers as she named her girls Blossom, Cherry, and Rose, and the daughters with her husband, she named Honey and Violet. I felt so grateful knowing I had done my best for her in appreciation for her when she was alive. I know this must've affected my

children also because we went on holiday together to America and then had to return separately.

SILENT KILLER

I remember at times when I visited my mum, I would encourage her not to use artificial sweeteners like 'Sweetex' in her tea, but she could not do without it; it was as though she was addicted to it. I feel this helped to speed up the cancer cells, spreading rapidly, causing her to die so quickly because she consumed these tablets daily in her tea. There has been much controversy regarding the toxic effects with connection to this, so, this is why I decided to do some research into artificial sweeteners and the side effects it has on the body to prove my concern.

RESEARCH – *THE SHOCKING RESULT*

Back in London, my mind pondered on how quickly the cancer had spread, and I became more curious to research and find out why. When I researched the Sweetex sweetener my mum used so keenly in her

tea, I was horrified by the confirmation results. These artificial sweeteners, saccharine, aspartame, sucralose, also known as Splenda, acesulfame-K, and candarel, are known to speed up the cancer cells in our bodies, turning them cancerous. This explained the rapid pace of the cancer which moved through my mum's body. I feel these sweeteners contributed to the speed at which the cancer grew swiftly, cutting my mum's life short. I learned so much from this research, which has helped others overcome their addiction to sweeteners; this made me see my capabilities in a different light.

PRESENTATION

For the first time, I was able to stand in front of a large congregational group of people in the church to do a presentation on 'THE SILENT KILLER'. This topic gave great insight into the food people eat.

Artificial— Synthetic, fake, lacks naturalness, is man-made, and not real.

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Our bodies are a temple; how are we treating them? We are what we eat; what we put in is what we get out! When we go shopping, do we read the labels? What are food additives, and what do they do? These are questions to ask ourselves. Our bodies are the sacred place in which God not only lives but is worshipped and honoured. When Jesus came, He eliminated the need for a temple being in a location; we became the temple of God. A house for His Holy Spirit, we are stewards of our bodies for the Lord, a gift from above; thank God for this amazing gift!

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” (1 Corinthians 6:19)


From my first presentation, I went from church to church, educating people about the dangers of how consuming sweeteners helped cut my mum’s life short. Artificial sweeteners, the effects it has on our bodies, our children, and the food we are feeding them. This

presentation helped me build my confidence and self-esteem and brought me out of my comfort zone to help others be cautious of what they put into their bodies. Here are some of the dangerous E numbers to look out for: E700, E999, E954, E951, E955, E621, E124, E955, E962, and the list goes on. *“Artificial sweeteners and cancer risks: results from the NutriNet-based cohort study Debras et al. (2022)”*, this was a large cohort study. Artificial sweeteners (especially aspartame), which are used in many foods and beverage brands worldwide, were associated with increased cancer risks.

It has been known over the decades that sweeteners are bad for our health, but not many people know of their dangers to the human body. Studies have linked that consuming too much sweeteners can trigger conditions such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, which links to cancer. Since my findings, I have made it a priority to always take time to read all the labels when I go shopping. I noticed they would put the worse E numbers at the very bottom and in small prints as if to hide this dangerous information from the public. As the years have advanced, so have the additives, so I not only look out for E numbers but some

PART 4: OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

names like inverted and inverters; this is to deceive us. There are so many common foods that have been covered up containing sweeteners. These food additives mimic the effect of sugar on our taste receptors, providing intense sweetness and can become addictive to our taste buds. Sweeteners have an effect on our health; when our body digests them, it accumulates in our body cells and causes them to become cancerous. Other sweeteners, including sucralose and saccharine have been shown to damage DNA, which can lead to cancer, but the truth is hidden; that's why I titled my presentation, THE SILENT KILLER. I would advise that you carefully check the ingredients and labels on every package and use natural sugar rather than substitutes.



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