

NEVER MEANT TO SELL

BY BLAKE STEIDLER

Chapter One

I made it! With 29 seconds to spare! I'm sitting here congratulating myself that I managed to pour myself some mountain dew, quickly nosh on some tortilla chips, and start up my lap-top all before the start of the new year. I do not type very quickly so you can probably guess at this point that we are already in the start of a new year. The year is now 2013. This is the year that I am predicting that I will be homeless. They say that 13 is a very unlucky number and my gut instinct is telling me that my misfortune is coming. If it didn't come then I would make it come. Yes I am just that crazy.

I have a rare mental condition known as schizophrenia and I'm more paranoid than a one legged dog expected to do some kind of trick like jumping through a ring of fire in front of a live audience. Even as I write this story I am convinced that right now the government is spying on me via their satellites in outer space. I'm so paranoid right now that I am convinced that the government has the ability to change the scripts on demand with any given television show. They do this to plant fear. To plant fear and bully schizophrenics like me. I am not worried though because you know why? I have God. Now they have the actors on television laughing at me as I try to write this story. Everything they do just seems so immature to me. I am only into the second paragraph of this story and already the government has some sort of remote control that shuts this lap-top down. **But I still have to tell this story.**

My name is Blake Ryan Steidler. To the best of my knowledge there is only one of me in all of the United States. I guess I should be proud of my name but over the years I have come to the conclusion that my parents had too much free time on their hands to give me an uncanny name like Blake. If they would have been in a hurry I'm sure I would have been bestowed a name like Bob, Joe, or even just another John. But God has blessed me with a name like Blake, so a Blake I shall be.

12/25/2011 CHRISTMAS IN JAIL

Today is the birthday of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. I am in an 8x10 ft cell all by myself this special Christmas morning. It is not my first Christmas in jail but it is one that I will definitely always remember. I am stuck in this cell pretty much all day except for meal times and a few opportunities to use the phone. But there's a huge problem. Nobody will accept any of my phone calls. Unlike the federal prisons I used to do time in these county jails only seem to allow collect calls and I am not worth a \$7.00 phone call to anyone in the world. I am 30 years old, single, and already 20 pounds lighter from when I first entered this jail two months ago. I am not in solitary confinement because of my bad behavior. I am in solitary confinement because I've been forgotten by my superiors who dictate the special housing section of the jail that they use for processing. I am being processed because I am returning from another county jail where my crime was committed just 82 miles away.

I have no commissary to snack on this Christmas because this section of the jail doesn't allow it and I am doing my best to keep my rashes under control that have transpired as a result of not having access to clean laundry in almost two weeks. I am stuck in a smelly jail cell this Christmas morning all alone with nothing more than a small piece of cardboard about the size of a quarter for entertainment. I have managed to find a three inch pencil which I have used to write on the small piece of cardboard. One side I have marked a "Y" for yes and the other side a "N" for no. I have pretty much spent all of my Christmas morning so far talking to this piece of cardboard and asking it questions. *Will I be finally going to court next month? Will anyone take a phone call from me today? Will I ever get the money back that my company has stolen from me?* The questions just keep going on and on. I find myself continuing to flip the piece of cardboard like a coin until I get the answers that I want. The piece of cardboard provides very limited entertainment but I don't even have so much as a Bible. All I have is this piece of cardboard and God.

Eventually my small piece of cardboard falls onto the floor too many times and I get too lazy to pick it up. The craftier inmates at this point would already be engrossed in a good game of chess with another inmate across the hall without either of them ever leaving their cell. Just like the old saying goes *where there's a will there's a way*. I was amazed to eventually learn how inmates were able to play chess without ever getting a chance to meet the person they were playing with. Unfortunately I would not be playing chess this Christmas day because I was one of the very few inmates that had never learned the game. I packed a mean scrabble game but chess always seemed too confusing for me to learn. My hobby was writing. I hoped to be a famous writer one day but with my willingness to learn I knew it would be a long shot. After publishing two novels that never received much recognition I was eventually learning that I would need God's help.

Everybody wants to be a famous author but is it really God's will? One thing that always confused me was that the Bible is a very large book but what about the size of all the other Christian literature? Was it that man had run out of things to talk about God? We should give God the glory!

It is a known fact that of all the books in this world ever written the Bible tops them all as the number one seller. So many homes have a Bible located somewhere and so do a lot of hotels. The Bible is everywhere but how many people actually read it? Because of my schizophrenia I knew that God would never call me to be a pastor so I could encourage people to read their Bible. My faculties would become impaired and I would risk fits of hysteria trying to speak in front of a crowd. My audience would get confused and try to surmise where I was trying to go with this. But what about my words? God has blessed me with the ability to write and the greatest thing I could do for God is do my best to preach to people through my skill with writing. I could be the pastor preaching to people with the use of my words. The use of my words that I could only put on paper. But maybe that's the kind of pastor that our Lord wants me to be.

These thoughts ran through my mind as I stared deep into the yellow concrete walls of my cell. I knew that right now my family was miles away eating only the finest Maryland crab soup and digging into some fresh jumbo shrimp salad that more than likely my uncle had prepared. I felt like the games my overseers at the prison were playing were getting old. I'm the type that tends to notice the small things but those small things eventually add up over time. I often wondered if my superiors had an inkling that there was virtually nothing too subtle for me not to notice. I don't remember everything; but the stuff that I do recall is always accurate. I regressed at the time when I had first been released

from Federal prison and started attending my brother's church. Near the end of the service they opted to do communion but never went through with it. Half way through the prayer the pastor caught a bad vibe and informed us we weren't doing communion that day because the grape juice was spoiled. Really? Did he really feel this way or was it the fact that I was among the crowd? The subtle things.

I gave my life to Christ on May 5th 2007, or what some people like to call Cinco De Mayo. To this day I can still remember which inmate it was that led me to the Lord. His name was Richard but I always like to refer to him as the pocket sewer. I don't know how he was able to do it but Richard could stitch home made pockets into any pair of sweat pants or shorts and make it look professional. I never questioned where the material came from but his work always looked like the pockets had always been there from the get go. The pocket sewer was a short stalky Spanish guy doing some serious time. He had a few of those tear drop tattoos underneath his eyes. He had been to "the hole" numerous times for disciplinary reasons and I often caught him cursing like a British sailor. His mother had passed away during his incarceration and it was rare that I saw him standing in the line for church. **But he was telling me about God.**

It was his testimony that led me closer to the Lord until I finally took Jesus into my heart. All of my life I had been exposed to healthy Christians growing up in sheltered lives and the majority of them had experienced very little adversity. Those people had all the reason to keep Jesus in their lives but what about the pocket sewer? He'd lost his mother, and many years of his life! But he still had good things to say about Jesus! And even though he ran with a rough crowd Richard still made a point of advising me to start a walk with Christ. I did notice more peace in my life since my conversation with the pocket sewer. There was less profanity in my conversations, less anger and resentment inside of me, and yes I noticed a lot less stress in my life. I can still remember back in 07 how one of my biggest struggles was flourishing my Bible amidst the inmates to my walk up to the church. I was one of the better attenders of church but I always gave little testimony and can still remember my walk up the sidewalk covering most of my Bible in the crook of my arm. But why? I never kept it covered up once I entered the church with the other believers so why hide it from the unsaved? Perhaps my walk with God just wasn't what it ought to be.

Mark 8:38

"For whosoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him and the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes to the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

And there it was right there for me to see in black and white. I was leading a scrupulous life behind bars but I was still ashamed! I could behave, never steal, and give away those crackhead soups to the more indigent inmates but I was still failing in God's eyes! My Federal time behind bars went better with God in my life and I was eventually released from Federal custody 4/29/2009. I was excited about going to church after my release but I was up against yet another problem. They were doing background checks in church! At least at the church I was momentarily attending in Philadelphia while still at the halfway house. The Pastor's son wanted to know what other churches I had attended in my life and said he was going to call my previous pastors. He did his best to dissuade me from getting Baptized and eventually I gave up asking. A few months after getting released from the halfway house I moved back to my hometown 65 miles away but still felt daunted from pursuing my Baptism. I still

continued to attend church but had my doubts about getting dunked in the pool. I constantly reminded myself that maybe that church in Philly wasn't quite so pleasing in God's eyes. I knew it would not hurt to pray for that church.

My cell gate slides open and I know that it must be lunch time. The three other inmates stuck on this block race to the phone to squeeze in another phone call. I don't even bother. Every contact I know has already blocked me from being able to make a collect call. It's not that I said anything wrong to upset anyone, no, I can't make a phone call solely for the reason that hearing my voice is not worth \$7.00 to anyone. Not after knowing that all of my family members are probably sitting around on comfy sofas and calculating the cost of Christmas this year. *I got \$50.00 from Grandpa but had to spend \$40.00 on my sister so I guess I'm up \$10.00 but wait I used that \$10.00 for gas money to get to the Christmas Party!* Was pretty much the mindset I had surmised was going through each and everyone of my family members. But I asked myself *would God want that? Would God want that on his birthday?*

I lost my train of thought when I looked at my Christmas meal. As I mentioned before I've done time in Federal prison so I expected big things on Christmas even if this was county jail. But I was wrong. I didn't notice anything fancy about our meal and I wasn't even sure if there was enough on that tray to fill me up. I entered the prison at 205 pounds and was down to 182 pounds and it had only been a few months. I could feel my body emaciating right down to my hip bone. No phone call for me today and now we were getting short chumped on our Christmas meal? Say this isn't so. But it was.

There was little Christmas spirit on the isolated block I was being held in and I was not surprised to notice that the sentry working today were all the more recently hired. I finished my spaghetti and looked over once more at the phone. It appeared that phone time to one of the inmates was so important that he was willing to skip out on his spaghetti. I desperately wanted a cup of instant coffee but this block I was on did not allow commissary. I couldn't help but wonder how long my overseers were planning to leave me in processing. Had they forgotten about me? Or was it just that they were disgusted at me for landing myself in jail when my zip code was different from everyone else. Yes I do read. I realize that experts can now make predictions of teenagers growing up based on their zip codes. An announcement came over the loud speaker and I realized it was time to return to my 8 x 10 ft. cell. I took one last look at the phones then climbed up the stairs and headed all the way back to the cell in the corner. I stepped back and braced myself for the shock from the sound of the mechanical cell door getting slammed shut. There was no cell mate standing behind me reminding me to ask the guard for a roll of TP or a ½ once bar of complimentary soap. This Christmas of 2011 was going to be just me and God.

It was like a feeling words couldn't possibly describe. I laid on that cold piece of steel and felt a mysterious warmth permeate my body. It was as though God had sent down an angel to give me a warm hug or God had taken a time out on his special day to give me a hug himself. It made no sense how it was happening but I honestly felt someone was hugging me from up above. I stopped thinking about my family. I stopped thinking about what led me to jail. I even stopped thinking about whatever became of my Christmas meal. My heart was on Jesus! I knew that God had me here for a reason and I soon found myself rejoicing for all my blessings surrounding me. I had access to water. I had a blanket to keep me warm, even if it did feel scratchy. I didn't have a Bible but that was still okay because I had a lot of verses memorized! I quickly thought of a Bible verse that would keep me in tuned with God.

Proverbs 23:7

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.”

I let my spaghetti digest as I squirmed around in my bunk and pondered on that verse. Was my heart always right with God? Or were there so many times my heart was on my wallet? Spending years of my life in Federal prison had caused me to become more astute to my finances. I started to study the college kids to take notes on how that “I’m a poor college kid” card would pan out when they purposely left their wallet at home and it came time to pay for things. I liked to refer to these people that capitalized on other people as “wolves”. I was slowly becoming a wolf but I had purposely left on my sheep's clothing. Most of my life had been spent with sheep. Many of my friends growing up had trouble holding onto jobs or keeping a driver's license. They often mooched off people and were very terrible with money. I still enjoyed hanging out with these people but over the years I became privy with my finances. I didn't trust the chemical imbalance in my head and trips to prison had proven to be very expensive. I've already witnessed indigent inmates emaciate almost to the point of ossification. The government simply didn't care whether or not an inmate went to bed hungry or not and they cared even less by the time they reached the halfway houses. (If they were ever blessed enough to make it that far.)

And so this is Christmas and God still had my attention. It was mid-day and I was still feeling all warm and fuzzy inside. I take my psychotropic medication at night time so I knew the *high* I was feeling really must be coming from God because the effect from my medication surely would have worn off at this point. I folded my arms across my chest and waited for another Bible verse to pop into my mind since I had no Bible.

Jeremiah 33:3(A)

“ Call unto me, and I will answer thee,”

The verse was succinct and easy to remember mostly because it rhymed. I knew there was a little bit more to the verse but my Sunday school teachers had always taught us to memorize the first part. Here I was this Christmas of 2011 unable to make a single phone call because nobody would take a collect call from me. But what about Jesus? He is there any time and he promises in the book of Jeremiah that if we call unto him he will answer us. There would be no robotic woman intercepting my conversation with God advising me to hurry up because there was only one minute left. God is there for me any time and all I have to do is call unto him!

The noodles from my lunch swelled up a bit more in my belly and I began to remind myself how good my Christmas was even if it was behind these walls. I had heat and food and even a bed to lie on even if it wasn't to my liking. I knew that there was a good possibility that there might be some U.S troops in a hot Desert wishing they could lie on a bed and twiddle their thumbs like I was doing. I began to think that maybe, just maybe God had me in this prison for a reason. It was that instant that it all made sense. I was special! I had no cell mate to chew my ear off which meant God had me all to himself! This was going to be one of the greatest Christmas celebrations! No distractions, just me and God! When I felt I truly understood the blessing of the situation I was in, I concentrated a little bit more towards the meaning of Christmas. Santa Clause?

It didn't take me long to remember what one of my Sunday School teachers had taught us as kids about how man had twisted up the meaning of Christmas. How they had started by taking out "Christ" and replacing our Lord and savior with an "X". Pastor Hart had informed us that the word "mas" meant celebration thus we had the word "Christmas". He then proceeded to tell us that man was extremely backwards. He backed up his beliefs by telling us about the saying of a man's best friend being a dog when in fact it should be God because Dog spelled backwards is God. Pastor Hart taught us that man was so twisted that if you scrambled the letters of the word "Santa" you could come up with "Satan". These demonstrations sat so well with me that I could remember Pastor Hart's teachings when I was just 8 years old. It's been 23 years since then and even throughout my deviating times of faith, I have never taken "Christ" out of Christmas and replaced it with an "X".

Chapter Two **(The Counselor verses the Inmate)**

The drama was unfolding right before my eyes. I didn't have to talk. I didn't have to voice my opinion. I didn't even have to wink my eyes. What I did notice was Miss Barb constantly looking in my direction for my approval. She would get none. I had been to jail too many times. And I was completely aware of that *Big White Cloud*. That *Big White Cloud* that the less privileged people of Dauphin County had to face every day of their lives. A cloud that constantly rained on them and consistently capitalized financially off of every blunder of the less educated people in Harrisburg. But it was still entertaining watching the drama unfold. 60 year old Miss Barb wasn't holding up very well, and she was losing the argument.

"Oh boo-hoo!" She hissed, "And I had to wake up at 4am every morning to milk the cows!"

The inmates looked around at each other confoundedly. Where was she going with this? Was this professional? But the Brazen inmate didn't want to give up the argument.

"Yeah well I had to wake up every day to a gun pointed at my head! Do you know what it's like to live with a drunk father and a gun in the house?" He scratched the scar on his head without picking it open. The scar was given to him by the guards as a welcoming present on his way into the big house. He was 50 years old but looked in his early 30's, so many years in prison had preserved his body in such a way he was healthy as an ox. You could feel the strength exuding from his body just by sitting next to him. He wasn't the kind of guy to be messed with. The amount of scars on his forearms seemed to tell a story. I had surmised at this point that he had spent the majority of his life living in the bad lands of the city. I doubted that in his youth he was riding four wheelers through cornfields or opening up Nintendos on Christmas morning. There was a good chance that Ramsey didn't have a father to play catch with in the backyard after school. If he even had a back yard. No, Ramsey had lived a life under

the dictatorship of a big white cloud that specialized in sequestering him from society and taking all of his money. Offering no adequate means of education or exercise equipment so that upon his release he will be even worse off financially than when he first went in. I'd seen the aftermath of the big white cloud over and over again until it eventually reached the point that the correctional officers would make bets as to how long an inmate would last in society before they would see them again. With a return rate at 67% there was a good chance that the guards were saving a bed for Mr. Ramsey.

Miss Barb had dealt with plenty of inmates like Ramsey before. She'd met plenty of people in life during her twenty years of service in the Navy. She had a name for people like Ramsey. Babies. Big babies. There was 15 of us in the group and she couldn't understand why Ramsey always did all the talking. Perhaps he just needed some special attention. She often wished that he would act his age and grow up but she still had concern over his mental condition. Schizophrenia. Ramsey was a full blown Schizophrenic. There was no telling where the voices inside his head would take him. And now he was back in jail what felt the millionth time for yet another parole violation. Ramsey had been picked up for drinking a beer. A 24 ounce Natural Ice from what he told us. He wasn't too thrilled for being incarcerated for something so stupid. His family was fed up too with the system. They were making a lot of calls to the jail. Calls Miss Barb would have to deal with.

The group seemed to get quiet after Miss Barb's comment about milking cows. I didn't know about the rest of the group but as for myself I think I would rather be milking a cow than having a gun pointed to the back of my head. Maybe there was a little more to the story Miss Barb was leaving out. Did she maybe have a gun pointed to the back of her head while she milked those cows? I noticed a hand went up and an inmate skinnier than Gumby took the floor.

“ Miss Barb, I had days like that too. My daddy used to make me sit in a corner while him and his cousin threw beer cans at me. They waz always playing with guns.” He said crossing his arms. He looked at Ramsey for assurance. They both nodded.

“Uh-hmm” was all we got from Miss Barb. It was evident that at this point she was giving very little attention. Instead she appeared to be engrossed with her doodles on her yellow pad. My vision is very good and I was amused at her doodle. It was the same exact one as yesterday. A cartoon of a girl looking exactly like Punkie Brewster only with a hair style that looked like a cha chia pet in full throttle. I was amazed at how the drawing looked like an exact duplicate of yesterday's. These groups were very exciting to me and I was hoping to assimilate as much as I could with hopes of one day including these experiences in one of my next books. As far as I knew there really wasn't one inmate in this jail that liked Miss Barb. The mean look we often saw in her eyes was intimidating and there were times it felt like she wanted to go old school on us and beat us down with a stick. But I imagined she probably wasn't allowed to do that.

Miss Barb looked at her wrist watch and stood up. “We're all out of time today guys and I wont be here tomorrow so there's no group tomorrow.” She said matter of factly, “ Kevin might do a mental health group in the morning.”

The group got up to put away their chairs. I wasn't very happy about the group ending. I actually enjoy listening to these guys wild stories in the hood. I was in no hurry to go back to my 8 X 10 cell where a smelly 52 year old man was probably pooping up the place. Quite honestly I was just

hoping it got cold enough in there that he would decide to put his pants back on. I was on a medical block and it seemed to have a lot of freaks on it. Not all of the guys in Dauphin County prison were straight and it sure made things difficult. Miss Barb looked at me as if she expected me to give the heavy set pedophile in the wheel chair a push. This was the part I really hated about prison. They don't pay me to provide health care but I gave him a push anyway to keep the peace. I didn't want to end up getting kicked out of group. This is the only prison I had ever been to that had no television. Supposedly Dauphin County Prison is dubbed the second to worse prison on the whole east coast. After eating enough of those green hot dogs I really didn't doubt it.

Ramsey had some parting words for us as we exited the door.” Hey everybody! Make sure you check out my book sometime *Touched By The Spirit Of A Black Man*” A book? Was Ramsey capable of writing a book? I've read many books but if this guy seriously had a book out I definitely wanted to read it. Nobody else in the group ever had anything interesting to say and even though the other inmates complained about him hogging up group time I liked this guy's stories. Needless to say Ramsey had very much spirit and I was touched by the spirit of a black man. I intended to check out his story upon my release. Whenever that day might be.

Chapter Three **(The Dopefiend that Loved Jesus)**

All of my life I had always wished that I would master the ability to keep my emotions under control. I laugh at the most dumbest of things and sometimes once I start laughing it is nearly impossible for me to stop. I will never be a public speaker or even be able to give a speech at a wedding without risking a huge fit of hysteria making myself looking like a fool. Because of my condition I often find myself shying away from any situations that might induce my symptoms. Unfortunately for me one of those places is the church services here at the prison. To the best of my knowledge some of the inmates were making a joke out of it and one inmate had gone so far as to put one of the outside volunteers in the spot light. This did not sit well with me that the inmates were not taking church serious and I did not want to find myself leading a bad example and laughing at their mockery jokes in the Lord's place. So for the first few months of prison I stayed away from the church services in the prison. That all changed the day I met Danny. Stress Box Danny is what they called him. It was his first week in prison and he had already earned the name “Stress Box” because of the way he bugged out. Nobody wanted him as a celly because all he did was whine all day long as if it was his first trip to prison. It wasn't. This was trip number 13. And all of the sentry within the jail knew him by first name.

“ You mean you're not going to church? Do you really want to sit in this cell all day? Come on it will be fun.” He said rubbing more hair gel through his hair. It wasn't his hair gel. And I of course was

too much of a miser for it to be mine. Toothpaste and soap are the only toiletries you really need in prison. That and TP of course. White gold is what we called it in the ARMY.

I defended myself the best I could.” I dunno man. I think I'd rather stay here and read my Bible. You go ahead and have fun.”

I reached for my Bible to make it look legit. I was glad to have a celly that I didn't deem threatening but Danny was the kind of guy most people couldn't stand. The stories he conjured up all day long consistently contradicted themselves and everybody in the jail already knew that Danny couldn't be trusted. He was short, lethargic looking, and had the slick look in his eyes of a crooked car salesman. His dark curly hair was the only thing he had going for him and he never let 5 minutes go by without slicking it back with more hair gel. When he wasn't doing that he was constantly rubbing anbesol on all the sores on his tongue. Where those sores came from I didn't know but the needle marks on his arms looking like choo choo tracks made me believe he'd done his fair share of drugs.

Danny persisted, “Come on man! You mean to tell me that you're a christian and yet you don't come to church?”

I felt my face redden just a bit. I really don't like much when people challenge my faith. The church I had gone to when I was a kid had always accentuated that one could never lose their salvation once one was saved. Did he think he could get me to come to church by challenging my faith? I shut my Bible and jumped down from the top bunk. I can honestly say that in all of my years spent in prison I could never be seen on a bottom bunk unless I was temporarily left in a cell for a few days without a cell mate. I did sustain a grade 3 shoulder separation in my right shoulder from a motorcycle accident but that would never grant me a bottom bunk pass from medical. Over the years I had gotten used to figuring out how to climb up on the top bunks without a ladder, regardless of my pain.

“Okay Danny. If you think I need to go to church then I'm ready to go to church.” I said tucking in my shirt. Danny looked pretty shocked.”Are you serious?”

“ Yes I'm serious. Why wouldn't I be?”

Danny had a quizzical look but he picked up his paperback Bible from the desk.” I thought you said that everybody in there turns the church service into a joke?”

I rolled my eyes.” I dunno man. Maybe that was just that one time. We should be alright as long as nobody tries to monitor my thoughts. Are you ready to go?” I watched that sneaky smile jump on his face. Something told me that there was a pretty good chance that he was going to try to steal most of the service with his wild stories that seemed to change every time he told them. We heard the scraping of keys outside our cell door and we both turned our heads.

The door slid open and a correctional officer about 5 years younger than me stood outside our door. Deep down inside I felt pity for those guys knowing how much money they had to spend each year on hair cuts. I guess their jobs required them to look sharp.

“ You ready for church Danny?” Asked the blond haired pretty boy guard. It seemed to me as if

he made the statement jokingly. Every prison offers Christian worship but yet the inmates just keep coming back to prison. The correctional officers see this kind of stuff all the time. Danny rubbed one big dollop of hair gel through his hair and then stepped outside of the cell.

“ Yeah, I'm ready can my celly come too?”

The guard shook his head. “ Did he sign up?”

Danny gave the correctional officer a stupid look.” Come on man! Nobody pays attention to that sign up sheet. He can sign up right now.”

I watched the guard slide the door back open so I could come out. I was a bit nervous at first because all the other inmates were staring at me through their cell door windows. The church here at this prison never seemed to drum up a big crowd. All eyes were always on the ones that decided to come to church. Today I would be one of those inmates.

Chapter Four

My gut instinct had panned out to be right. Danny had stolen the floor and now our church service had deviated from talking about God. We were now talking about Danny's case. I couldn't help but wonder how many times this has happened in the prison's church services. The volunteers from outside churches really couldn't help us with our cases but that never hindered the inmates from asking for prayer for their courtroom appearance.

As Danny droned on and on about how unfair it was that the authorities had taken him to jail I couldn't help but wonder what God would want at this time. Did God want us learning about him or did God want us hearing about Danny and how he might be stuck with us for a few months because he just couldn't seem to stay off the needle. I daydreamed a little bit as my celly told us the story of how the bank teller had ratted him out to the police because she knew something wasn't quite right with him by the glossy look in his eyes and his erratic behavior. To his dismay, his girlfriend had patiently waited in the car and was disheartened when the police picked up Danny for his third parole violation just for this year.

Although there was only 4 of us in church today, I couldn't help but wonder if God wanted us hearing stories that did not include him. Wasn't the purpose of church to lead us closer to him and learn more about him? Every church that I have ever visited on the streets consisted of a pastor. And every church service was led by the pastor! Was my celly a pastor? Why was he doing all the talking?

Romans 10:14

“ How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

It was often that visitors from outside churches came to visit and lead a worship service. Sometimes the messages were good but sometimes I felt the inmates talked too much. God had a special plan for Danny and I needed to blot out of my mind the thought that he could never be a pastor because of the lifestyle he lived. I've read through the Bible numerous times in my life but I knew deep down in my heart there was still a lot in there for me to learn. Sometimes it befuddled me how I could read an entire fiction novel and assimilate everything but yet forget some of the most important scriptures in the Bible. Maybe God wanted me to learn just a little bit of his word at a time so that I could spend the rest of my life learning the rest of it!

My daydream abruptly stopped when Danny had finally put a lid on it and one of our outside guests was talking about speaking in tongues. The subject always piqued my interest but I couldn't help but remember my mother's opinion about it. “ *That talking in tongues stuff is a bunch of hooey! I think they do that stuff at your aunt's church.* ” Maybe my mother was right, I really didn't know. But what happened next shocked me.

A big warm hand went on my shoulder. “ Ahbe goo hash nah boo mub majone!”

I waited patiently for something to happen. Nothing. I thought for sure that my attention seeking cellmate would at least pass out on the floor for us but he looked befuddled as well. We all were befuddled. The big hand remained on my shoulder a bit longer as our outside guest continued to speak in tongues. Eventually it slowed down and it turned into a simple prayer. At the time I was very confused but as I write this story a very free man I now know why God led that worship leader to do that. God did that because he knew that would be an experience that I would never forget. God didn't want me to forget that day because that strange man is now my pastor.

Chapter Five

God has a plan for all of us. As a writer I can't think of how many times it has been on my “to do” list to finally come up with a spiritual piece of writing to tell people about Jesus. I believe that although I consistently fail with life God can still use me to tell others about his word. One of my favorite Bible stories is Jonah and the whale. God purposely imprisoned Jonah into the belly of the

whale to get his attention. Just like God had put me in this county jail to grasp my attention as well. Did he want me to tell the inmates about Jesus? Maybe he did. But did I? No.

2 Timothy 1:8 (NIV)

“ So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God.”

The 9 months of incarceration I was doing for my Rosa Parks stunt had left me plenty of time for suffering. Sometimes I felt as though I just didn't have the courage to tell other people about God. I felt I had always led a scrupulous life but I struggled with telling others the good news. I was in my 30's now and struggled with depression along with constant racing thoughts that plagued my mind. I hadn't been in a relationship since I was 22 and had never married. The relationships I had been in never worked out and never lasted more than a month or two. I wasn't good at making friends and my world was soon turning to a life with cats and dogs. It was harder for me to maintain employment since my plastic surgery accident in 2004. But I know that Jesus loves me! And some day he will give me the ability to tell others about him!

Because I belong to the Feds I constantly have to be bounced back and forth between two different prisons for all the different arraignment hearings. Inmates constantly like to refer to this treatment as “Diesel Therapy”. People that have never been to prison don't know the half of the games that the overseers play. I've personally witnessed inmates lose as much as 40lbs in just weeks from Diesel Therapy. They can't activate their phone accounts, can't keep up with their mail because loved ones don't know where to send it. And most importantly, they miss many meals. It is not wise to fight your case, especially on a Federal level.

I'm sitting on my scratchy blanket Indian style going over my paper work in my cell. Danny is at medical for the third time today. The sores on his tongue gross me out and it wouldn't surprise me that he might have AIDS. He talks incessantly so I am glad for the 20 minutes alone that I can review my paper work. The Affidavit I have confuses me. It clearly states that my civil lawsuit against my company prior to my arrest had already been resolved. Really? I didn't remember ever going to court on this issue? Why was I here then? Certainly if my company would have reimbursed me for the money they stole my Rosa Parks stunt would confuse a lot of people? So why were the Feds lying? Why was there exclamation points all over the place? Was I not only sitting in a chair?

Jesus died on the cross for our sins. They nailed him to a cross. They whipped him 39 times to be exact. But what had he done wrong? Was he trying to pick up a paycheck? No he wasn't. He was hanging on the cross getting ready to die for our sins. I'm sure a “Sit In” like I did would have sounded a lot more benign. Just before Jesus finally died on the cross he looked up to God and said “It is finished”. I still can't help but wonder how the government in those Biblical days were able to drum up charges against our Lord and savior. But what I did know was that after God experienced all that I'm sure he could understand how I felt as I scrutinized my paper work. I eventually put the papers back into the manilla folder and picked up two pieces of loose leaf paper that I had written on. As a writer I knew that at some point I should eventually dedicate a story to God but I found myself constantly succumbing to writer's block. Just 2 papers? Was God only worth 2 papers to me? I was capable of writing 470 page mystery novels but unfortunately when it came to writing a book to lead people to

Jesus all I had were these two pieces of loose leaf paper with the writings of a disgruntled man. I knew God could have me do a lot more better than that. But what did he want me to tell people? Just prison stories? Maybe juvenile stories? By the age of 13 there were already rumors about me that the reason my middle school was under construction was because I had blown it up. It wasn't true. Yes at the age of 13 I did indeed plant a remote controlled explosive under the stair well but they were firecrackers as small as my thumb. I got expelled for that but I think deep down my electronics teacher was impressed with my ingenuity. Or not. Luckily at that time Mr. President Bush had not coined the term "Weapon of Mass Destruction" yet so I didn't end up going to Juvenile Hall.

When I returned to school the next year I had accrued many nicknames within the first week."Unabomber" and "Mad bomber" ended up getting used the most. The firecracker incident was only meant to be a prank but all the nicknames left me feeling compelled to do bigger bolder things. I found that I could get a pretty good rush by stealing cars. I was only 14 and already known by many cops. I didn't have any interest in drugs but I was having a field day with vandalizing. The preppy kids in school were starting to hate me because I was trashing their house in the wee hours of the morning. Because I was only 14 the newspapers weren't allowed to release my name so they circumvented by commonly referring to me as the "East Earl Boy" for every time I had struck again. I once had unloaded 5 cartons of eggs all over the house of a person who had once ratted me out to the police. Needless to say it was hard for me to procure employment by the time I reached 16. Fortunately the Mennonite pastor down the street offered me free counseling and helped me with finding a job at a bakery just three miles away. They loved my work ethic and were disappointed when I left for a higher paying job at a smorgasbord just across the street. For the next seven years I lived a very quiet life but that all changed the day I met a plastic surgeon.

God is good and he knows when we need him. God also puts many challenges before us and if we trust him we can get through those challenges. I hear stories all the time from other Christians giving their testimonies about their life before they met God. Many of them describe what they call that "empty hole" in their lives. I never could fully fathom what they were talking about but for me I had always struggled with being bored. I had struggled with so much adversity that every time life would start getting easy for me I would question it and end up doing something stupid. Stupid things that would land me in jail or have me reach a financial debacle. For me I only felt that "empty hole" when things started looking up. Maybe things would start going well at work or I would be in a relationship. I would find myself crying out to God asking "what's next?". Did God have a special plan for me?

I looked at the writings on the two pieces of loose leaf papers. Weak. And confusing on top of that. I honestly didn't know if I could ever steel myself to complete this project. What would I write about? How would my writings help lead people to God? Would it be as easy as writing crime novels? What about dialogue? Who would be doing the talking in my story?

These thoughts continued to plague my mind as I tried to enjoy what little time I had left before Danny would return from medical and chew my ear off. I knew that my career as a writer would have breaks in it but I would always end up submitting more stories to my publishers later down the road. Everybody has heard of the saying that the pen is mightier than the sword and it was literally the only weapon left that the Feds would ever let me play with. Maybe my stories down the road would upset my readers considering I had always written under the pen name "Pastor Edwards" and I was nowhere near close to being a pastor. For the time being, I was feeling as though God would want me to write a

book that focused less on myself and would glorify him. I made a promise to him that day. I would use my gift he has given me to glorify him. I would use that special gift to the best of my ability. I promised myself one more thing that would make God proud. I would put in my best effort, and I would keep it clean.

Chapter Six

6/13/2012-F.D.C. Philadelphia @ 11AM

The floor of the bull pen still looked the same as it did 7 years ago. Nasty. Unfortunately I was stuck sitting on it Indian style in a green jumpsuit covered in dust bunnies. The only sounds to be heard was soft mumbling from the other inmates and an occasional twinkle sound emanating from the dirty toilet that sat off in the corner. Everybody in this room was nervous because today was the day that we would finally get to see a judge. A federal judge, the kind that never smile.

I clicked my water bottle a few times and made it clear to the other 8 inmates that I was not eavesdropping in on their whispers. Or “ear hustling” as they like to call it. 7 years ago when I sat in this very same holding cell I was accused of being an undercover cop. With no tattoos on my body and no sinister look in my eyes, I always tended to stick out like a sore thumb when trying to blend in with these brazen inmates. Not to mention I keep to myself and offer very little information about my personal life. The uptight inmates looked relieved when they saw a heavy set Spanish man talking to me as if he knew me. He did. His name was Ramos AKA “Gordo” which meant “big” in Spanish. He was once my cell mate back at the other jail. The best one I had out of the 22 different cell mates I had lived with in the past 9 months. I had ended up losing him as a cell mate when he fought back with another inmate that tried to extort him and had to go to “The Hole” (solitary confinement).

Gordo smiled. “All I left with my cell mate was half a bag of coffee. I think my cell mate thought I was going to leave him with all my commissary.”

I half chuckled.” What did you do with those black Nikes you bought?”

I watched as he gently rolled up the cuffs of his pant legs to keep them from soaking up the filthy grime on the floor. I was certain that the floor we were sitting on hadn't been cleaned in over a

year. Probably 5 or 6 years for the toilet covered in brown streak marks.

“They let me take them with to this prison. I have them along with my personal stuff. I'm glad to be out of that other jail aren't you?”

I didn't know how to react to the question. Jail was jail.”Yeah I guess so. I'm sure my celly back there is freaking out wondering who they are going to have him bunk with next. All I left him with was some envelopes. More than likely he will sell them for an eight ball of coffee.”

It was Gordo's first time in jail and I felt that he was going to do pretty well with it. He had explained to me earlier that his lawyer had set up a deal where he could plea out and only do eight years instead of the 15 years they were trying to throw at him. He wasn't from the U.S but frequented the states enough times until he finally got caught up in a big drug bust. It was a lifestyle that he had grown up with and it had made him a lot of money. A lot of money that he would now get to spend on lawyer fees and over priced commissary. Gordo's hobbies in prison were eating and sleeping. That's pretty much all he did all day long. You couldn't ask for a better cell mate and he even went out of his way to say excuse me when a fart would occasionally slip out. He maxed out his commissary each month and usually gave most of it away. He had to slow down a little bit when the inmates started to take advantage of his kindness. Gordo was a humble man but often the inmates underestimated him and took the liberty of stealing from him right out from under his nose. That's when Gordo would “throw down” or “pop off“ as the inmates like to call it. I even got the privilege of taking a good look at his home made shank made of plastic. Gordo was half bald and had quite the potbelly on him but with the way he carried himself I imagined that he did alright with the ladies. Although society would deem him a thug one would hardly think so after watching the way he treated other people. He was kind towards everyone and showed respect to even the small fish in jail. Gordo was the type of guy that would never cut in line or be seen shouting like a fool. He was determined to do his time the way it should be done. Having consideration for others.

I watched closely as he tugged on a loose string at the bottom of his green jumper. I could tell an interesting question was coming because he started to look around for ear hustlers.

“ You think they might let you go home today?” He finally asked.

They say misery loves company so I tried not to act too thrilled around these other Federal inmates that could be facing 10-life. I had once been in their shoes and really hated the small timers that came through the system and acted all giddy all the time. They were dubbed a mockery to the system.

“ I don't know what to think Gordo. My public pretender really didn't say. I've been locked up 9 months now and my guidelines call for 3-9 months. I've already gone all the way on this one. You'd think after all this I should definitely be entitled to my last pay check.”

Gordo just smiled that clever smile of his. I think he had a pretty good hunch that I was going home today. It made no sense why the Feds were sweating a minor disruption at work.

“Man.....they really got you good. Stole money from you AND put you in jail. That's gangsta!”

I didn't dismiss the idea that maybe the flagging company I had worked for were gangsters. How they were above the law I really didn't know.

I stared at an army of ants fighting over a bread crumb."A radio too. My uncle had given me that radio."

Gordo looked up with assurance in his eyes."You'll be alright. You can always find another job."

"Thanks for the encouragement. Do you think you'll do alright today?"

"I already signed a deal for 8 years with my lawyer and the prosecutor agreed. I'm pretty sure the judge will go along with it."

I knew how these court cases usually panned out because I'd seen and heard so many."Yeah if the prosecutor agreed then you have nothing to worry about. Just remember what I told you about Federal prison. It's not nearly as bad as this county crap. They have a bigger budget so there will be more things for you to do." I said speaking from experience.

Our conversation was suddenly curtailed by the loud jingling sound of a humongous key being shoved into our cell door lock. The door swung open and a tall man covered in Marine tattoos looked at us as if we were nobodies. The man dressed in blue looked at me and pointed his key at me.

"Steidler get ready, your on deck!"

Chapter Seven

It all seemed so surreal. Everything was the same as it was years ago except for one thing. Me. I wasn't the same. I was no longer afraid of these people and I knew that there would be no tears shed today. I once described jail as a roller coaster. It looks daunting and scary at first but once you've done it you find yourself doing it over and over again until the point where it almost seems fun. One thing I noticed about the court room was it was very clean. That only led me to believe that it didn't get used much. And that of course could only mean one thing. Federal crimes don't happen that often. *So why would the Feds pick up a case so silly as an X- employee gluing himself to a chair?* I didn't know. But God knew.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

