

THE HOODLUM PREACHER

I Was Lost, Now I'm Found

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Introduction

It was a cool, crisp, Chicago evening in September of 1985. I was feeling kind of good about myself because I had just pulled off, what I thought was, one of the sweetest con games I had played in a long time. It would keep me out of jail and put some money in my pocket at the same time. You see that was what I did for a living. I played games on people that separated them from their money or their merchandise. But I wasn't a big time con man like the guys in the movie "The Sting" or the men Iceberg Slim talked about in his book, "Trick Baby." I wasn't trying to be either. At that stage of my life, I was just trying to get enough money to feed my \$200.00 a day drug habit. When I say \$200.00, that's just an average. There were many days that I spent well over \$500.00, and there were some days where I couldn't even raise a hundred.

I was sitting in my living room that evening watching Smokey Robinson's new TV program with my brother, Ralph. We called him "Weasel," because he was short and fast. We all had nicknames in my neighborhood. Mine was "Bub", short for Bubba. My childhood friend, Richie, gave it to me. His favorite baseball player was Bubba Philips, the former third baseman for the Chicago Cubs. Richie's family was one of the last white families to move out of the neighborhood.

Ralph and I have always been close. We've had our differences over the years, but what brothers don't? We used to love to get together and watch sports on TV or listen to some jazz while we were getting high. Ralph didn't shoot up like I did. As a matter of fact, he hated for me to do it. But that was my thing, "Speed balling." Speed balling is mixing heroin and cocaine together and either shooting or snorting it.

Ralph's thing was smoking crack. They called it freebasing back then because they would take some cocaine, mix it with baking soda and water, and cook it in a test tube. Most people had never heard of freebasing until Richard Pryor almost burned himself up while he was doing it. After that, everybody wanted to try it. But that just goes to show you the mentality of the average drug user. If someone died of an overdose because they had some drugs that were too strong, everybody wanted some of that, because they knew it had to be some good stuff.

But to me, freebasing was just wasting good cocaine. So whenever Ralph and I got together, we would just drink whisky and beer, and smoke reefer. That's what we were doing when the doorbell rang that night. Ralph started to the door, but I thought it might have been Shelia, my lady friend at the time, so I decided to answer it myself. The building we lived in was the two family flat where we had grown up. My father lived on the first floor, and Ralph and I lived upstairs.

When I got to the door I pulled back the shade and saw two policemen standing on the porch. One of them was in uniform; the other one was a detective. I figured they were

there to arrest me, but I wasn't worried. I was sure I could talk them out of it. I had done it many times before. So when I turned the lock and pushed the door opened, I put on my best smile.

I didn't even get the door completely opened before one of my hands was cuffed and I was being pulled out onto the front porch. They finished handcuffing me and informed me that they had a warrant for my arrest. As I was being taken away, I noticed they had come in different cars. The uniformed officer was a Chicago city policeman. The detective was from one of the suburbs and had to be accompanied by a city officer in order to serve a warrant inside of the city limits. I was put in the car and taken to Oak Park, IL.

While I was being booked, I found out that the sweet con game I had played earlier that day had backfired. I didn't know that the manager of the store that I had passed some bad checks at earlier in the week had found out how I operated. So while I was planning phase two of my con, he was at the police station filing charges against me. I also found out that I had another warrant from another suburb, so my bond was \$11,000. I needed \$1,100 to get out of jail. I didn't have it.

When I got to my cell I thought I was in "Jail Heaven". I had never been in a hold over cell like that in my life, and I had been in a lot of them. Most of them were crowded, noisy, open cells with cold steel benches. Most of the time the benches were so crowded some of the people slept on the floor. And you had to wait forever for someone to let you out to use the phone.

But this was more like a single room. It was nice and warm, and there was a bed in there with a mattress, a pillow and a blanket. And there was a telephone in there too. When I looked around, I realized I had been hanging out in the wrong jails. I decided right then, that from that point on, I was going to commit all of my crimes in the suburbs, preferably, Oak Park. Prisoners had it going on out there.

I talked on the phone most of the night. But I wasn't calling people, trying to get bond money. I was calling to tell them about that fancy jail cell I was in. One of the people I called was Sandi, an ex girl friend of mine who lived in St. Louis. Although we were no longer together, we still remained friends, kind of. You've got to remember, I still had the mind of a hustler and a con. Sandi was a beautiful, loving woman. But she came into my life at the wrong time. I had been hurt by so many women, my heart had become calloused. I had decided that I was going to be the one doing the hurting. Unfortunately, Sandi was one of my victims. She really didn't deserve that.

We tend to do that to each other sometimes. We are so focused on our own hurt feelings that we don't see the pain that we are causing someone else. It's kind of like an automobile accident. Even if the accident is our fault, the first thing we do is look at the damage that was done to our car. We are not really that concerned about the other person's car. It is the same thing when we sin against God. The first thing we do is look at how it has damaged our lives. We are not really concerned with how we hurt the God who loved us.

When I woke up the next morning, I couldn't believe the breakfast they gave me. It was an Egg McMuffin with a hash brown and orange juice from the McDonald's next door. All we ever got for breakfast in the city jails was a stale dried up Honey Bun.

I went to court later that morning and was bound over for trial. Since I was not able to make bond, I was sent to the Cook County Jail. That is where people are held until they either bond out or go to court. If you are convicted in court and sentenced to do time, you might do it there if your sentence is one year or less. Anything over a year, including one day, you go to the penitentiary.

The county jail is located on the corner of 26th and California. Ironically, it is only two blocks from my old high school, Carter H. Harrison, which was located on 24th and California.

After a brief stay in Division 5, I was moved to Division 2. That was the minimum-security section of the jail. It is a two-story building with two open dorms on each floor. There were about 40 or 50 inmates in each dorm. The older, more mature prisoners were housed on the first floor. The second floor was known as "Gladiator School." It was reserved for the "Thunder Cats." Those were the young gang bangers who spent most of their time fighting. We could hear them throwing beds, tables, chairs, benches, and everything else that wasn't nailed down. Sometimes it sounded like they were coming through the floor. If anyone on the first floor got out of hand or gave one of the C.O.s (Correctional Officers) any trouble, they were transferred upstairs to Gladiator School.

I learned something while I was in Cook County. The C.O.s didn't really run the jail. The gangs did. The C.O.s controlled the overall system as far as telling the inmates what to do and when to do it, therefore maintaining some sense of order. But when it came to the individual dorms or wings or cellblocks, they were definitely run by the gangs. I learned that the minute I stepped into "D" dorm.

There were three of us that were taken to "D" dorm that day. The first person I saw when we walked in was Cochise. He was tall, thin, and crazy looking. He was not wearing a shirt and his pants were hanging well below his waist with his boxers showing, although "sagging" was not yet in style back then. He had another inmate pinned against the wall and he was all up in his face. Then he threw him across the room onto the floor and shouted, "If you ever do that again I'll tear your head off." Then he looked over at us and said, "What ya'll looking at?" We just turned and went our separate ways, looking for the bunks we were assigned to.

I later found out that Cochise was the "shot caller" for "Folks" in "D" dorm. "Folks" is a group of Chicago area gangs that are united. The inmate that Cochise was beating up was a member of "Peoples", another group of gangs, and the arch enemies of "Folks." In "D" dorm, "Folks" out numbered "Peoples" 10 to 1.

During that time, in the Chicago jail and prison system, there were three categories of inmates, "Peoples," "Folks," and "Neutrons." Neutron is another word for neutral, meaning they were not in either gang. Neutrons were the minority. Ain't that something? Being black, I had been a minority all of my life. Now, there I was in the Cook County jail where almost everyone was black and I was still a minority. But that wasn't the first time I had been locked down, so I was able to adjust.

The brother in the bunk next to mine just slept all of the time. He would get up when it was time to go to the mess hall to eat, but when he got back to the dorm he just went back to sleep. But I know how that is. Street life can take its toll on you. Sometimes the police are really doing some people a favor when they lock them up. That's the only time they get any rest. So in a sense, they didn't arrest us. They rescued us.

Prison is a culture of hardness. You can never show any sign of weakness or fear. If you do, the predators will sense it and they will be on you like a pack of dogs. If you are challenged in any way, you must meet it head on. But smart inmates try to avoid certain situations and certain people. Their goal is to do their time and stay away from trouble. But if trouble comes to them, they deal with it.

On my second day in "D" dorm, I was lying across my bunk. Since it was an open dorm, I made it a habit to always lie on my back. I didn't want anyone looking at my booty and getting any crazy ideas. We had just returned from lunch and I didn't want to see what

was on TV. As I stated earlier, the gangs controlled the jail, and that included the TV set. They liked to watch the soaps after "Oprah" and the other morning programs went off.

I was just lying there with my blanket over my face trying to keep the light out of my eyes. I didn't want to see anyone and I didn't want anyone to see me. I was angry and feeling sorry for myself. My birthday was coming up soon and it was beginning to look like I would be spending another one of them in jail. I was really getting tired of that.

Then I heard Cochise's voice. He was talking to one of his soldiers. I heard their footsteps and their voices coming closer and closer. I started praying, "Please Lord, let them keep going." But they stopped right by my bunk. I had spent two days trying to avoid this crazy man, and now he was standing over me, with Larry, his right hand man. All of a sudden it got real hot under that blanket. I was sweating and praying and making all kinds of deals with God.

While they were standing there, I heard Larry say, "Who is that?" Cochise said, "That's just some old preacher that's running from God." Then I heard them walking away. That messed me up, because I had been a preacher, but I had quit years ago. I knew God had called me to preach, but I didn't want to do it anymore. So Cochise was right when he said I was running from God. I was a fugitive. But I wasn't the only one. Our jails and prisons are full of fugitives. Some of them are fugitives, running from justice. Some of them are fugitives, running from God.

My friend, Richie, had a little brother, named Michael. When we were younger, Michael used to aggravate some of us older boys and then run into his house before we could catch him. One day, Michael did something that made me angry, but that day I caught him before he was able to get home, and I beat the mess out of him.

Afterwards, it dawned on me that I had one little brother, but Michael had four big brothers, so I ran home. That evening while we were eating dinner, the doorbell rung. Thinking it was Michael's brothers, I jumped up and ran out the back door. My father caught up with me and asked what was going on. After I told him what had happened, he said, "Son, when you are in trouble, you are supposed to run to your house, not away from your house." That is how Satan tricks us sometimes. When we mess up or get into trouble, we leave the church because of embarrassment or we don't know if we will be forgiven. But that is the time that we should run to God and to the church, instead of running from them.

Later that night, we were all sitting around watching TV when Cochise called me off to the side. He said, "What are you doing in here Preacher? You don't belong here." I started telling him about my crimes and some of the things I had done, trying to impress him and show him how bad I was, but he just started laughing. He said, "You know you ain't supposed to be doing that stuff."

I went back to my seat and started watching TV again. Just then, one of the C.O.s came in and handed Cochise some bags of food. (Some of the C.O.s were gang members that had never been arrested.) All of the gang members started making sandwiches and eating. It had been a long time since dinner, and I was hungry too. But I wasn't part of the gang. Then Cochise said, "Hey Preacher. Are you hungry?" When I said I was, he told someone to give me a sandwich. But what they gave me was a jailhouse donut and some bread. I'd had one of those donuts in the mess hall before. They were terrible. They were not sweet at all.

I was looking at that donut and bread, and I was wondering, "What am I supposed to do with this?" Cochise asked me if I had ever had a donut sandwich before. I said "No." He told someone to show me how to make one. I thought they were playing a joke on me.

Someone told me put some butter and jelly on the bread and put the donut in between them and make a sandwich. I tried it. It was good.

We were given donuts at least twice a week with our breakfast, and we always made sandwiches with them. Whenever we had something for lunch or dinner that I didn't like, I would trade it to another inmate for their donut sandwich. My niece, Christine, teases me because I still eat them sometimes. Donut sandwiches.

After everyone had eaten that night, Cochise called me in front of everybody. He said, "Hey ya'll. This is "Preacher". He ain't Folks. He's a Neutron. But he's alright, and I don't want nobody messing with him." So that was my name while I was in the Cook County jail. "Preacher." Cochise and I got to be pretty good friends. One day I asked him how did he know I had been a preacher? He said, "Anybody can look at you and tell you're a preacher." I didn't realize it at the time, but even in jail, God had His hand on me and was protecting me.

A few weeks later some detectives came to the jail and arrested me again. I thought that was the dumbest thing I had ever heard of. How can you arrest someone who is already in jail? It turned out that while I was in jail, stores in two other suburbs had pressed charges against me, so they added another \$50,000 to my ransom, and moved me to Division 4, the more secure section of the jail. Things had gone from bad to worse. I figured God was angry with me, but I didn't think He was this angry.

So why was He so angry with me? After all, nobody's perfect. At least that's what I had always heard. The truth is, we do not live in a perfect world, and God did not create a perfect people. When God created man, He gave us a choice of how we want to live our lives. He did not give us a tongue that would not lie. Neither did He give us heart that would not hate. He did not give us hands that will not kill or thoughts that cannot lust. We were not born with a mouth that will not say things that hurt, or feet that will not follow the path of unrighteousness. But we were blessed with a mind to think, and the knowledge of right from wrong.

The name Preacher followed me to Division 4. But something happened while I was in Division 4 that changed my life forever. But before I tell you about that, I want to go back a few years and tell you the story of how I became, "The Hoodlum Preacher."

CHAPTER ONE

The Call

I knew that I was going to be a preacher since I was nine or ten years old. I was a junior usher at the Rose of Sharon Missionary Baptist Church, which was located on 13th Street, and Christiana Ave., right down the street from our house. I loved to hear my first pastor, Rev. James A. Murphy, preach every Sunday morning. I would sit there with Ralph or my grandmother, listening to his every word. I even started my own church in my mother's kitchen one summer. Ralph was my only member. I would put on the robe that I was baptized in and preach to him everyday. He didn't have a choice since I was bigger than him. When I couldn't find him, I would go on the back porch and preach to our dog, Rex. I tried to baptize Rex in the bathtub one day. He didn't like that at all.

When I told my mother that I was going to be a preacher, she said I couldn't just decide that I was going to be a preacher. She said that God had to call me. So for the next day or two I stayed in the house, hanging around the phone waiting for God to call me. Needless to say, I never received that phone call but that didn't stop me from preaching to Ralph and Rex.

During my early teenage years, I strayed away from the church and started hanging out with some of the older boys in the neighborhood. I also discovered girls during that time. One girl in particular was Betty Jean, my very first love. She had big pretty eyes and the sweetest smile. She was very beautiful and we had planned to get married some day.

She gave me a surprise party for my 16th birthday. It was the best party I'd ever had, but it wasn't much of a surprise. My friend, Fuzzy, was supposed to hang out with me until a certain time. Then he was supposed to take me to Elaine's apartment, where the party was being held. He ended up telling me what was going on before we got there. When we got to Elaine's I acted surprised and we all had a good time.

My friends and I were not bad kids. We didn't steal or run around with gangs or anything. We just did typical teenage stuff but sometimes some of us did some dumb things, like getting drunk or ditching school (Playing hooky). Whenever we ditched school, we stayed at my house because both of my parents worked. That's what we decided to do on the last school day before Christmas break in 1964.

There was Gip, Fuzzy, Joe, "who we called Gonzalez," and myself. Fuzzy had already dropped out of school. The rest of us were ditching. We had been drinking whiskey and playing records when we decided to go to the school and beat up some white boys. Now, our school, Harrison, was in an all white neighborhood, and the majority of the students, about 80%, were white. Can you imagine four black, drunk, teenage boys riding a bus into an all white neighborhood to start a fight with some white boys in 1964? I told you, we did some dumb things. I don't think we even had any civil rights back then.

I stole my father's gun, a 32 revolver, to take with us. It was just for show, because we only had one bullet for it. (Remember Barney Fife from the Andy Griffith show?) Gip had the gun. We got off of the bus on 23rd and California and started a fight with some guys there, but we were quickly out numbered. When I realized how much trouble we were in, I started shouting, "Shoot um Gip. Shoot um." I was hoping they would hear me or see the

gun and run, but they kept coming. When I looked around, there were about fifteen or twenty of them. I kept yelling, "Shoot um Gip. Shoot um."

But the gun had fallen through a hole that was in Gip's coat pocket and was trapped in the lining. When he finally got it out, Fuzzy grabbed it from him. Some of them saw the gun and started running. Fuzzy caught one of them and hit him in the head with it. When he did that, the gun went off. And all hell broke loose. I had never seen that many white people in my life. They were coming from everywhere, young and old. They were running out of their houses, jumping out of cars. Some of them even came out with no shirts on. All of a sudden we heard gunshots. We knew it wasn't us; we didn't have any more bullets. So we started running. We saw a bus coming down California and jumped on it.

We ran to the back of the bus and started laughing and talking about what had happened. Then we realized that there were only three of us on the bus. Gip was missing. We started looking out of the window trying to see if he was out there but all we saw was a bunch of angry white people. We thought Gip was dead. They must have caught him and killed him.

When we got back to Christiana, we went to Vivian's house to tell her about Gip. She was his girlfriend. We started drinking more whiskey and beer. I got so drunk, I passed out. Somebody laid me across Vivian's bed. When I woke up, I didn't know where I was. The room was dark and extremely hot. I tried to stand up but I fell against the wall and slid sideways and got stuck between the radiator and the wall. The radiator was burning my stomach and chest, but every time I grabbed it to pull myself up, I burned my hands. I started yelling for help and finally someone came and pulled me up. It was Gip. He had gotten away by running in the opposite direction. Remember that I was still drunk and I thought Gip was dead. So when I saw him in that dark, hot room, you know where I thought we were, don't you? I was glad to find out that we were still alive and not in hell.

Like I said, we were not bad kids, we were just misguided. Although there were a lot of churches in my neighborhood, most of their members were like guard dogs. In other words, they were territorial. What I mean is, the only time a guard dog will attack someone is if that person goes into his house, yard, or wanders into his territory. A guard dog will not go after a woman who is standing on the corner. He will not try to get to the gang-banger who is sitting on the porch across the street. He will not confront the kids in the neighborhood, or the wino who is standing in the alley. He will wait for them to come into his house, his territory, or into his comfort zone, and then he will be all over them.

A lot of church members are the same way. They will not tell anyone about the goodness of the Lord that is outside of the sanctified walls of the church. They won't talk to that woman who is standing on the corner. They won't reach out to that gang-banger who is sitting across the street. They won't invite the neighborhood kids to Sunday school, or tell that wino about God who loves him.

1965 started out with a bang. Almost every weekend there seemed to be a quarter party going on somewhere. Quarter parties were house parties where people were charged a quarter to get in. Some people called them blue light parties. They were also known as rent parties. Most of the time, the parties were held in the court way building across the street from my house. I was not allowed in that building because some boys were playing with a gun one day and accidentally killed a girl in there but I went anyway. That was where Vivian and Elaine lived. Vivian lived on the first floor. Some of the parties were in her apartment, but most of them were upstairs in Elaine's apartment, where the girl was killed. Both of their mothers were single parents that worked a lot, so that was our hangout.

We started a social club, called "The Mack Men." We were not a gang. We were just a group of guys from the neighborhood that partied, played ball, and hung out together.

There was a group of guys from another neighborhood that would sometimes try to crash the parties and start trouble. They were part of Fat Nash's gang. One night some of them came in and started a fight, so we all went outside. Butch was Betty Jean's cousin from the south side. He was bigger than the rest of us and the only one with any gang fighting experience. So he stepped forward and challenged Saul, who was their captain. But Saul said he wasn't going to waste his time fighting a chump like Butch. So he called one of his boys, Clint, to do the fighting. So Butch said he was not going to fight a chump like Clint. So he told Clint to pick someone in our group that he wanted to fight. Clint picked me.

Clint was a big, black, corn bread eating, country boy. He was almost a foot taller than I was and he out weighed me by about thirty pounds but I didn't care. I thought I was Cassius Clay (that was before he changed his name to Muhammad Ali). Besides that, the beer and whiskey I had been drinking at the party gave me all of the confidence I needed. So I started dancing around and throwing jabs like I had seen Ali do on TV. I kept dancing in and jabbing him and then dancing back before he could hit me. Everyone was cheering me on and saying, "Go Bub, go." But then the whiskey started talking to me. It said, "Grab him and body slam him." So I moved in and grabbed Clint around his waist and tried to pick him up.

When I woke up--I was in my bathroom lying on the floor and someone was putting wet towels and cold water on my face. I asked somebody what had happened. They kept asking me why I grabbed Clint. I didn't know. The whiskey told me to do it.

The following Friday night, Vivian had another party. I was dancing with Betty Jean when someone said that Saul and Clint were outside. I wanted a rematch with Clint, so we went outside. Butch and Chucky told me not to grab him this time. But before we started fighting, someone pulled a gun and started shooting. Although the person with the gun was not one of us, he was at the party with us. Eventually, word got back to Fat Nash that we had shot at some of his boys.

Everybody split up and went their separate ways. Chucky and Fuzzy went around the corner with Betty Jean and me to her house on Roosevelt Road. After we stayed there for a while, Fuzzy went across the street to his house. Chucky was able to get home by going through the alley, so he left too. I stayed a little while longer and was just about to leave when the phone rang. It was Chucky. He told me not to try to go home. He lived across the street from me, so he could see my house from his front window. He told me that Fat Nash and some of his boys were sitting on my front porch waiting for me. I ended up staying at Betty Jean's all night, hoping her mother didn't wake up.

I didn't go to sleep at all that night. I spent the whole night pacing the floor and trying to figure out how I was going to get into my house without Fat Nash or my father catching me. Dad didn't play that staying out all night stuff. Fat Nash was bad, but dad was "badder." I found that out a few weeks earlier when I thought I was big enough to challenge him on his rules about where I could and could not go.

Ralph had gotten angry with me one day and told dad that I had been hanging out in Vivian and Elaine's building. I made a big mistake by telling my father that I could go wherever I wanted. But it was a bigger mistake to tell him that while I was standing at the top of the stairs. I realized that when I found myself lying at the bottom of those stairs in a lot of pain.

I called Chucky and asked him to look out of his window and see if the coast was clear. He said it was, so I headed home. It was about 6:00 in the morning. The whole time I

was walking down Christiana, I was praying that I got home without Fat Nash's boys seeing me. I made it. Then I started praying that I could get into the house without my father hearing me. I made that too. As I was taking off my clothes, dad woke up. When he came into my room, I acted like I had just woken up and was putting my clothes on. He asked me what time I had gotten in last night. I told him I was home before my curfew. He said, "Good. Since you're up, go outside and water the grass."

The last thing I wanted to do was go back outside and possibly run into Fat Nash but I figured I had two choices. One, I could tell my father the truth, which included me being in Vivian and Elaine's building again. (The same building that got me knocked down the stairs.) Or two, I could go outside and water the lawn.

While I was watering the lawn, I kept looking up and down the street for Fat Nash and his boys. I was praying that they had gone home. I was about halfway finished when I heard something. When I turned around, there was Fat Nash, Saul, Clint, and two other guys. They had come through the gangway next to my house. I tried to tell them that I had nothing to do with the shooting, but they didn't want to hear it.

They were taking me toward the gangway that leads to the alley when Nelson, the neighborhood preacher, came out of nowhere. Boy was I glad to see him. They told him what my friends and I had done, but Nelson asked them to just forget about it and let me go. Because of the respect that Fat Nash had for Nelson, they let me go.

Oh! I forgot to mention something. Fat Nash had a big brother, known as Big Nash. Their mother was a Pentecostal Evangelist.

After that incident, Nelson started recruiting some of the neighborhood boys for a basketball team. We had all grown up playing baseball, basketball, and football in the alley behind Christiana. We called the alley, "Christiana Stadium." We named the team, "The Harlem Browns," and sold chicken dinners to buy our uniforms. In order to be on the team we had to attend Bible study classes at Nelson's house. Most of the time his wife, Velma, was the teacher.

We had some pretty good players on our team. Besides Butch and Gip, there was Punchy, who played guard for Cregier High, Jerry, and Joe. However, the basketball team didn't last very long. We played in a couple of tournaments but some of the guys didn't like the Bible study part but I did. Although I had grown up in church, the only part of the Bible I had ever read was John 3:16 and the 23rd Psalm. I didn't know that the Bible was so exciting. I went home one day and started reading the Gospel of Matthew. I got so caught up in reading about the life of Jesus Christ, I couldn't put it down. I couldn't wait to get home everyday so I could see what happened next. I cried when I read about how they crucified Him but I rejoiced when I read about His glorious resurrection.

I knew that it was time for me to change the way I was living. It was like the time my mother caught Ralph and I cursing. I was about eleven or twelve years old at the time. A group named, "The Coasters" had recorded a song called "Charlie Brown". But there was a different version of the song that was going around school. In that version, some of the words were changed and there were a lot of curse words being used. One night when our parents weren't home, Ralph and I were singing the school version of Charlie Brown, curse words and all. We were singing so loud and having so much fun, we didn't hear our mother when she came in, but she heard us. Before we knew anything, she was lighting into out behinds with an ironing cord. While she was whipping us, she made us keep singing, Charlie Brown. After that night, I never wanted to hear Charlie Brown again. As a matter of fact, every time it came on the radio, I changed the station. That is what we all must learn to do. Change the station. If it is your friends that are getting you into trouble and making you

sin against God, change the station. Stay away from those friends. If it is the places that you go that bring on temptations, change the station. Don't go to those places. There might be something, or someone that you are holding onto that is causing you to stumble. You know what you've got to do. Change that station.

I got down on my knees and begged God to forgive me for all of my sins. I will never forget how close I felt to God that night. My whole life was changed. I felt like I was a different person. I wanted to know more and more about Jesus. I started reading the book of Mark to see what happened next. But to my surprise, a lot of it was the same as what was in Matthew, but I read it anyway. But when I got to the part where they were going to crucify Him, I stopped reading. I couldn't go through that again. It was just too painful. Imagine how painful it was to Him.

Some of the boys and girls in the neighborhood continued studying the Bible with Nelson and Velma. We joined the Galatians Missionary Baptist Church, a small storefront church on 15th and Millard. The pastor was a young, 24 year old preaching machine named Rev. Joe Jones. He was short, and he stomped when he preached. He built a little step behind the pulpit one day. That way, he could step up on it and lean over the pulpit when he preached.

He was a good singer too. Before he was a pastor, he sang with Nelson and Velma as part of the Holloway Community Singers. Although I wasn't much of a singer, I was in the choir. So was everybody else for that matter. There were about twenty members in the church, and fifteen of us were in the choir. Nelson was the director. I never led any songs. I just stood in the back and tried to blend in with everyone else. Rev. Jones, Velma or Stean, another girl from Christiana, led most of the songs. Stean and her sister, Gloria, had grown up in the Pentecostal church. Gloria was Betty Jean's best friend and was part of the reason we were together.

One day, someone told me that my grandfather had fallen down the stairs on our front porch. He lived on the first floor of our building. I tried to help him up but he wasn't responding so I ran inside and called an ambulance. (There was no 911 at that time) The person that answered the phone asked me if I had any money to pay for the ambulance service. When I told him I didn't, he said I had to call the fire department. When they arrived they took my grandfather to the hospital, but he died anyway.

I really hated to see him go because he had been such a big part of my life. He was the one who walked me to and from school when I was a child. I also remember going to the Jack's Foxhole tavern with him and sitting on the bar stool next to his. I drank milk while he drank "something else." But that was our little secret. What I remember most about him was he always dressed up. Although he was retired, he wore a suit and tie everyday. Now he was gone. We buried him next to my grandmother who had passed about a year or so before him.

That summer we had a weeklong revival at the church. The preacher was Elder James Kelly, pastor of the St. John Missionary Baptist Church on Gladys Avenue. Elder Kelly had a reputation of being a Holy Ghost filled Baptist preacher, and boy could he preach. I didn't know why he was called "Elder" instead of "Reverend," like all of the other preachers. Some people said he had come out of the Pentecostal church. Others said he wasn't a real Baptist. There was definitely something different about him. He had something that most preachers I had known did not have. I didn't know what it was, but I wanted it too.

I started preaching in our kitchen again, but Ralph had outgrown me, so I couldn't make him sit and listen to me anymore. Preaching was in me. The desire was getting stronger

and stronger. I felt like the prophet Jeremiah. The word of God was like fire, shut up in my bones.

In September, school started back, and I started my junior year of high school. I was sitting in the back of the bus on my way home from school one day. The bus was full of people that were laughing and talking. I leaned back in my seat and closed my eyes, and I could see myself preaching. I was just preaching, and preaching, and preaching. Before I had realized it, I had missed my stop. So I stayed on the bus and went to my aunt's house. She was a pastor in an African Methodist Episcopal Church named "Coston Chapel." Her name was Rev. Armie Rayford, but we called her Auntee. She had left the Baptist church years earlier because they did not recognize women as preachers, but the Methodist church did.

I told her what had happened on the bus and of my unquenchable desire to preach. I asked her if God was calling me to preach. She told me that He could be but she suggested that I go home and pray some more. I went home and talked to my father about it.

Oh! I forgot to mention something. My father was a preacher too. He had accepted his call to the ministry late in his life. He had run from God for a long time. During most of my life, he had been an alcoholic like my grandfather, my uncles, and most of my family.

He was glad to hear that I was praying about my call. He prayed with me that the Lord would make clear to me what He wanted me to do. After praying for a few days, I realized that God had called me to preach His word a long time ago. I was finally ready to accept the call.

The next day, I talked to Rev. Jones about everything. After he was satisfied that I was sure of my call, he set a date for my trial sermon. December 5, 1965. That was almost three months away. I guess he was giving me plenty of time to either get prepared or to change my mind. When I told Betty Jean about it, she said she had seen it coming and was happy about it too. After a while, word started spreading all over Christiana that, "Bub is a preacher." Fuzzy and Chucky started teasing me and calling me, "Rev. Bub." But I didn't care. I was sixteen years old, and I had finally gotten the call that I had been waiting for since I was nine. I was going to be a preacher.