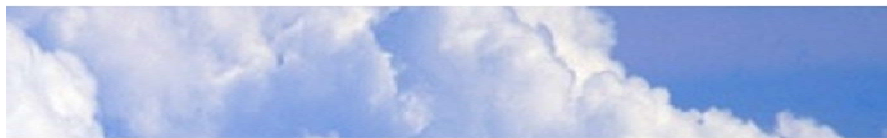


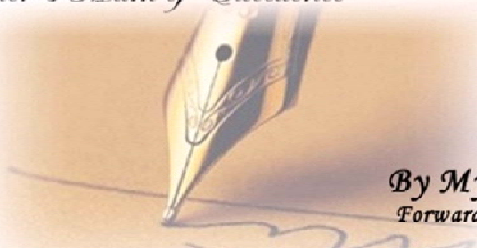
A Little Slice of Heaven

For All People of All Ages



An Anthology of African American Family Folklore

Writer's Mark of Excellence



*By Myrna Roberts
Forward By Bernice Jones*

*Released specifically for the 2007 Celebration of
African American Authors, Oklahoma State Capitol*



A Little Slice of Heaven

Psalm 68:11

A Little Slice of Heaven
An Anthology of
African American Family Folklore

MyrnaRoberts.com
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

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Definitions for bolded words
contained in the book are found in the
Glossary of Terms

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Special Thanks to:
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Forward

As I read this simple but profound **anthology** of stories, I was reminded of many examples of such wisdom from our forefathers and other members of the community during my childhood. Today, as an adult, I find myself leaning more and more to the teachings of my youth. These little bits of knowledge have made my life richer and more interesting. Teachings about love, self esteem, respect, integrity and honor were eminent in our ancestors, which made getting along in society more placid.

I hope that as you read these narratives you will find the idea of each one as beneficial to you as they were for me.

God Bless,

Bernice Jones

Former Vice Mayor, Tatums, Oklahoma

I've Learned:

You can cure helplessness with a good plan.

A Little Slice of Heaven

Folklore Dedicated to the Memory of George Hooks

(February 1, 1887 - January 6, 1951)

Several times during the new year, I have watched and listened to various people, mostly TV evangelists, who say that we are moving into a great philosophical harvest season. They declare this harvest and then dance a little gig, then they proclaim a great time of rest that we're *fixin'* to go into. Then they dance some more.

What a glorious time!! Last year was a hard year for everybody and we're all tired. Most *saved*

folk are simply *refusin'* to have more of the same! ... swearing by the mercies of God that things will be "better in 2007". We wipe the sweat from our brows and again declare rest and harvest. Then dance that victory dance. Whew, God is so good!

Well, right before you dance that dance a third time; and declare rest and harvest in the same breath, will you take just a few moments to let me tell you what I've learned about harvest? It's just a simple little story and I promise it won't take long.

* * *

One day, just a few years ago, I ran up on my cousin, Steve, and asked him the most serious question I ever uttered to him. You see, Cousin Steve was older than my parents, so I was honor-bound to give him the utmost respect. We were in our family cemetery, burying another cousin – one of Steve's cohorts. Since Steve was so much older than I, and since he spent his time in Wichita and I had spent mine in Wanderlust, USA and abroad, I

figured that he would think I was just another crazy harebrained wacko. The stable sensibility of his generation is sometimes put off by my radical activism. Therefore, I said what I had to say quickly before he had a chance to dismiss me. Simply put, I had put Steve in a box that he didn't belong in. I had done unto him BEFORE he'd done unto me.

Like I said, I ran up to Steve and said in one long breath, *"Cuttin' Steve, my name is myrna roberts – you know my mamma and daddy – Bernice and C.J. -- and my purpose in life is to teach, train and tell our children who they are. I write history and I'm a genealogist – Ah wanna know what you can tell me 'bout 'cho da-de that I can tell your great gran chil-ren. I take history very seriously and I've **empirically** studied this entire region and I've determined that there are certain key people in our history that strategically made things happen and yo da-de, George Hooks, was one o' them people 'cause he was born in the 1800s an' he made the trip out here from Alabama to Oklahoma an' he knew a whole bunch o' slaves and if he knew them*

slaves he knew their survival tools so Ah think his story deserves to be told... Sir."

Steve stopped in mid stride, swung around and stared into my eyes for a thousand years. He gazed so deeply into my pupils that I was sure he saw every one of our fore parents somewhere in the depths of my face. That's when I knew I had misjudged him. He had heard every single solitary word I said. He knew what I was talking about better than I knew what I was talking about. I had to back up a step or two because Steve was just as passionate as I was and the intensity was too potent – too pure.

Then Steve said, "I know who you are girl. I've known you all your life. Now what, exactly, do you *wanna* know?" I thought that was funny because I was at least 40 years old and he was calling me 'girl'.

"Sir," I said, "If you just had one idea, just one thought to funnel through to our babies both born and unborn... this one idea will be the thing that

makes George Hooks live forever ... this is the one thing that your dad did that exemplified his pioneer spirit. But this isn't about George Hooks; this is about saving our children! Give me the one legendary thing that George Hooks knew that will bless us for a thousand years.

Cousin Steve thought for a mere second while he pinched his chin. Then he took up a farmers' stance. His left hand bent at the elbow, fist extended in front of his body while he tossed his right hand to and fro, first over his left arm and then away to the right. He made a continuous motion back and forth with his right hand, as if he was sowing seed ... pretending to toss seeds on the ground.... Steve said, "My daddy planted huge fields of corn. When he sowed them corn seeds, *eeevveerry* now and again..." He said that as he tossed right hand over left, "*Eeevveerry* now and again, he would throw a watermelon seed in with them corn seeds ... and them watermelon seeds was like a little slice of heaven."

Steve smiled a nostalgic smile as he stared into the distant past. "Yes sir, that watermelon was like a slice of heaven". With that said Steve spun on his heels and walked away.

That small conversation was the first adult conversation I had ever had with Steve ... and I didn't know it yet, but it was also my last conversation with Steve. I wondered what he meant.... I thought that maybe the watermelon seed somehow cross germinated with the corn and made a hybrid juicy sweet corn; in some strange way the watermelon seed must have changed the texture of the corn. I shrugged my shoulders and stared at Cousin Steve's back as he strolled through the graves of the cemetery. I tried my best to understand but I couldn't. Cousin Steve's wisdom had escaped me. I knew he had told me something great, but I just couldn't understand.

A few months later, maybe that year, maybe the next, I visited that same family cemetery again. This time we were burying Cousin Steve. I found myself caught in a time warp, standing in the same

place wondering the same thing... "What was the deal with the watermelon and corn seeds?" That's when Renee, Steve's daughter, asked, "Does anyone have something special to say about my daddy?" I had to snap out of it. I shook off my **quantum physics** stupor and spoke up. I told the crowd of mourners about the seeds and asked them what it meant.

Steve's siblings, Millicent and Theron, laughed out loud and spoke up. "No," Millicent chuckled, "The seeds don't mutate in that way. When you start *pullin'* that corn – that's what you call it when you harvest corn, 'pulling corn' ..."

Theron chimed in, "Harvest time is *vvvvveerrrrryyyy* labor intensive. It just ain't easy. When we were children we didn't have all the modern conveniences that you have now. We worked hard in those fields. It was hot and miserable. I mean it was horrible. An' when you pullin' that corn in that hundred degree heat and fool around and fin' one o' them watermelons, we would crack it open and dive in on the SPOT. It was cool

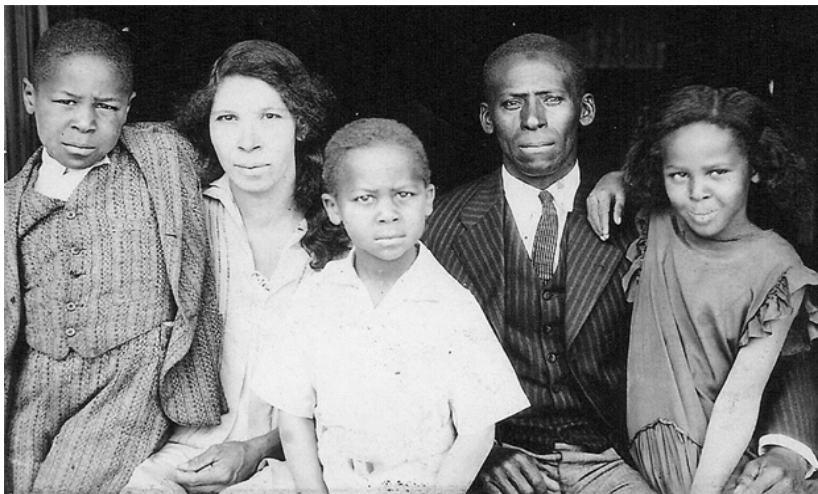
even in the heat. It was wet 'cause it ain't nothin' but water and sugar and that sugar gave you a tremendous burst of energy..." Theron took on that same nostalgic look that Steve had. "Yes sir", Theron said as he sliced through the air with his open palm, "It was like a little slice of heaven."

Then Millicent said with a voice of authority, "What Steve was telling you was to always remember ... when you plan for a harvest, you had better PLAN for your rest periods in the midst of the labor 'cause harvest ain't NEVER easy. Harvest is just as hard as breaking ground and sowing seed. You should sow rest and refreshment in with the crop on the front end and not as an after thought. Not only is harvest labor intensive, it's also time-sensitive; therefore the rest periods are short and few.

Having said all that, Ah'm jus' sayin' think on it some. Thas all I'm sayin, jus' think on it some before you declare harvest and rest in the same sentence.

The Family of George & Perchie Hooks

of Tatums, Oklahoma



L-R: Morris, Perchie, Steven, George, Millicent; circa 1930-31. Photo provided by Theron Hooks.

I've Learned:

People who are mean at work are mean at home and they live in hell with themselves.

Revelation

One day, while working at my computer, the Spirit of The Lord came upon me. I wasn't alarmed. By that time I was very familiar with His persona. I know Him as "**Paraclete**". He told me to get my pen, that He had a good outline for a new story that I should write; something different, something fictional.

I was naturally interested because I'd never known of any instance where Paraclete dealt in fiction. So I backed away from the computer, rubbed my hands together and smiled inwardly, spiritually stepping up to the occasion. With my acceptance

of the challenge, I was immediately transformed to a different reality. It was sort of like exercising with a personal trainer: exhilarating, fascinating and breathtaking. Every step that Paraclete took, I took. Every word that Paraclete said, I said. Every breath that Paraclete breathed, I breathed. It was like a dream but I was wide awake. Our meeting of the minds went like this.

Paraclete said, "Chapter one. There's a ghost on a highway." I repeated, with a smile, "There's a ghost on a highway."

Paraclete said, "There's a ghost on a highway in Louisiana." I repeated, marveling at the thought of writing a story about a ghost on a highway in Louisiana; especially considering that I was the sole witness of my sister's death on a highway in Louisiana.

Paraclete said, "There's a ghost on a highway in Louisiana and SHE is really mean." Slowly and thoughtfully, I said "hum, a she-**haint**". I got an eerie feeling. I followed but ceased the **recitation**.

Paraclete said, "There's a mean female ghost on a highway in Louisiana and she is so fierce that she won't allow anyone to even change a flat tire on the highway. She haunts the road and the locals see her often."

"So the plot thickens," I marveled ... "Very interesting". I pondered the thought for a while, and then signaled that I was ready to go on.

Paraclete said, "Chapter three. There is an angry she-ghost on a highway in Louisiana and she fiercely claims the roadway as her own. She frightens strangers and locals alike, menacing all who stop on her territory." I nod my understanding of the plot of this story, just a little annoyed by the coincidence between the plot and my sister's death, but I was more intrigued than annoyed.

Paraclete continues, "The towns' people who lived near the Louisianan highway, being good Catholic citizens, commissioned an exorcist to rid their environment of the pesky **poltergeist**." At this point I stopped pretending to write and settled

back into my pleather high back executive chair. My eyes narrowed as I stared into space. I was visualizing the place where my sister died. I didn't need to imagine that place because I was very familiar with the highway, the town, and the people. I could see it all. I became a part of the environment. I was there. Please, walk with me for just a moment. This won't take long.

Chapter five. There's a woman ghost haunting a highway in Louisiana and the people living in the surrounding area are so afraid of the ghost that they have secretly commissioned a Jesuit priest to **exorcise** the spirit from the roadway. The Louisiana highway patrol officially closed the highway as the priest, Father Michael Antwine, arrived at the scene of haunting. Father Antwine summoned the Lord by chanting Latin songs and casting pungent incense about the highway.

At this point the story takes on a whole new aura. It is no longer a cute little story about a funny little ghost but now, there's a priest on a highway very seriously performing a holy sacrament

of the Roman Catholic Church. At every inch of that haunted place Father Antwine could be heard uttering a steady chant that officially put the devil and his legions in their place. In both English and Latin, over and over again, the exorcist spoke from the book "Of Exorcisms and Certain Supplications":

"I command you, unclean spirit, whoever you are, along with all your minions now attacking the servants of God, by the mysteries of the incarnation, passion, resurrection and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, by the coming of our Lord for judgment, that you tell me by some sign your name, and the day and hour of your departure. I command you, moreover, to obey me to the letter, I who am a minister of God despite my unworthiness; nor shall you be emboldened to harm in any way this creature of God, or the by-

standers, or any of their possessions." ...

Very ceremonially, each motion had a specific purpose. Methodically, Father Antwine performed his duties knowing that this was a life threatening, solemn occasion. Hours passed while Father Antwine administered his duties. The place of haunting came completely under the clergy's control. During Father Antwine's mass, the fog rolled back and the sun hung in the sky longer than normal. Because of the father's prayers and supplications everything stopped. Not a rabbit moved, nor a cricket chirped.

The highway was completely under Father Antwine's command. Total harmony is the idea that comes to mind. As the sun dipped beneath the horizon and all the animals yielded to the dominion of God's chosen son, the screeching she-haint grabbed Father Antwine around the throat. Amidst various assorted expletives and conjugated *cuss* words, Father Antwine understood the hiss that suggested that he remove his anus from her high-

way. Then the darkness came, the crickets chirped, the fog rolled in, and Father Antwine **pensively** removed his anus from her highway.

Chapter seven. There's a bold feminine haunting on a Louisiana highway and the commissioned Jesuit did not exorcise her after hours of prayer and supplication. During a gathering of the relevant politicians and clergy in the area, it was determined that Bishop Hezekiah Jones, a 65 year old African American preacher who was a spiritual father to many and pastor of the local Pentecostal Holiness congregation was the man they commissioned to cast out the demonic spirit that dwelled on their highway.

Bishop Jones appears with an entourage of saints; all equipped with quart jars of holy water and oil to anoint the highway. Bishop Jones and the saints called on the very angels to expel the demons. He commanded the demon, in the Name of Jesus to flee to the pit of hell, taking the haint's power and authority to walk around on earth. Bishop's heavy handed, dogmatic method inflicted

fear and respect. He boldly used scripture from the New and Old Testaments as his personal authority. His formal education was of the third grade but his power was greater than world class – it was God class.

Bishop Jones preached, as traffic whirled by at the 65 mph speed limit, the unadulterated Word of God. The choir sang songs and the church mothers spoke in tongues at the top of their lungs. They had revival right there on the highway and every living creature of the air and the earth and of the swamp that heard, received the message that Jesus was Lord. The unwanted spirit enjoyed the sermon. She cried and thanked the Bishop from the bottom of her heart for bringing that strong Word from on high. Then she promptly threw a brick into the windshield of their church bus and dismissed them all as she demanded that they leave her sanctuary.

Well, at this point I have to confess, the story outline is really messing with my religion because Paraclete seems to be ignoring heavenly principles.

No demon is supposed to be able to withstand the aforementioned remedies if the application is pure and genuine Godliness. I held up the progression of the story because I had to mourn the **non-event**. The demon was supposed to be gone now and I just did not understand.

Paraclete continued. Chapter Nine. There's a haunting on a highway and two of the strongest clergy in Louisiana were not able to send the spirit packing; at least not in the time permitted under their contracts. The community is clamoring for a solution and the church folk are putting pressure on the highway department to reroute traffic because it's just too dangerous to be on the highway.

So, some of the more powerful ... gentlemen ... commissioned the likes of Voodoo Queen Marie Devereaux to come and expel the spirit from the highway. Marie drives up to the predesignated spot in her late model BMW signature series. She sees the judge, the police captain, and the corrupt businessman standing at the appropriate highway marker and stopped her vehicle. The cop opened

her car door to reveal ravishingly fresh, clean leather seats. Marie placed one bare foot on the ground and suddenly put her foot back in her car as if the ground was hot.

"Oo we" Marie croons. *"Mi not know what kind of curses ya gotten urselves into out hea but dis is no regula spirit"*. She tisked at the skuzzy trio as she pointed her finger from one to the other. She was a beautiful woman with dark skin. Her ankle length skirt matched the kente cloth turban which was piled high on her elegant head.

Marie closed her car door and let the window down with one push of a button. *"Mi never seen such a ting before. De presence is powerful strong and me-ee-eeen."* Marie grabbed a single sheet of paper from her passenger seat and handed it to the judge.

The judge shrieked, "you hand me an invoice but you haven't rid us of the imp!"

"You know our deal." Marie snapped. "I come, you pay; and dis ain't no imp. Imps I know, dis is a force I never seen befo – maybe a familiar spirit or someting. Na pay me ma money fo ya really be curst bad fo sho!"

The judge signaled to the criminal who peeled off two crisp bills from his bank roll and gave them to Marie. *"Dem naa,"* Marie snapped in another language as she raised her window and drove away. The men shrugged their shoulders, not knowing that she said "I have already gone."

* * *

Now, you have the extent of my conversation with Paraclete that balmy February morning in the year of our Lord, 2005. I thought our little outline would make a fantastic book, but I needed to know the end. So I asked Paraclete to tell me the end of the story. He said nothing. It was as if He were not there. It was like wondering if your comrade is on the other end of the telephone. I found myself saying aloud, "Are you there?" Still I got no an-

swer. Days passed and even weeks, but still no word from Paraclete.

The silence was nerve racking and the more time passed, the more despair I felt regarding the story. Periodically I would ask The Lord to finish the story but to no avail.

One day about three weeks after our last conversation on the subject, I participated in a little prayer and supplication of my own. I went down on my face and earnestly repented of my sins and told The Lord that even with my vivid imagination, there was no way I could finish the story without his help. I confessed that initially I'd thought it a game but now I realized that it was too important not to know the truth. I pleaded with God to tell me the answer to the million dollar question: "Why couldn't God's people get my sister's spirit off the highway?" I was suffering so I employed the age old remedy of my forefathers. I wailed for awhile.

That's when it happened. Outside of time and only in the way of Kingdom phenomenon, Para-

lete, who is the mighty counselor and comforter comes back. He croons and chuckles in that way that fathers sooth their daughter's fears, "Do you want me to tell you why the remedies can't expel your sister's spirit from the highway? Its because that's not your sister's spirit on that roadway, it's YOUR spirit on the roadway. You left your persona there. You need to go back to Louisiana and retrieve your pieces. You left part of yourself there! That part that is not of God, YOU need to handle and put it where it belongs. No one else can do that."

My mind flashed back to when I wanted to be mean to people at the scene of the accident but somehow grace and mercy prevailed and I humbled myself to be kind in spite of my trauma. I never managed to regain my ferocious military bearing – the soldier's stance after that. I had been much kinder since Karen's death.

"You must go back to Louisiana and gather your pieces. Move quickly." Paraclete said. Immediately thereafter I was laid off the best job I ever

had and off to New Orleans we went; me, my 13 year old daughter Ashley, and my 17 year old god daughter, Helen.

The miracles that happened during that trip – well, that’s another book. But I will say that God gave me the opportunity to go back before the city was destroyed and before important friends died. I went back and gathered my fragments while they were still where I left them. My acquaintances, 18 years later, were still sitting in the same places; same pew, same bar stool, same stoop, same porch, same, same, same. I visited with and interviewed extensively many people that I had not seen since my sister died, 18 years hence. I interviewed my old associates and friends, those rich people; some Rastafarian, some Muslim, many Christian, some homosexual, most heterosexual, some street people, doctors, lawyers; shop keepers, in the French Quarter, in the lower ninth ward, back of town, on the West bank and in New Orleans East.

As I questioned those people about our relationships, I was amazed to realize that I really was a

different person. For 18 years I had been fragmented, crippled and hurt. I was amazed to realize that for some reason, maybe lack of courage, I had refused to be angry about Karen dying. I had left my anger on the Louisiana highway and I needed that anger if I was going to function properly as a whole person here, on planet Earth.

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I've Learned:

Time is not money.

Time is time and money is money.

The Face

Having returned to Oklahoma City after years in bigger cities, I noticed one thing about "Urban Oklahoma" culture that is missing in other cities. Oklahomans listen while other city folks are too busy to communicate. I recognized this one day while stumbling through a large hardware store feeling overwhelmed. I was sure I'd never find my selection, when from nowhere a store clerk asked, "May I help you?"

Well, there were several things unusual about his question from my perspective. I considered the question a mere formality because he really didn't want to help me. So, just when I opened my mouth to say "no", from somewhere inside of me a naughty spark ignited and my answer was actually a teasing challenge to his question.

Slowly I replied, "Why yes! I'm looking for the tiny little thing that you clip to your ceiling when you have the square metal thingies that you put the Styrofoam stuff in..." I made sure to act this out using arm gestures and doing my dumb blond-come black chick act that nobody can tolerate. I also made sure to use up my nine seconds. You see, I've noticed that generally from the time you start talking to a stranger, you have roughly 9 seconds to rouse their attention. If you don't get your point across in 9 seconds, you can actually see what I call the "closing of the face." Well, to my surprise, the store clerk didn't back away and close his face. On the contrary, he stepped closer, eyes wide and sparkling with interest, he said with a big Western

smile, "What do you use this *thingie* for?" Then, simultaneously we both said, "To hang plants on." That was funny and we both laughed. At that point, he didn't say, "its on Isle 13." He proceeded to walk with me to the other side of the store, which was about a hundred miles. He said, "If I send you there you'll get lost. That piece is so small you'll never find it." He went on and on, friendly chatting until there we stood, right in front of the acoustic ceiling tile plant hangers.

I thanked him for the help. He smiled and winked at me as he walked away. Ten years later, I still remember the small exchange. I think it was "the wink" that left the lasting impression ... I think he knew I was being a jerk. I gave him a mask in front of "the face", a caricature and in return he gave me "the real thing." This wasn't about plant hangers. It was about people giving other people a chance. Everybody should have a fair chance to be honorable.

I've Learned:
Secrets have power generations
after the truth is irrelevant.

The Dead Bird Syndrome

One spring morning I rose two hours earlier than normal and decided to get a head start at work. I vigorously dressed in a lightweight linen suit with matching heels and headed for the office. I was so happy! My computer graphics company had recently moved to a new location that I believed was in an affluent area of town and I felt particularly blessed to be positioned for prosperity in this way. I parked my car and practically skipped along as I wondered simple things.

I was considering a new marketing strategy for my new location. I began to outline a rather **ob-tuse** strategy whereby I would pretend to be an employee of the company rather than the owner because I didn't want to upset the delicate socio-demographical environment already in place. I believed that as an African American female, my company may not be well received in a vicinity where European American males were prominent.

Well received or not, all was right with the world at this particular point and I felt as though I could conquer the world. I hummed along as I approached the storefront, reached into my purse to get my new keychain out. At the very moment that I brought the keys out, I approached the door and there, laying on the ground directly in front of the door was one of the most horrible sights I had every seen. Petrified, I shrieked my alarm and came to a complete halt. My heart leapt in my chest as I realized, yes, it was what I thought it was... A dead bird lay at my feet with a broken neck.

Fear quickly mixed with anger as I dashed to my car, tore out of the parking lot and sped home. I lived a short distance away so within minutes I pulled into my driveway, hit the garage door opener and jumped out of the car, leaving the motor running. I ran into the condo and took the stairs two at a time. When I reached my bedroom I violently shook my husband awake and cried, "Emmett, wake up! Those white people killed a bird and put in front of my office door!"

Emmett jumped straight to his feet with concern. He soothed my tears and admonished me to calm down. Emmett dressed quickly. Straight away we got into the car and hurriedly went back to the office. As soon as we reached the parking lot and Emmett saw the angle at which the sun hit the huge storefront windows. Before we even got out of the car to approach the building, at the very instant that he threw the car into park, Emmett glared at me in disgust and yelled, "Girl! Have you lost your mind? That bird flew into that window and broke his neck." Immediately I whined a **per-**

functory, "No it didn't," that didn't even sound true to my own ears. We approached the curb together and he was still fussing. At that moment we were reduced to our least common denominator. In the past Emmett and I had quarreled about all kinds of issues but at this moment we were "*fussin*" on unchartered territory because all truth had changed. We weren't husband and wife debating mortal issues of life. We weren't the preacher and wife contemplating biblical foundation. We weren't even CFO and CEO discussing company methodology. Neither were we two professional adults arguing over abstract linear theory. We were the children of an enslaved people arguing over the systemic world order; little people, debating universal change, and we were honor bound to make humankind different from the experience. Emmett had slipped out of American Standard English and continued in the familiar ebonic dialect passed down from generation to generation of the enslaved people to their almost middle-class children. "*You is 'bout ta start ah race riot out hur an' da' bird hit da' wall in mid flight.*" With each word I got a little

smaller. I was overwhelmed with the gravity of my mistake. "*Whur is da bird gurl?*" he growled.

I was forced to admit that the groundskeeper had already picked up the mess. At that point the whole world stopped and dared me to get off. I was experiencing what is known as *cognitive dissonance*. The word cognitive implies working thought process and dissonance meaning conflict. Together the phrase establishes conflicting information in a person's thinking process, a conflict which can not be resolved without change.

I recalled how good "*them wiit peoples*" had been to me. How they helped me get into the lease, get commercial insurance, and get utilities and alarms systems turned on. Those "*wiit peoples*" had helped my company move from a mom and pop country store to a world-class computer graphic center over night. But for some reason I believed the worse in the business community. My attitude showed tendencies of a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. I had predesignated unaccep-

tance by my new peers and was in the process of scheming against them when I saw the bird.

Time stood still and God gave me a chance to ponder my stupidity. At that very moment I was forced to become a new person. I had to examine my motives under a virtual magnifying glass, but first my mind jumped to the grave realizations that: 1) I was potentially capable of starting racial unrest because as a employer and business owner my position in the African American community granted me capacity to influence groups of people; and 2) as an employer I had workers at my disposal who pretty much did as I directed (i.e., they might carry a picket sign not only because they were on-the-clock but also because I might have persuaded them into conformity or convinced them that it was the right thing to do).

I pondered my error for a long time. That laborious second became a minute, then an hour, a day, a month, a year. In my mind that simple little sparrow became the metaphoric embodiment of the millions of cruel jokes that fate — slavery, **Mani-**

fest Destiny and **jim crow** — had played on the whole United States. His innocent death coupled with my irrational accusation of malicious intent represented 400 years of atrocious misinterpretations similar to the Texas Troubles of 1860, Tulsa's Black Wall Street of 1921, the Rosewood incident of 1923, and millions of other examples of hurt and shame directed against an entire people for one group's delusion of grandeur. That situation grew into what I now call the "Dead Bird Syndrome" (DBS). DBS is what I call it when someone irrationally reacts strongly to something that could be a figment of the imagination.

But I had to ask myself the hard question, 'was I the one living in a delusion?' Initially, I criticize myself severely and set out to make positive changes in my own mind and in the structure of my company to assure that I cleaned up any poisonous attitudes I had leaked into the organization. I began to recognize and improve attitudes that helped me take control and then shape my company. The very first decisions were to introduce myself to the

neighboring business owners, treat them with honor and respect, and immediately offer them some sort of preferential treatment. I used this sincere greeting as a way of informally surveying the racial attitudes of potential customers around me.

Secondly, I had to admit that there were historical reasons for my anxiety – events that I could do nothing about. I could only affect my piece of the cultural fixation. I had to find the healthy balance (i.e., recognize reality but creating my own destiny and the destiny of my company). I counted myself as aggressively sensible on the matter. My family and personal values dictated that all people be assessed on their own merit. However, my racial and ethnic value system were quite different – I was trained to distrust European Americans, especially where business was concerned, and to believe they would always discriminate unfairly against me. I had to admit that while I was reacting to my own thought process, those thoughts were not my own ideas. If my company was going to survive, I was going to have to dump all the baggage I carried,

like cleaning a closet. Sometimes you take everything out of the closet, only to put most of the items back in. I had to examine everything, dust it off and then determine if I could still wear it.

To that end, my next decision was to hire a diverse sales staff. That worked out well because each salesperson had his/her own niche, none of which measure out the way I figured. I thought blacks would sell well to blacks and white sell well to whites, etc. It turned out that my African American male, whose hobby was cars, sold well to people in the car business, no matter what racial or ethnic background. I personally sold well to Asians of Persian descent (who knew?). The white female was able to sell tremendously in the black community. The trend seemed to be more along the lines of interests and hobbies rather than race.

I spent (and continue to spend) the next several years, dedicating personal and professional time to studying interdisciplinary approaches to shaping (not manipulating) the ways people treat one another. This art involves examining culture, gender,

sexual orientation, religion, age, traumatic experiences and many other variables. I count this new attitude as “ministry” because ministry means, “service”. Service means offering one’s self to others as an example, sending a good message and hoping that message will, in time, be understood and accepted.

In conclusion, I must admit that I never would have realized my erroneous attitude had I not had help. The interaction between my husband and me displayed some very important communication elements. The elements that changed a whole series of human relation problems were:

1. A trusted party was present. Many times when people are faced with a drama or trauma, they transmit or send a message to their most trusted confidant. That confidant, the receiver, usually shares previously established common ground with the sender. When common ground exist, communication becomes very efficient.

2. The receiver of the original message must be courageous enough to communicate honest feedback to the original sender, in a clear and unmistakable language, void of ambiguity.

3. The sender of the original message must be willing to trust the feedback of their confidant and then

4. Be willing to realize when old social traditions are inconsistent with reality. If old attitudes are out of balance with reality, then change the attitudes in order to restore balance.

5. The sender of the original message must be willing to forever monitor and change his/her attitudes to reflect more reasonable and rational thought processes. If change is not affected, one could find themselves stuck inside The Dead Bird Syndrome.

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*I've Learned:
If life were a car,
money would be the oil not the gas.*

Clothes

April 2, 2002

A couple of summers ago, my eight-year-old daughter and I were invited to a dance recital. As I prepared to walk out the door, I called her to hurry. I didn't want to be late. Ashley exited her bedroom wearing the same old blue jeans and t-shirt that she wore every day.

I frowned at Ashley, pointing in the direction of her room, and said, "Go back to your closet and find something more appropriate." Ashley stomped

both feet on the floor while pounding her thighs with her fists. She pouted and grumbled, "I don't have anything else to wear."

Patiently I took her by the hand and led her back to the closet. I quickly selected a very elegant dress of the finest fabric and the richest color. The dress complimented her complexion perfectly. "Oh, no Mom, everyone will laugh at me! *Pleaeesssee* don't make me wear that!" By now she was shrieking, "I'll never be able to face my friends again!"

I soothed her fears by stroking her delicate face, rubbing the frown away. Then I hugged her with so much love you'd never know I was in a hurry. As I caressed her head, I said, "I could fix your hair. We have ribbons to match this dress. You'll look just like the little princess that God has called you to be." Ashley stared up into my eyes, really wanting to believe me but not quite there yet. She repeated her fear, "but everybody will laugh."

With the dress over my left arm and Ashley's hand joining my right hand, I led her from the closet to her bed. I ceremoniously laid the dress on the bed and hugged her again. As I sat on the bed, I pulled her to me, grasping both her hands with my hands. I gazed and held crucial eye contact with Ashley and finally I said, "Ashley, this is an issue of trust. Do you trust me?" She nodded her head in the affirmative. I asked her again, "Do you really trust me?"

"Yes, Mommy", she whined. To that I replied, "If you really trust me, you'll wear what I tell you to wear. I can't explain to you how I know, but I know that this dress is what you should wear. If anybody laughs, hold your head high and tell 'em 'sometimes a princess HAS TO LOOK like a princess.'"

Ashley let out a sigh of relief along with a sheepish smile and I helped her out of the jeans and t-shirt and into her royal attire. I brushed her hair and laced it with matching ribbons. Quickly, my little ragamuffin turned into a little princess.

As soon as we arrived at the event, the very first person we saw whispered in astonishment, "Ashley, you look beautiful. You should dress up more often." All afternoon Ashley received nothing but glowing remarks; and as I observed, I saw her notice that people treated her differently than normal. Men and boys alike, helped her up the stairs and opened doors while the other little girls cherished their own feelings as they gazed at and touched the beautiful garment she wore.

Later that evening, as I prepared for bed, Ashley came to me with a hug and a kiss. "Thank you Mom for making me wear those clothes. You were right! I had so much fun, all dressed up and stuff. I would have really looked stupid in those jeans."

The next fall we were invited to a wedding and the scenario repeated itself. Oh the clothes were different, but the outcome was the same. I felt pretty smart and proud of myself. I marveled at how good at this I was getting. Strange, how predictably that situation played itself out ...

That Christmas, our family was invited to a formal Christmas party. As we drove away from the party, I turned and saw my little princess, a portrait of beauty asleep in the back seat, and I felt set up. Now, I'm pretty smart, but I'm not that smart. I knew precisely what would happen next and it disturbed me. I felt a sense of helplessness because I couldn't change the next set of events even if I tried. Not that I wanted to change it but I had a strange feeling in my stomach.

I went to bed and waited for her to come, and she did, true to my prediction. As she hugged and thanked me for producing the distinguishing apparel, I pensively stroked her head. When she left the room, I whispered to the room at large, "Lord, what are you telling me?" My husband, Emmett, spoke up, "Are you talking to me?"

"No, I was just praying..." my voice strayed away "... praying for understanding..." Emmett's unsolicited advice to me came straight from the Bible, "... with all thy getting get understanding". (Proverbs 4:7b.) By the time he completed that

statement I was already before God's throne of grace and mercy. I wanted to understand the lesson. I realized that God teaches ME through repetition so I wanted to know the moral to the story. I asked God again, "What are you saying to me?"

God's conversation with me was as vivid as the preceding events. He said, "This is an issue of trust. Do you trust me?" I said, "Yes." He asked me again, "Do you really trust me?" I replied, "Yes sir, I do." To that He said, "If you really trust me, you'll wear what I tell you to wear. The clothes I have chosen for you will make you LOOK like the royal priesthood that I have called you to be. If anybody laughs, hold your head high and tell 'em 'sometimes a queen has to look like a queen.'

My back slammed against the chair of my vision, my mouth wide open. "Aw, aw, aw..." I was speechless for a few seconds and then spreading my hands in wonderment, I exclaimed, "But what do you want me to wear?" Now, I have been pondering His next words to me for two years. I thought He was going to tell me about His glory. I

beamed inside and out, posing to receive a royal coronation.

God said to me, "You wear poverty like a coat. Poverty is a spirit and YOU wear it. You take it off when you go to bed and when you get up, you put your coat of poverty back on. Everyday of your cognitive life you have done this." Then He paused for good effect. "Did you not realize that when you are asleep, in your dreams, you are not poor? I want you to forever shed that coat of poverty and wear My garment of glory, blessing and honor."

Needless to say, this has been a long journey. When I wear what God wants me to wear, people treat me differently and at night I thank my Heavenly Parent for choosing my royal attire.

I've Learned:

Age is not just a number.

The Fifth Teenager

February 3, 2002

This is a story that I told my nine-year-old daughter one day because I was at my wit's end in dealing with her rebellion. As the story goes, we had only recently purchased from my parents the house in which I had spent my adolescence. The move was a definite move up for our small family and my daughter was experiencing an unrealistic *bugge* (bourgeoisie) arrogance that offended all adults and most children. Her attitude was so offensive I was covertly planning to run away to a Jamaican mountain retreat for six months.

I laid awake that night praying for God to show me the answer to a question that I was not smart enough to articulate. As I prayed in my bed at 3:30 a.m., the Holy Spirit laid the groundwork by revealing three things: 1) Ashley was, indeed, out of control; 2) even though she was only nine, I had no hope of ever controlling her again; and 3) if I showed her realistic boundaries, she would learn to control herself. Now THAT sounded like a plan to me! The only prerequisite was that I had to get her to trust me. To that end, God planted a little family parable down in my spirit.

The next morning I could hardly wait to call a family meeting. Emmett, my husband, honorably met me at the meeting table and together we demanded the kid to show up. Ashley slouched over the table and I made her sit up. I started by telling the group that I had a story. Emmett and Ashley both sighed at the prospect of hearing another one of my stories. I continued talking to Ashley, "My story is a teenager's story and I understand that you have two weeks before your tenth birthday

but your behavior is very *teenagerish*. I feel that you are mature enough to hear the story and work the exercise that goes with it." Ashley's shoulders squared and broadened when she heard me say she was mature.

I began, "Once upon a time there were 4 teenagers who all embarked on the long quest to climb the Mountain For Success. Now these teenagers didn't leave at the same time but they all left from the same place and they all knew each other. These teens were just like you Ashley in lots of ways. They were all bright, intelligent teens, but they were also selfish and angry, believed the world owed them something, and they were all arrogant smart mouthed kids.

"The first teenager enthusiastically left on the journey to climb the Mountain For Success. This teen, indeed, journeyed very far, but at the very first challenge, the very first obstacle -- at the very first hard trial that teenager laid down on the rocky way and never ventured any further. Oh yes, the teenager eventually found a cave for shelter. Only

leaving the cave occasionally to find food, this teenager seldom used the gift of intelligence. The teen just laid in the cave and never progressed past the first hurdle on the Mountain For Success.

"The second teenager enthusiastically left on the journey to climb the Mountain For Success. That teen ran and played and climbed and cried and walked and wept and scratched and bled and moaned and sweat and spat and fought and cried some more and clawed and laughed hysterically and eventually -- after 22 years, that teenager appeared back on the scene with a small piece of success. This teen exclaimed, 'Here it is, I have seen Success and I know where it is! I know what it looks like, smells like, tastes like, feels like! I brought back a piece for all to see! I can take you to Success because I know exactly where it is!'"

At this point Ashley seriously interjected into the story, "22 years! If it took 22 years then this person wasn't a teenager when he came back was he?" I looked gravely into her eyes and sternly stated, "No". I looked at Emmett and asked him if he had

anything to say. Emmett wistfully massaged the ridges of his chin and moved his head in the negative while silently mouthing a strong 'NO'. I knew it then -- they were both thoroughly listening and the plot thickened.

"The third teenager left to climb the Mountain For Success. At the very first challenge this teenager, lacking strength, could not hold on and straightaway fell to certain and swift death!" Everyone at the table, including me, drew in a sudden shocking breath. Someone had died! This was no longer just a cute little story. We all leaned forward to hear the rest -- I was no different, deeply and completely enthralled.

"The fourth teenager left. This teen was not at all prepared and left prematurely. This teen, lacking basic understanding, never moved upwardly at all but aimlessly roamed. He fell into every little trap and got caught in every storm, making absolutely no progress. This teen lived a miserable existence, one day distinguishable from the next only by the terrible entanglements. Existing from trouble to

trouble to trouble to trouble with little glory in between."

"Now that's the story of the four teenagers. You have all the important facts, so lets work out the exercise. Given all that you know which one of the teens would YOU seek advice from?"

Ashley, as though she were 16 years old instead of 9, declared and motioned with her hands, "Of course I'd listen to the second one." Establishing crucial eye contact I asked, "Why?" Ashley smoothly continued as though I had said nothing. "The first one didn't make it, the second one made it, the third and fourth ones didn't make it." She counted them off on her fingers as she went.

Because I believe we learn through repetition, I asked her to state again why she would talk to the second teenager. Ashley, as usual, grew frustrated and aggravated with me and contemptibly re-established her views as though I was too stupid to understand anything. "The first teenager was too afraid to make it, the second one finished, the third

one wasn't ready and died. You can't get advice from a dead person. The fourth one was dumb. It is simple -- I'd talk to the second one.

I sat back in my chair, maintaining the established eye contact and expertly posed one question and one statement that forever changed who Ashley is and was. "What would you say Ashley if I told you that I am the second teenager?" Her chin hit the floor as she tried to utter a what-how question. "Dear child, not only am I the second teenager, but you are the fifth teenager."

All the intended shock hit the table, meeting each one of us where we lived and then registered on each face. Even Emmett coughed and sat back in his chair. We had all been sitting on the edge of our seats trying to anticipate where the story would go, and here we were, all caught up. For the first time in months I had little Miss Ashley's complete and undivided attention. Finally, she gathered her wits, found her chin and said "How?"

"I laid awake praying for you last night and remembered the four teenagers who have left the bedroom where you now sleep. The first one is my older brother. Ashley, you know Uncle Paul. He is a brilliant scientist and mathematician. But he's a man that stays at home for days at a time and he seldom eats. His house is dark and junky and he lays in bed for long periods of time. He's so smart he can work 2 or 3 days a month and pay all of his bills.

"The second one is me, I left this very house 22 years ago. There is much you don't know but I have traveled all over the world and now I'm back with a very small piece of success. I have seen success and I know where it is, I know how to get there but I am tired and weary from the journey. I can not climb the Mountain For Success and fight you at the same time. We must work together.

"The third teen is my little sister, your Aunt Yvette. You never knew her. She was a caring nurturer and excellent athlete. We left this house together, and within 24 hours of leaving this very

house, Yvette was dead -- I was there and I saw it happen. It was a terrible, terrible thing to witness and a waste of a precious life.

"The fourth one is my nephew and your cousin, Romy. You know Romy, he's the artist, the actor, singer. He's a virtual work horse; but he is in and out of jail all the time. He left that room at 14, going to live with his "real mom." Life has been terrible for him and although he is 21 years old now, he still has the mentality of a 14-year-old. He has not progressed one bit since he left that bedroom where you sleep right now.

Well my dear, you are next! You can take your own road or you can follow one of the other four. You can do as you wish. You have proven time and again that I can not make you do anything, but right now you are on the same road as the FOURTH teenager. I just hope you do as you said you would. TAKE THE ADVICE OF THE SECOND TEENAGER. I am telling you as seriously as I know how -
- YOU ARE GOING THE WRONG WAY!

Ashley was quiet and pensive after that for a long time. Emmett crossed his legs, rubbed his hands together and spoke for the first time, chuckling he looked at me and said, "That's a nice piece of social work. You got her -- you really got her."

Our relationship is different now. Ashley often asks my advice. We are on the same journey -- together -- and boy am I relieved.

I've Learned:

The training is harder than the test.

The Prize

June 1, 2002

When my daughter, Ashley, was born, she was considered a premy and at high risk. The experts were concerned that her lungs weren't mature enough to sustain life in this world. I refused to believe she was puny because I'd experienced her strong kick for months. The moment of truth came when the caesarian birth process began. While the process was important, my point is that once the doctor cut my stomach and swished some organs around, Ashley popped right into the world, eyes wide open and apparently very aware of her surroundings. I saw the pain of birth register on her

face when she breathed the first breath of God into her lungs. Her eyes and fist closed tightly and then angrily she squawked so loudly that I knew greatness was a part of her future.

Her birth weight was less than the other babies, but she was real tall and wiry. When the nurse placed her in my arms we cried together. She cried because birth is painful. I cried because I was so proud of her. I saw lots of character and courage in her struggle against the air. Her strength was obvious to all who saw her birth. She was destined for greatness. That was ten years ago.

Today, after only 3 days of practice, Ashley participated in her first track meet. Early in the day, she placed third in a sprint that only the strongest contenders qualified to run in. I was the proudest of all the moms because I knew that all the other children had more running experience. With more practice and a dash of humility, Ashley would soon be a champion also.

The real challenge came later in the day when the 400-meter dash was called. Ashley set herself into the blocks in lane 5, my eyes beamed, and my heart palpitations increased as an old familiar feeling engulfed me as I was reminded of when I ran track years ago. I stood up and leaned forward in anxious anticipation – waiting to hear the sound of the starting gun blast. Suddenly the gun blasted and they were off! Her form and gazelle-like stride were world-class and she held her own for the first 100 meters. During the second 100 meters, the more experienced runners started to pull ahead and I saw Ashley's facial expression when she realized that everyone was ahead of her. In the third 100 meters, her kick was still pronounced but she was getting tired. The other runners were really turning on the power around the bend for the final stretch and my baby was clutching her side. Personal experience told me that her lungs were burning because her breathing was out of sync. The expression on her face was just like the day she was born when she took that first breath. She was angry and about to cry. Her brain shouted, "Stop running!"

But her heart and legs didn't know how to quit -- her kick was still real strong. She crossed the finish line in sixth place, frustrated and disappointed in herself.

I wanted to run to her aid but my spirit made me stay in the bleachers and wait patiently for her. I could tell Ashley didn't want to face me but she had no other place to go. She came right to my arms and together we cried. She cried because the birth of great character is painful. I cried because I was so proud of my little premy. No words could explain to the "little woman-child" the beauty of what I saw in her today. My words fell on deaf ears, but somehow, on some level, she understood my tears.

And so it is with our Heavenly Father and His children. We are reminded by the Apostle Paul in Phil 3:14 to "press toward the mark for a prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Sometimes when we press forward, we win a spiritual prize but we are looking for a blue ribbon. The ribbon will soon fade away but the spiritual prize holds for us

an inheritance, a birthright that we can pass to our children and our children's children.

The next time you experience pain so great that it drives you to tears, look to your Heavenly Father -- He may have tears of joy over your spiritual triumph.

*I've Learned:
Freedom ain't free*

An African American in Africa

One afternoon while we "took" tea and communed in a new language that only Jane and I spoke, Jane lazily suggested to me that she wanted me to go to her construction company, La Femme, the next day and consult with her office assistant, Mary. Jane suggested that if Mary didn't get that office together soon, she would find herself without a job.

To this remark I nodded but said nothing. I pondered it for a long while.

At our midnight tea, I said to Jane, "Let me see if I understand what you're saying to me. You want me to go to your company and 1) find out the problems with the computer system; 2) analyze the knowledge, skills and abilities of your office assistant; and 3) fix any systemic problems that I find when relating people with technology." I paused for effect, and Jane said, "Yes".

I continued, "You mentioned that Mary's future with the company is at stake." Jane gave an affirming nod. Then, as I slowly synchronized what she was saying with all the new knowledge I had about Kenyan culture I forlornly crooned, "Now you know that if you fire Mary, her quality of life will drastically change."

Jane spoke up and said, "Mary has to get out of my house, whether she keeps her job at La Femme or not." To my alarmed facial expression, Jane replied, "I'll give her a substantial raise in salary, comparable to the marketable price for her position, but she must go". And that was final. Her mind

was made up and she didn't want to hear any more **banter** about Mary.

By now I was getting to know this powerful woman pretty well. She gave orders and people moved at her command. As if I were made from the same mold, I pushed beyond her boundary by retorting, "Explain to me how your secretary became part of your household."

Jane said, "La Femme started as a small construction company in my house so I used my house girl, Mary, as a makeshift office assistant. I sent her to computer school and then moved the company to the industrial park. At that point, I hired Faith as the new house girl. I expect Mary to command that office while I'm working at the Pipeline. The situation that happened today can never happen again. When she interrupts me at the Pipeline because of silly computer glitches she jeopardizes my position in the Pipeline and completely halts work at La Femme." La Femme Construction Company has grown into a big company with major contracts building roads for the Kenyan Government

and cathedrals and other facilities for the Catholic Church. As far as I could see, these were two of the strongest entities in Kenya and not necessarily prioritized in that order.

Jane continued, "I've told Mary over and over that she needs to find a small efficiency to live in. I've told her I will help her but she will not leave my house. I have too many people in my household and Mary needs to go. I have three children but there are eight people in my house. Mary has to go."

Jane was right. I reflected on the day's fiasco. Jane worked for the Kenyan Pipeline as a civil engineer. This pipeline appeared to me to be like a cross between the federal government and a huge oil company like Exxon/Mobil. Jane's responsibilities are great, as an engineer and supervisor over many people. It was very untimely earlier that day when Mary showed up at the Pipeline, anxiously expecting Jane to type a simple memo and spread sheet that was needed immediately. If Mary's problem was the printer then why didn't she type

the documents, put them on a disk and then go to an Internet Café to print? Internet cafés are the rage in Kenya. Mary could have done that whole project in an Internet café. But she didn't. Instead she engaged William, Jane's first cousin/driver/concierge/Swiss army knife.

Mary took William away from his duties, to drive her across town, through horrible traffic and ever worse road conditions and then he waited hours for her so that he could deliver the documents and then take Mary back to La Femme. After Mary got to the Pipeline, she then proceeded to pace the floor for the next two hours because Jane couldn't stop her meetings to see what Mary wanted. After ascertaining the circumstances, I finally typed the documents on Jane's computer but had to print to a remote location and I didn't know where the printer was so we had to wait for the end of Jane's third meeting.

It really was an unfortunate set of circumstances that could not continue.

* * *

Early on the morning of March 16, 2006, before the crack of dawn, the driver arrives and the secretary unlocks and removes the chain on the big metal gate. She holds the gate open as the driver pulls the RAV 4 into the yard. I watched through the window. Faith served breakfast to me and Jane inside of the house while Mary washed the car. Every morning around 5:30, Mary wiped the car down completely both inside and out. During this time William always busied himself with some household job that I would typically assign to a husband like cut the grass or take out the trash.

Just before the sun came up, one man and three women left the house in a small SUV and drove through city streets that also served as a rough terrain. The drive lasted approximately thirty minutes. When the car stopped at the Industrial Park, Mary and I got out and Jane and William pushed on through the heavy traffic to the Pipeline.

We entered the office together. Mary opened her office for business and I set my laptop computer up on a table next to Mary's computer desk. Her small desk was a crudely fashioned table with the printer and CPU situated low near the floor. I knew that Mary was very nervous because Jane gave her little information about why I was there. Because I believed there would be a language barrier, until we learned each others' dialect, I began by sitting down at my computer and motioning to Mary to sit with me. I began typing, as Mary watched, in 16 point letter size:

Mary, I have come here today to inspire you to go to the next level of your destiny.

I paused for effect while Mary read my words. I continued in the large print. I knew that Mary was baffled by my words.

Your employer has contracted with me to help you realize your potential so that you grow as this company grows.

Jane desires to bless you in a way that you, quite possibly, have never seen!

Mary's eyes grew large and she chewed on her bottom lip. After a brief pause, making sure the gravity of my words sank in, I continued to type.

Today will be long and hard. I will teach you several years' worth of information in one day. Don't worry, everything important will be in writing so you won't have to guess or try to remember what I said at a later date.

Mary smiled and nodded her head in agreement. I typed, reiterating...

Some things will seem hard because I won't have time to consider small courtesies but I will always treat you with the utmost love, care and respect. Do you agree to work with me in this manner today?

Mary nodded, "Yes". I typed on.

During this day, you may feel like crying because we have so much ground to cover. All I ask is that if you cry, maintain your position. Don't leave this meeting. This table is a place of reasoning and negotiating. You must be able to articulate when you leave here. That means even though you're upset, you still must say and do the important things correctly. This is called *'character'*.

Mary understood and agreed so we moved forward. I smiled and then happily typed.

"I have many exciting and wondrous things to tell you. You will be amazed and afraid. You are being blessed in a marvelous way and I am blessed to be the one to share this experience with you."

And so we started. It didn't take us very long to develop a rapport, so we digressed to the spoken

word over the written. I consider it a digression because after that point, Mary had to remind me to type the instructions on our cheat sheet. Because we started on a good note, Mary began to trust me. We delved into her normal workload and I helped her do her work to get a good feel of her habits and also what kinds of production was expected of her.

At 10:00 Mary went missing but just as I began to wonder where she was, Mary appeared carrying a tray with a canister of hot tea and cream. The tray contained small bowls with sugar and butter, and also a loaf of bread. Mary sat the tray down on the desk and begged me to "take" tea. I, as any forceful American, wanted to push forward with our work. My first thought was that this was an unnecessary interruption; but when I made eye contact with Mary as she bowed low over her tea tray, I relented. When I gave in, it came with a price. I asked, with a pleasant voice, "Mary, won't you break bread with me"?

Mary said, "Please Miss, I can not."

“Well, if you can’t, I can’t.” I then said, “It’s not taking tea, its breaking bread.” Like that somehow made a difference. Mary said, “You say breaking bread like its communion or something sacred.” I nodded my head in the affirmative, and said, “You hear my spirit. You see, for me, as often as I eat bread and drink from the cup, I commemorate the Lord’s passing until he comes again. Will you break bread with me?”

Mary cowardly sat in the chair and I got a cup and served her tea. I spread butter on her bread and put sugar in her tea. I said, “Eat”. Mary’s eyes filled and a tear fell in her cup. I pretended oblivion; but knew she was transcending an age-old caste system by sitting with me and drinking tea. With the simple act of receiving tea instead of serving, Mary had moved to a new level of reality that her fore parents may not have realized. As an African American and descendant of formerly enslaved people, seeing this transition was like seeing 300 years of history pass before my eyes. It set me free of chains that neither I or Mary had earthly

knowledge of. I had to work real hard to keep my tears out of my tea.

Over tea in the hot, dusty office, as the breeze flowed through the open window, I said to Mary, "Mary, in the United States, we have what is called 'a glass ceiling'."

Mary smiled and repeated my words, "A glass ceiling?", as she pointed to the ceiling of the room we sat in.

I said, "Yes, a glass ceiling. That's what we call it when you want to go to the next level of achievement and you can see where you're trying to go, but somehow you just can't seem to reach it." Mary said thoughtfully, "Yes, yes, I really understand what you're saying to me. How do you get passed the glass ceiling?"

I sighed, "That, my dear, is the question of the century. I personally believe the way past the glass ceiling is through education. That is my opinion.

But there is another reason why I'm telling you about the glass ceiling, Mary." I paused for effect.

Mary fell for my trap. She said, "Why are you telling me about the glass ceiling in America?"

Like a bomb falling out of the sky, I said, "Because that ceiling, in Kenya, is not glass, its concrete. And if *yo' head is hurtin', its becauz you been bangin' it against a concrete barrier*. I'm here today to help you get in the position where you are standing on the very ceiling that you're bumping your head against!"

As Mary's tears mixed with her laughter, I barked, "Let's get to work." The next two hours were spent teaching computer techniques – the kind you don't learn in school. I called on 20 years of legal experience. I was relentless and it was grueling. But I stood true to my word; I loved Mary as a daughter and taught her tricks that you don't find in books. Tricks about how to run the office as well as the computer.

There were several sets of ears covertly listening to this workshop. So as I taught Mary how to command the office, I overtly taught Mary and those other ears what was expected of them. By the time Mary and I broke for lunch, five men took deep breaths and sat back in their chairs. They were grateful for the experience of being taught by this American facilitator; but also grateful that I was leaving their presence. They were in overload and wanted to debrief what they had heard and they didn't want me to be a part of the process. I continued to pretend that I didn't know the men were paying attention to my facilitation. I walked out the door knowing that lives were being changed because I wasn't just teaching office skills, I was teaching life skills – a new way of thinking. I was teaching a servant to become a manager. It was a **paradigm shift**. Every new office procedure had at least one life application attached to it. I found that being a blessing for Mary and company, was blessing me to heal centuries of hurts. I wondered if any of us really understood the gravity of what

we participated in. This was a powerful and moving experience.

As we ate lunch, I understood that Mary thought we were taking a break but I never stopped working. I told her, “Mary, in the United States, we have a phenomenon that I believe you have here too. That is, there is a situation among birds, when the mother bird has her chicks in the nest...” Mary was nodding yes, indicating that happens in Africa as well. “Well,” I continued. “When the mother is trying to teach the babies to fly, she will push them out of the nest.” Mary was still nodding yes over her fork. She still didn’t feel comfortable breaking bread with me.

I went on, “Either they fly right away or they fall to the ground.” Mary was nodding yes. “Now, if they fly immediately, that’s the coolest situation. If they fall to the ground, then we have ourselves a situation. Why? Because, it’s hard to learn how to fly from the ground number one, and secondly while they are on the ground, their lives are in danger – subject to any predator. Then too, the

mother bird has no way to retrieve her young from the ground. In many instances, a young bird falling to the ground can mean a death sentence.”

Mary, all the while, nodded her agreement and understanding.

“In our world this seemed cruel and yet in reality its the **epitome** of *survival of the fittest*. Survival is heavily dependent on skills, knowledge and abilities. The mother is not being cruel; she’s teaching her babies a mere milestone in survival.

I ate for a little while, knowing that Mary was waiting for me to finish the point. Finally, between bites, I said, “Mary, the reason I’m telling you all this is because in our situation, you’re the baby and Jane is the mamma bird. Jane, just as the mother bird pushes, is pushing you out of the nest but there are several things that distinguish you from the bird.”

Mary’s eye welted up with tears and she said, “What is it?”

I said, "The difference between you and the baby bird is that you're going to be fine whether you fly or not because you've got excellent skills. As long as you speak the language, you can go anywhere on Earth and get a job. It's because you have a real solid understanding of the Micro Soft suite of software. What would be perfect is if you learned to fly before I leave Africa. Here's my card so you can email me at any time even after I leave. But I'll be here for the next 10 days and I will make myself available to you. Again, I'm telling you that you are going to be okay. You've got two really big advantages and they are 1) you've got solid computer skills and 2) you are thirty years old rather than eighteen or twenty. You've had some life experiences and won't lose your mind when you get out on your own."

Mary was laughing and crying at the same time. She was happy and afraid. I stayed quiet for awhile to give Mary some room to think. Mary stared into space for a while then she asked, "What should I do first?"

I chuckled and said, "Mary, it's your life, you can choose for yourself what to do. However, if I were you, I'd look for a small room or apartment for one person. Find a safe place, where the environment has natural barriers to protect you. Try to find a place where you have community – where you know people. After you find a suitable place, tell Jane and she will help you negotiate from there. Jane has told me that she will give you a substantial raise so that you can live comfortably. While you're learning to budget your money keep it small then you can grow as your understanding of the economy grows.

Mary was very happy. She was wondering if she could do it.

"Mary, I'm here to encourage you. If you have any questions or need help, let me know and I will help you every step. At the same time, I don't want to intrude into your life so you'll have to let me know what you need. This is one of the first lessons to being 'free'. You have to tell your community what you need."

Mary was nodding affirmatively, crying, laughing and eating her desert. Then I said, "Mary, this is very important, I've heard the rape statistics in Kenya, and those numbers are very very high. I spoke with a judge yesterday and she said there are over 50,000 reported cases of rape in Kenya every year. You must find a safe place where no one will crash in on you. You must protect yourself. This is the most important piece of your plan. Do that part right and you're half way there."

I asked Mary if she knew about Moses. Mary proceeded to tell me about how Moses lead his people out of bondage and all the circumstances surrounding that event. I reminded Mary and she agreed that in the "wilderness story" of Moses, lots of people wanted to go back into Egypt. After I made sure she understood that, I said, "You are being set free just like the Hebrews. There will be times when you'll want to walk back into bondage but RESIST the urge. Don't ever go, willingly, back into bondage. Now, that doesn't mean that you wont have to clean a few houses now and again but

I mean start to think of life as a manager rather than a servant who doesn't think or plan for the future, just doing what you are told." I told Mary that Jane didn't need another house girl, she needs an office manager.

I assured Mary, "Now, I'm not a bird, but I suspect that the first bird that the mother bird pushes out is the one that she believes will make it. She will probably push the strongest or smartest bird out first so the others can follow by example. My point is that you are doing something extraordinary by crossing over your caste system. Many people will observe you and you will inspire everyone watching. You will set the pace for those coming after you and I don't just mean Faith, but for Jane's children and everyone else. The whole community will see what a big difference computer knowledge can make in today's society."

For the rest of the work day, Mary and I worked closely. We breezed through a couple of semesters of algebra, created spreadsheets with algebraic formulae, troubleshooted the printer and finalized our

cheat sheet of notes. I closed out the day by teaching Mary how to make macros and how to use auto-correct in Micro Soft programs. By 5:00 I was exhausted and Mary was happy and energetic. I knew she would do very well.

* * *

That night, while Jane and I “took” tea, I brought it up. I told Jane all the things Mary and I discussed. I then kicked my leg over the side of the chase lounge, laid back and said, “If you fire Mary, you will be sorry for a long time. *Mary’s got it goin’ on and she knows exactly what she’s doing.*”

Jane sipped her tea and replied, “If that is true, then why is she always having so many problems in the office? Why do I have to always come and fix something on the computer?”

I said, “It’s because you’re trying to do twenty-first century work with twentieth-century technology. Just get new computers, Jane, *dang girl*, you can afford it.”

“Yea, I can” ... she stared into space.

“Then do it and buy a copier too. You *need* to put a couple of phone lines in so you can put in a fax machine and the Internet. We had to walk four rugged blocks to get a photocopy of one sheet of paper. Just buy one o’ them HP all-in-one thingies. That way, the next time Mary needs your approval on a document, she can fax it to you. In many instances you can sign a fax. Then, William can pick the document up and deliver it. The all-in-one will give you 21st century latitude in the way you operate the office.

If you introduce scanning technology into your scheme, the whole way you operate will expand. Get the all-in-one. It will revolutionize your office. Photocopies are so rare that you could pay for your machine by selling copies.” We simultaneously looked at each other and then broke out into laughter because both of us had owned copy centers and understood more about selling copies than anyone. I was surprised Jane had not already bought a copy machine.

* * *

The next day, Jane told me that Mary found an apartment. She said that William helped Mary find it. I was real surprised. I congratulated Mary immediately. She was very happy.

The next evening was an elegant affair. Jane was the keynote speaker at an extravaganza hosted by the University of Nairobi's graduating civil engineers. She, in turn, asked that I address the class by telling a colorful fairy tale jazzed up with **Ebo-nics**. The entire occasion was enchanting. We finally made it home around midnight.

William had gone home earlier that evening so Jane was driving. Jane halted the car at the gate, dialed on her phone for several minutes and then looked at me and pouted, "What have you done to my house girl? She won't even answer her phone to open the gate. What the hell is wrong with Mary? Why is she behaving this way? This is all your fault". She said that and pointed her phone at me.

I hissed, “Dang Jane – she ain’t no house girl, she’s an office manager. You can’t have it both ways.” Jane was shrieking when finally, ten minutes later, Faith opened the gate. I told Jane, “Let me talk to her first”. Then she glared at me and said, “You need to let her know that I’m not happy about this!”

I thought, oh-my-GOD! What have I done? Can I fix this? Should I fix this? Is this really my fault?

The next morning, with the honor and dignity usually reserved for my teenage daughter, I told Mary through clinched teeth, “No matter how ‘free’ you get young lady don’t ever get so high and mighty that you can’t treat other people the way you want to be treated.” Mary’s eye grew big, as if she didn’t understand what I meant. I continued, “Why didn’t you open the gate?” She said it was because she didn’t know we were at the gate. I pushed ahead, knowing she was ... fudging ... and said, “You would not like it if someone refused to open the gate for you late at night, so why did you do that to Jane? Why did you do that to me?”

Mary bowed her head down but nodded yes. She said, "I understand, it won't happen again".

I told her that nothing I could say would teach her how to behave in all situations but that sound, thoughtful judgment would be good friends to visit often. I watched Mary make a mental note to not let anything selfish like that happen again. I assured Mary that balance would always be an issue and all successful women struggle with balance. I reiterated that a good standard to measure behavior by is to always care for others in the same way she wanted to be treated.

* * *

As I reflect over those few days, I realized that it was 100% human relations. We had invented new language and culture in order to communicate on a high level. Issues like family dynamics, training and skill development, life skills, interacting with people, and human resource management stayed at the forefront of our circumstances. Jane and I love each other but were able to argue friendly and

firmly all along the way; each person caring for the other but forcing her point forward.

The moment of truth in human relations came when I realized that if I didn't act, Mary would have been run over by the monster; only later to realize that if I didn't move again, Mary could become the monster.

I walked away from the situation with a better understanding of human nature. I learned that when you tinker around in people's lives, you had better understand that you can't change one area of their existence without that change cascading throughout the person's life and the lives of the people around them.

*I've Learned:
Just because there is a predator
doesn't mean there is a victim*

An Interview With Queen Vashti

Gir'friend to Gir'friend

This story is written as told to me by Queen Vashti herself when I interviewed her in my dreams.

* * *

I believe that people remember me disrespectfully. For thousands of years, people have read into my story rebellion and punishment; and have somehow missed the real ideology. Truth, honor and

conviction are what drove me to revolution, not arrogance and conceit. I'm glad you asked me for this interview because I want to narrate my own epic. Then, maybe, someone will understand the trials I overcame were not just for me, but for the disenfranchised people all over the world and for all time. My expression to the world says, "Just because there is a predator in our midst is not a reason for me (or you) to become a victim."

Before I give my accounting of bigotry and egotistical buffoonery, let me first qualify my statements by saying that my family has been part of the royal Babylonian court for no less than four generations before me and several generations after me.

You may even remember my great grandfather, King Nebuchadnezzar. He was the very same man who destroyed the first Temple at Jerusalem, threw Daniel in the lion's den and put Shadrach, Meshach and Abendnego into the fiery furnace down in Babylon. After their Lord saved the three Hebrew boys from the fire, my great grandfather declared a

law vowing that to even speak badly about their God was a crime punishable by death.

My father, King Belshazzar, behaved pretty outrageous himself, forgot those old declarations of Nebuchadnezzar and partied with the vessels and utensils stolen from the Hebrew temple. Then handwriting mysteriously appeared on the wall. These handwritings were interpreted by Daniel and that very night my dad was killed in the midst of much bloodshed and looting in the palace. During all the confusion, I was unaware of the death of my father and ran to his quarters where I was captured by Darius.

Darius presented me to his son, Ahasuerus (Xerxes) as a wife. Not a wife as you know it, but as a piece of property – part of his harem. No doubt my status as Belshazzar's daughter made me seem a worthy prize.

Part of my story is chronicled in your Tanakh and/or Holy Bible, in the place where the Hebrew girl, Esther, is made queen in my place and she

thereafter was revered for saving her race from the hands of a great deceiver. I'm not disputing Esther's heroism, but I am saying that there would be no Queen Esther had I not done my part. George Bush had Ronald Reagan, Jesus had John The Baptist and Queen Esther was preceded by me, Vashti.

I think it's ... interesting that *HIStory* seems to have overlooked *MYstory*. My story has all the tantalizing ingredients: an ancient story of court intrigue, deception, miscommunication, drunken sex parties, assassination plots, and a foolish king. My story is full of "isms". I, too, dealt with extreme isms like racism, sexism, and alcoholism. These isms have wreaked havoc particularly and consistently on womenfolk for thousands of years. Institutional isms were well-established then, just as they are now. Yes, there is, indeed, much to say.

This happened in the third year of the reign of King Xerxes, his family called him Ahasuerus but I prefer the name given him by the Spartans, Xerxes. The year was 483 Before the Common Era.

Xerxes, idiot that he was, governed 127 provinces extending from India to Ethiopia, which in those days, and from my perspective, was most of the known world. Xerxes' capitol was at the fortress in a place called Susa.

To celebrate the expansion of his empire, King Xerxes gave a six month banquet. The celebration was designed as a tremendous display of the opulent wealth and glory of his empire. He invited all his princes, officials and military officers of Media and Persia.

When that feast was over, Xerxes gave a seven day banquet especially for all the palace servants and officials – from the greatest to the least. This second banquet was held in the courtyard of the palace garden.

The courtyard was decorated beautifully with blue and white linen sheers, fastened with purple ribbons on the silver rings that were embedded into the marble pillars. Gold and silver chaise lounges

stood on mosaic pavement made of marble, mother-of-pearl, and other precious stones.

Cocktails were served in gold goblets of many designs, and the wine flowed abundantly, just as Xerxes had ordered. Those who wished could have as much as they pleased. His only restriction on the drinking was that no one should be obligated to take more than he wanted.

At the same time that the men were drinking themselves into a stupor, and only God in heaven knows what else, I gave a party of my own. One in which the women of the palace were invited. I felt that we needed a group support system because I anticipated that the men would do something shockingly shameful with all that drinking going on. When men drink non-stop, nothing is safe, especially women.

On the seventh day of the second feast, after Xerxes had been drinking for six months and a week, he sent seven men to get me, ordering me to wear only my royal crown on my head. Imagine

my horror at such scandalous antics! He wanted all the men to see me “buck naked” so that he could brag about how beautiful his woman was!

My opinion about that situation is that everybody knows I’m pretty, the very name “Vashti” means beautiful woman. So when they told me Xerxes’ order, I said “No!!” I think Xerxes is a fool. He ***mustafagot*** that I was royalty when he met me. Neither his marriage, nor his crown, made me a queen.

At any rate, my refusal to dance naked in front of Xerxes and company annoyed him so greatly that instead of coming to talk to me like a normal husband to his wife, he sought advice from his friends, “the lawyers”. Well, of course the lawyers considered his feelings from a legalistic point of view rather than a matter of the heart. Those guys made sure they knew all polices, rules and laws because he always asked their advice about everything.

Jumping the gun just a bit, let me say, it's always a bad sign when you ask a bunch of lawyers what you should do about your marriage. Lawyers only get paid if you get a divorce. Never turn your household affairs into affairs of the state. That's a bunch of mess. I was trying to salvage my dignity and my home, it had nothing to do with those scandalous **pharisaical** imbeciles.

So, here we go, the eight highest positions in the entire empire decide to treat me like I'm a standing army ready to wage nuclear war. Now, just because I won't parade myself around, stark naked and pregnant, in front of all the men in the country, this fool decided to penalize me. Those fools, all eight *'em*, decided to enact an irrevocable law stating that my refusal constituted a crime against all humanity. They said that every woman from Egypt to Istanbul would rebel against her husband when they learned that I refused to appear before the king.

Well, it sounded stupid at the time, but in hindsight I can truly say that I understand that people

need an example to follow when it comes to saying “no”. Somehow, people lose their ability to say “no” when they don’t have living examples to follow. But still, if *I’da* gone to that fool without my clothes the next *thang he’da* wanted was for me to have sex with all those men; and, like I said earlier I was royalty when he met me. I’m not about to behave sexually in front of a whole *buncha* men. If he wanted that kind of action, he should have hooked up with one o’ those *skezers* at Aphrodite’s temple over at Corinth.”

Well, the new law stated that I would be forever banished from Xerxes’ presence and that he would choose another queen – one more worthy than me. So, Xerxes sent letters to all parts of the empire, to each province, proclaiming that every man should be the ruler of his home. Ha ha, that’s the stupidest *thang* I ever heard of. If he was really the leader of his own home, he would have talked to me rather than those fools he called his advisors. Every one of those idiots’ wives were here with me when the whole incident went down, so I can tell

you first hand ... well, second hand, that they all need to go home and have a little conversatin' and communicatin' instead of being so busy worrying about what I'm doing. To top it all off, when Xerxes divorced me, that wasn't punishment, he set me free! I didn't want to be bothered with him and his ill-mannered habits. I say, "Good reddens".

Like I said earlier, for the last three thousand years, people have remembered me as a sorrowful divorcee, banished for rebellion and vanity. But come on people, I've been waiting all these millenia to hear somebody, anybody, ask this one little question! What kind of man drinks for six months and a week then demands that his wife parade herself, pregnant, wearing only her crown and her birthday suit, in front of all his partners and servants?

Well, I'll tell you what kind of man behaves like that. This all happened in the third year of Xerxes' reign; but let me tell you what happened in the first two years. Xerxes centered his attention on a war with Greece that his father started. You can proba-

bly identify with that because I understand that you are in a war right now, on this very soil, because your leader wants to fight a war his father started. Well, Xerxes' campaign was the largest movement of people of all time. People from all over the world were drafted to be part of this war. It was truly a world war.

Stores of provisions, sufficient to support the immense army, were collected at different points along the intended route of the marching army and a bridge of boats that was at least a mile in length was constructed. The bridge of boats was destroyed by a storm. Da' uh! The idiot Xerxes was so angry that the storm destroyed his little boat bridge that he ordered the beheading of the bridge engineers. Then, because he was so enraged at the rebellious and disrespectful sea, he ordered 300 lashes be administered to it – to the sea! After he beat the sea with his whips, he ordered that a set of chains be cast into the sea to contain it. Talk about living in a state of denial!

Through all that chaotic ship building, tinker toying, beating the sea action, it seems to me that somebody could have indicated to Xerxes that he was crossing the line of insanity. If *I'da* been there *I'da* told him to put "Jack back in the box."

After that madness, Xerxes ordered another bridge. The second bridge consisted of a double line of boats to stabilize it better. This information came from the father of history himself, Herodotus. Herodotus said that the second bridge was so long, it took seven days and nights to march across it. Herodotus believed that the whole number of fighting men, military and naval amounted to 2,500,000, and the fleet consisted of 1207 war ships of war, besides 3,000 smaller vessels. Herodotus also said that when he counted everybody there, it was considerably more than six million people. Like I said, you'd think that with six million people standing around, somebody would be bold enough to slip Xerxes a note, even if the note was anonymous. During his whole reign, I only remember two people, besides myself, bold enough to risk raising

Xerxes' ire: Bel Shimmeni and Shamash eriba. Those two caused enough unrest to make Xerxes holler day and night.

Anyway, Xerxes' suffered heavy losses, but he continued on and destroyed Athens. For that episode, the Greeks beat him and he ran like a wet dog. Xerxes proved to be utterly ignoble, vain, wicked, cruel and cowardly. The whole world can see that his famous invasion was carried out for the sole purpose of gratifying his own weak-minded vanity – so that he could say that he had men and nations at his mercy.

In the end, this is not a story for women to use as a weapon against men, this story is about the conviction of a person and a refusal to be victimized. It's about empowering people to do that which is right rather than that which appears easy. When it was all said and done, Xerxes died, I went back to the palace and reigned as queen mother with my son, King Artexerxes.

I believe that Xerxes knew how to treat Esther only because I taught him how to treat her. He didn't want to be humiliated by losing yet another beautiful woman. Read the story of Esther and her uncle/cousin Mordicai. Mordicai knew how to refuse Haman because I exemplified what it looked like to say "no" to a person of high authority. We have got to learn how to use our faith – the stuff that is the life's blood of our conviction, to tell the world "no" when people desire to molest our dignity and our homes.

A major theme that I learned in this progression of circumstance: when a person torments one person in a family, that person, in fact torments all people in that family. This rule applies even if the tormentor is also a family member. If you, as a family member, don't find a way to stop the harassment, your tormentor may destroy the whole family and each person therein. You may find that in order to save your family, one member may need to be banished – even if that member is the family leader. You see, depending on your perspective,

Xerxes didn't banish me from his house; Xerxes banished himself from his family. The proof is in the pudding. It is well-established that my son, Artexerxes, was a wonderful family man who was comfortable with himself and competent in his job as king. Had I allowed Xerxes to behave miserably in front of my son, I would have been, by default, endorsing that sort of behavior and therefore, signifying to my son that it's okay to act hideously.

People may try to victimize you, but you can stand victoriously in spite of the predator's actions. Even if you have tears in your eyes and balled-up fists, don't ever compromise your dignity. When God gives you a birthright, no man can take it away. Someone important is learning from your example, so you better stand firm. Who knows, a whole nation of people may be depending on you to take a stand.

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I've Learned:

I don't have to stop loving people when they die.

The Spirit of Bow Wow

One day while contemplating an upcoming workshop with young women, I became convicted. My usual recourse is to try to change our youths' behavior by convincing them that we are descendants of kings and queens. For those of you who don't know, our children are on a path of dogs. Our young men call each other *dawg* and call the women *bitches*. They bark at each other and their heroes have names like Snoop Dogg (named because he looks like Snoopy) and Lil' Bow Wow. I was becoming more and more alarmed because this is not just a passing fad. From my best guess, we

as a people have been on this path at least since 1983 when the original funkmeister, George Clinton, sang "bow wow wow yippy yo yippy yay!" on his explosive album, "Atomic Dog," which topped the R&B music charts. That was over 20 years ago and we are still progressing down the dog-dom trail.

What troubled me about this is that I'm working from a school of thought that revolves around three concepts. The first two are pretty easy for anyone to understand. The third concept, while pretty uncommon, if given enough thought can be easily understood and proven on both spiritual and scientific levels.

First, whatever a person thinks of themselves, that is what he/she will become because they behave in a way to create a self-fulfilling prophecy. (Proverbs 23:7) Secondly, the words coming out of your mouth direct your path. In other words, your words determine your destiny. So, my feelings are apparent, our people will ultimately behave like dogs if we keep calling each other doggy

names. The third premise, the new school of thought, dictates that as people, we remember on a cellular level those things that happened to our forefathers. In other words, our blood, skin, flesh and even bone has memory. Not only does our DNA carry physiological instruction from generation to generation but other things are also transmitted, things that our brains don't recollect. For example, mannerisms, alcoholism, emotions, etc. There are all sorts of scientific and biblical data to back up this statement.

This third concept is what I'd hoped to tap into to change the hearts of our children and let me add that this concept has been somewhat successful. But this particular night God stepped in and called me to His spiritual journey. As I was preparing my "script" that night, the Holy Ghost convinced me to search for those kings and queens that I continuously speak about. I have been teaching that we, black people, are the descendants of kings and queens and yet I had nothing tangible - no names, ideas or faces. We all know that Nefertiti and Cleo-

patra were African queens but Egypt clearly distinguishes itself from black Africa and that somehow did not set well in my spirit because its too complicated to connect those dots to a group of teenagers who continue to bark at each other. I wanted to convince our children to stop giving "what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before pigs." Jesus said that at Matthew 7:6.

So. I began my research on the Internet. After all, I'm an internet expert. I can research in a few minutes what would take hours in an actual library. I'm just smart like that, okay? That way when I appeared at my workshop the next day, I'd have a nice airtight argument that we are kings and queens. I pictured myself posing this majestic question, "If we were of a royal bloodline when we were put in chains, at what point did we cease to be royalty and take the bloodline of dog-dome?" I was going to follow my normal recourse and help our youths to tap into that cellular memory, grab that royal blood line with a two-fisted kind of loving-kindness and *juss gone and be great any-*

how. I believed that I'd quickly connect those dots and draw that picture to join us, former slaves, with African royalty -- and I don't mean the biblical royal priesthood noted at 1 Peter 2:9 in the Bible. Some of our children would be disqualified from that chosen race.

After a few hours of constant searching, when I still had nothing to support my royal-flesh theory, I started getting desperate. I searched and searched. I found lots of interesting things but I found nothing linking a royal bloodline to the formerly enslaved descendants of Africans in the United States.

Finally about 3:00 am, with tears in my eyes, I backed away from the computer empty handed. I was brought first to my knees and then flat on my face. It was one of those times when we are called to pray. I said "Lord, this is the story that has been passed down from generation to generation. If we are the real flesh and blood descendants of royalty I want to know now. If we are not the physical descendants of royal blood I'm asking You to show

me now, here, tonight. If this story is a myth, I want to know and I won't spread the word any further. I'll be satisfied with being a 1 Peter 2:9 royal priesthood.

I laid there suspended in a timeless prayer closet, just me and God. I laid there and found my peace. I asked God to forgive me for many things but most of all I repented because I realized that I had *hung my hat* on being of a royal bloodline from Africa. I had taught that idea across the United States, the Caribbean and Europe too and I resolved in my heart and soul that my bloodline didn't make a bit of difference. I was God's child, a joint heir with Christ and all those things promised to the righteous are mine. I understood on a different level the significance of my earthly wealth ... that money is only a piece of my wealth ... that I was already walking in the abundant life that God promises His children.

Finally, around daybreak, I rose from the floor well rested even though I had not slept. I stepped over to the computer keyboard and who knows

what I typed into the search engine but you will never guess what rolled up on my screen. You will never never never guess what was revealed in that continuous flow of information ... My chin must have hit the desk because I could not believe what turned up on that screen ... Immediately, many things were cleared up for me, things that I had wondered since early childhood... All of the entries said the same thing so I just picked one and clicked on it ... It said, "The Kingdom of Bow Wow". The Kingdom of Bow Wow ... The Kingdom of Bow Wow.

Like in a vision I was moved back in time as I began to read a soldier's account of a 16th century war. The young soldier, whose name I don't recall, eloquently wrote an extremely logistic explanation of the exploits of war. His letter was pretty lengthy and yet interesting. After a short while his military prose took on a different air and he began to tell about how he, as a young boy, was abducted from his homeland and brought on a long voyage to a life of enslavement. Sometime during his training

and adventures as a soldier this man learned to read and write. He became a "gentleman of letters". He wrote of his boyhood home, The Kingdom of Bow Wow. That kingdom was a majestic kingdom of kings and queens. From his description I understood that each household had a king and a queen and that there were certain things that every king and queen needed to know. This Kingdom of Bow Wow, as described, was located in present-day Ghana and these were a joyous people ... until the day of destruction came. As I understand from his writings, the entire nation was captured and forced into slavery and the only survivors assimilated into the other tribes.

As I read about the Kingdom of Bow Wow it was like I walked among those kings and queens. I could see their vibrant colors and hear the drums. I saw the culture, the work, the food, heard the language. I understood the village life and had a new respect for the elders. I saw the horrendous abduction and remembered the captivity, the ship, the ocean, the stench and the crying. I heard the kings

and queens wail and howl “Bow Wow, Bow Wow”. And I saw their captors mock in laughter and turn the bow-wow sound into a dog’s cry.

As a small child I understood that cows moo, cats meow, but dogs do not bow-wow. I distinctly remember questioning that notion as a preschooler. As the foulness of this vision struck my consciousness I began to weep audibly and tears stung my eyes and streamed down my cheeks. I choked out an agonizing “Why?” I wanted to know why this horrible thing happened, why did we survive and finally I asked God why he let that wonderful name “Bow Wow” become the synonym for a dog’s language. Then God told me, “I let that happen because I knew that one day, hundreds of years later, you’d search for your ancestors and I wanted you to have a place to *hang your hat.*”

When I stood up from that journey, I was unexplainably different. I felt that God had done something special for me. He gave me, alone, answers that I didn’t know how to digest. I walked away from that virtual world and went on to my semi-

nar. I taught from my soul for those two days. At the end of the workshop when it was time for the students to identify what they'd learned, one Caucasian girl jumped to her feet and demanded to go first. I was surprised because she'd only spoken when absolutely necessary during the two days. She loudly declared, "I learned that I'm a queen! When I came in here yesterday, I was an atheist and now I wanna' see 'bout gettin' some o' those promises that God's people get!"

Look how the world gets blessed when we get blessed. That's what it means for your cup to "runneth over". Others get sustenance in your overflow.

That was a freebee. What's really important here is that the spirit of Bow Wow is about our royal birthright not doggie-hood. Satan is good at taking what is good and perverting it until it's unrecognizable. During that class it became real apparent that our children remember Bow Wow on a cellular level. Let's not pervert it but carry our birthright with the excellence of God.

The evening after the first day, I raced home to read more about the Kingdom of Bow Wow and my screen was blank! It all vanished. It was a major challenge in my life for years. I had to believe in the Kingdom of Bow Wow with my faith only for a long time.

* * *

One day, three or four years later, while feeling quite angry and sorry for myself, my telephone rung and a gentleman introducing himself as Thomas Brown was on the other end. Mr. Brown explained to me that he was looking for his ancestors (genealogically) and had a clue that his 6th great grandfather's name was Jeffrey Brace. He asked me if that name sounded familiar and I told him it did, but that I couldn't remember where I heard it.

That's when he threw the bomb at me... Mr. Brace, formerly named Boyrereau Brince, wrote memoirs about his 18th century (things were

starting to sound familiar to me) ... homeland ... the Kingdom of Bow Wow!!!

I dropped the phone and ran around the house screaming. I came back to the phone screaming repeatedly, "how did you find me?!" Mr. Brown said he saw my article at MyrnaRoberts.com and was grateful that I too was searching for his 6th great grandfather. Mr. Thomas advised me to read the book: "A Blind African Slave: Memoirs of Jeffrey Brace". He told me of a controversy between two Caucasian people who were both publishing Mr. Brace's memoirs. The lady, in an effort to publish her version before the gentleman, put her article on the Internet. I found her article during a very brief period of time that it was on the web. A subsequent legal battle ensued. The man won and the woman took her book off the web.

I have not read the whole book; but I understand that this gentleman's book is quite different from the lady's that I read on the Internet late one night. Excerpts of Brace's memoirs can be

found at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/brinch/ill1.html>. My information came from the lady's book and apparently her information about the Kingdom of Bow Wow (sometimes known as the Kingdom of Bow Woo) is not supported in "A Blind African Slave". For example: the books version is in direct contradiction with regard to every household having royalty (which was the very point of my story); it distinctly describes that the King of Bow Wow was basically a tyrant. However, I believe both could be true. I believe that it is possible that every family had royalty until a tyrant chief, seeking to harness the wealth for himself, sold all the kings and queens into enslavement.

I've Learned:

Children are our present and our future

Neo Ebonics Dictionary

Words tend to evolve in time. Take, for example, the word *Christian*. When that word was invented, it was a negative word describing the followers of Christ. Before that time the followers of Christ were known as the people of *The Way*. Perhaps words evolve because ideas evolve; therefore people need to find new words to describe a given idea.

While communicating with the teens of my community I discovered what I believe is the key to their language. Their entire language seemed to rest upon one word, *nigga*. In my generation that word is offensive; however, I noticed that

the word seems to have evolved much the same way as the word Christian. The word nigga has become a term of endearment in many urban settings.

In my quest to understand the culture and language of African American youth, I have made the following translations. Before you go further, understand that the youth of the world are embracing this language and not just people of African descent in America. You may find these terms offensive, amusing and/or helpful. You may find communicating with people born after 1980 much easier after reading the next few pages. Enjoy!

* * *

Aaight - see light.

All that - 1) Superior. Admired. A cut above. Possessing qualities envied by one's peers. In possession of all good qualities.

All that and a bag of chips - 1) To mean that a person is "all that" and more. Sometimes it is an opinion and the only one who thinks it is that person. Other people usually don't believe the person is "all that and a bag of chips." 2) someone who is really fine. 3) good attitude, body, personality, and different from everybody else.

Beotch – female dog. Derogatory name calling.

BlingBling - 1) saying diamonds, white gold or anything that is quite shiny. 2) The gleam that comes off something new. 3) Gaudy jewelry and such. Usually gold.

Crunk - 1) is a mixture of the words crazy and drunk (I *wanna* go to a party and get crunk); 2) a specific type of hip hop music, based out of the southern United States, particularly Atlanta, Georgia. While most crunk-style music could be called "Dirty South" or southern rap, the reverse is not necessarily true.

Crunk juice - 1) is an alcoholic beverage consisting of mixed Red Bull and Hennessy cognac, which is endorsed by such crunk hip-hop artists as Lil Jon and the Ying Yang Twins. 2) It is a mixed drink aimed at providing an energetic state of drunkenness. 3) The 2004 album by Lil Jon and the Eastside Boyz.

Dawg - 1) the close acquaintance of a person of African-American ethnic background; 2) word to be used in place of a name, or other personal noun or pronoun to be used in place of a name. See also, nigga, homie.

Down - 1) To be "with it" or "in the know", knowledgeable about something. 2) To give respect or recognition to something. 3) To agree with someone or something. ("Oh yeah...I'm down with what you're talking.")

Fly - cool, in style (That car is fly.)

Fo shizzel my nizzel – indeed, that is an extraordinary idea, my African-American brother!; I con-

cur whole-heartedly, my African-American brother (Would you desire some more orange flavored soda? Answer: fo' shizzle my nizzle!) For sure my nigga; A polite and well meaning colloquialism used to express agreement with a cohort. (Coined by celebrity/artist/rapper/pornographer Snoop Dogg along with other words containing the suffix "izzle" or "izzy.")

Gay—1) jovial or happy, good-spirited; 2) a homosexual male or female ("You DO know she's gay"); 3) often used to describe something stupid or unfortunate.

GhettoFab - 1) An upper or middle class person, of any race, who thinks or act like he/she lives in the ghetto when actually living in a nice neighborhood. 2) Something that is fabulous in the ghetto. (His/her clothes are so ghettofab.)

Ghettolicious – someone or something that is in the ghetto and has style! Usually describing something extremely ghetto and is not to be used

by Caucasians unless used to make fun of the language of African Americans.

Grill—1) One's personal business. 2) A person's face or teeth.

Heezy—1) hook; 2) house. See Off the heezy fo sheezy.

Holla—1) to talk to someone or telling somebody to call you later; 2) a term used to try and talk or try to "hook-up" with a female (Hey mama can I HOLLA atchu fa' a minute.) 3) To show a romantic interest in an individual esp. with exchanging of one's personal information.

Holla back—1) get back to me (yo holla back). 2) After a farewell has been made you say this to the other person (FRIEND: yo peace dawg – YOU: aight man holla back). 3) a feisty response to people who make lewd sexual comments to others in public 4) to reply at your convenience. To let someone know you received their message.

Homie – see nigga.

light (see also aaight) - ok, alright. (I'll call u up 2nite iight?)

Legit—legitimate.

My boys 1) The term used to describe male friends. (See My nigga) (At this party my boys and I got into a fight.) 2) A term of endearment for one's genitals.

My nigga – see nigga.

My nilla - A variation on "My Nigga", for white people. (Shoot the thrilla, my nilla.)

My nizzel - see nigga.

Nigga - Slang term for homie, friend, buddy, etc., used primarily by African Americans but has spread to other races as well. Origin: "Nigger" or "Nigga" is a term created by Caucasian Americans used in the past to belittle a person of African descent. Other words such as "coon" and "boy" were also created to belittle the spirits and dignity

of African Americans. The word has had a reverse effect due to the fact that African Americans have taken it into their own vocabulary and culture. As negative as it was, has turned into a mutual term among African Americans, meaning "homeboy" or "friend." Yet other races have also began to use it and therefore the word has become very controversial.

Off the heazy fo sheazy - otherwise known as "off the hizzle fo shizzle" meaning off the hook for sure which in turn means off the chain for sure. In American English it means that is surely awesome.

Off the hizzle fo shizzle—(see off the heazy fo sheazy)

Off The Hook—1) exceeding the minimal standard of satisfaction; 2) appealing to one's mind (That song is off the hook!); 3) Closely related to off the chain, there referring to something being so fresh and new that it is literally right off the store shelf. Origin: in reference to clothes, the

hangar being the hook (Them shoes is off the hook dawg.); 4) To express such demand or activity that it is beyond normal conditions. Out of control. Origin: A phone ringing so much that it remains off the hook as a result. (so busy)

Pimp - As an adjective: If somethin' is pimpin', it's pretty darn cool. It's probably something "normal" that's tricked out ghettoicious, gawdy and blingbling. However, as a verb 1) to pimp something out is to make it look very ghettofab. 2) to pimp is to advertise (generally, in an enthusiastic sense) or to call attention in order to bring acclaim to something; to promote.

Skezer — 1) a woman of questionable repute whose character may include negative sexual connotations 2) sometimes applied to describe a rapper's female groupie.

Snap—1) is an expression which expresses expression (Oh snap, I used too much dynamite.); 2) expression used to describe dismay, disbelief, surprise or joy.

Tight—1) Stylish, cool, hip, having everything together (Did you see his ride, it was tight.) Origin: the mood or spirit between members of a music group who are having a particularly excellent performance; 2) very close friends (I've been tight with Chris ever since high school; 3) See off the hook. 4) Not very generous.

Wack—1) Lamé, sorry, ain't legit. 2) to be of low or dubious quality. Origin: comes from 'whacky', which evolved to 'whacked' or 'whacked out'. Eventually shortened to 'wack'. The 'h' is usually dropped to differentiate the meaning from 'whack', which is to hit something hard or kill (old wise guy terminology); 4) something that sucks horribly; stupid; fake; talent less.

Wigga - Caucasian that takes great pride in draping him/herself with ghettofabulous paraphernalia, then pretend they are in the ghetto and call their friends "Dawg" and "Bitch" or "Word Up Nigga". A European American who dresses and acts like African Americans. Some people find this behavior offensive.

Word or Word Up — 1) well said; 2) said in an agreement 3) A versatile declaration that has no single meaning, but is used to convey a casual sense of affirmation, acknowledgement, agreement, or to indicate that something has impressed you favorably. Origin: introduced in 1986 by the R&B group Cameo. Its usage among young blacks has been parodied *ad nauseam* among clueless suburban whites.

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Glossary of Terms

ad nauseam — to a disgusting or ridiculous degree; to the point of nausea. [Latin *ad*, to + *nauseam*, accusative of *nausea*, sickness.]

anthology — literally "collection of flowers"; a collection of literary works, originally of poems, but has evolved to apply to collections of short stories and comic strips.

banter— to exchange mildly teasing remarks.

Ebonics—African American vernacular; Black American English.

empirical— relying on or derived from observation or experiment; empirical results support a hypothesis; verifiable or provable by means of observation or experiment.

epitome — a representative or perfect example of a class or type; a brief summary, as of a book or article; an abstract.

exorcism—a ceremony used to drive demons out.

haint — haunt; To inhabit, visit, or appear to in the form of a ghost or other supernatural being.

jim crow —The systematic practice of discriminating against and segregating Black people American South from the approximately the 1870s through the end of th 1960s.

Manifest Destiny — the 19th-century doctrine that the United States had the right and duty to expand throughout the North American continent by whatever means necessary, regardless of the effects to others.

mustafagot—must have forgotten. Home made word, invented by Myrna Roberts specifically for this book.

non-event—an anticipated or highly publicized event that either does not occur, or simply turns out to be very anticlimactic, boring or is a hoax.

obtuse — lacking sharpness or sensibility; not clear or precise in thought or expression.

Paraclete — according to St. John the mission of the Paraclete is to abide with the disciples after Jesus has withdrawn His visible presence from them. Middle English Paraclyte, from Late Latin Paracletus, Paraclitus, from Greek Paraklētōs, literally, advocate, intercessor, from parakalein to invoke, from para- + kalein to call -- more at LOW; Holy Spirit.

paradigm shift — a change from one way of thinking to another. It's a revolution, a transformation, a sort of metamorphosis. It just does not happen, but rather it is driven by agents of change.

pensively — to ponder or to be caught up in thought; dreamily thoughtful; suggestive of sad thoughtfulness.

perfunctory— lacking interest or enthusiasm; characterized by routine or superficiality.

poltergeist — a ghost that manifests itself by noises, banging, and creating chaos.

pharisaical — practicing hypocrisy: hypocritical, sanctimonious; from: pharisees.

quantum physics — in this writing quantum physics is related to time travel, whether by shifting one's consciousness or by manipulation of some sort of device.

recitation — going over what has been said before. It is used in a religious, oratorical, or educational sense.

skezer—see reference (p. 129) in Neo Ebonics Dictionary.

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Myrna Roberts is a wife and mother of one daughter. She writes essays, short stories and books in the inspirational genre, frequently Christian in nature. She currently works as a paralegal and consultant for small businesses in the Oklahoma City area. Mrs. Roberts also acts as a consultant for spiritual, business, educational and governmental leaders in Oklahoma, Jamaica and Kenya.

Myrna Robert is a minister of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. She holds a Bachelors of Liberal Studies and a Masters of Human Relations, both from the University of Oklahoma. Myrna Roberts has traveled extensively throughout the United States, the Caribbean, Europe and Africa. Along with the Cause for Christ, her interests include genealogy, women's issues, civil rights, and the world-wide human condition. Much of Mrs. Roberts' work is available on her personal website at www.MyrnaRoberts.com.

