

Out of the Shadow of Poverty: Living the American Dream through Faith

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Out of the Shadow of Poverty:

Living the American Dream through Faith

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my parents, children, grandchildren and siblings.

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Acknowledgement

I like to thank the Holy Spirit for placing it in my heart to tell the story, and for guiding me every step of the way.

I like to thank my family and friends for their support and prayers.

I like to thank Patricia Andres and Jo Ellen Chisholm for editing the manuscript.

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Preface

A salt water author who lives close to the Atlantic Ocean talks about growing up in a small Geechee and Gullah community in South Georgia where people believe in both God and roots and how she found her calling in life through faith. The book details what life was like for Rudy an African-American girl growing up in poverty in McIntosh County, Georgia. She grew up in a loving family that cared about each other and always pulled together to survive the hardships in life.

Despite the odds, Rudy was determined not to follow in her family's foot steps. As she grew older she became a self-empowered thinker, and thought about the consequence before she acted upon it. Even when she was told by her high school guidance counselor that she wasn't college material, she stayed focused on her goals in life especially focusing on living the American dream of getting a college education because she knew that all things are possible if you trust in God and make him the center of your life.

Author's note: This is a true story drawn from memories of real events that took place years ago. Some of the names were changed. In telling this story, I have been truthful and where possible I have verified my recollection against those of others.

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Introduction

Eulonia is a quaint, small rural community located eight miles south of Darien Georgia which is the county seat of McIntosh County. Most of the residents live below the poverty level. Some speak a mixture of Geechee and Gullah dialect inherited from slaves. In earlier years some of the people ran illegal gambling to help make ends meet.

I grew up in Eulonia during the 1950s and from the time that I was a toddler my grandparents took me to Sunday school and church every week because they wanted me to know about God. My grandparents died when I was six years old. I was at my aunt's home when my grandmother died, and when my grandfather passed away, I ran out of the house terrified because he died with his eyes opened.

Shortly after my grandfather died, God gave me the gift of precognition dreams and spiritual visions. I was too young to know what was happening, and I thought something was wrong with me for a long time. However, I learned to cope with the dreams and everything else that was going on in my life.

I attended school in McIntosh County, and grew up in a community where a neighbor would chastise or sometimes even spank a child in public for wrongdoing. Then the neighbor would tell the child's parent, and the child was punished again by the parent. When there were family issues and social problems in the community, the elder of

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the church stood up and asked the congregation to pray for the victims and also for the person who was responsible. Back then very few people had telephones, but news spread through the community by word of mouth.

Some people who lived in the community believed in faith, roots, and superstition. "Root is a traditional African-American band of magic-not to be confused with the voodoo of Haiti. Root is a home grown part of the Gullah heritage, attributed to slaves.

Of course there were some who didn't believe anything a colored person said, but if someone white said the same thing it was gospel. As I grew older I became a self-empower thinker; I didn't believe everything I heard, and thought about the consequence before I acted. Even when I was told by the high school guidance counselor that I wasn't college material, I stayed focused on my goals in life because I knew that all things were possible if you trust in God and make him the center of your life.

I was born and raised in McIntosh County.

I lived in a small, old house with my parents and grandparents. My mother Mae was the youngest of eight children. After Mae married Ted, he moved with the family. The house had five rooms: three bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen off the back porch. The house didn't have any paint on it, just grayish boards that had changed color over time from the elements. The four rooms in the main part of the house all had glass windows.

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The kitchen off the back porch had a wooden window that swung out on hinges and latched with a hook. The kitchen had two stoves for cooking. One was a four-burner gas stove that my mother used to prepare meals. The other was a wood stove used by Mae's mother Leona, who was afraid to cook on the gas stove. The family had a hand pump outside in the back yard to get their well water. An outhouse was away from the back of the house at the edge of the woods.

In the third bedroom, a pot belly wood stove was used by the family to heat the home. Also, in the room were four straight back chairs and a full size iron bed.

The top of the house had tar paper over the roof. The interior walls were made of sheet rock, and the living room had wallpaper on the walls. Each bedroom door had window curtains for privacy. The front and back doors each had a wooden latch. The wooden latch was made of a strip of wood about an inch thick and six inches long with a nail in the center. Horse shoes were hung over the front and back doors to keep out evil spirits.

The seven acres of land were passed down

from Mae's grandmother to her mother. Several other family members lived on the land including one of Mae's sisters named Vera and her husband William. Mae's Uncle Curtis also lived on the property.

Ted worked in McIntosh county cutting pulp wood. The work involved a lumber- jack cutting down pine trees with a power saw to make paper

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and lumber. Mae was a house wife and didn't work outside the home.

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Eulonia 1950s

I remember, when I was around three years old on a cold fall day, all the family members were huddled around the pot belly stove. My mother Mae got up to go into the front part of the house. She didn't realize that I was following her, until she heard a crash and I cried out. I had a glass baby bottle in my hand, and I hit the top of the glass table, I broke the bottle and the glass table top, cutting my thumb. My mother turned around, grabbed me up, and rushed me back to the kitchen. She held my hand over a tin basin and poured a dipper of cool water over it while I cried. My grandfather George went outside to get some spider web to place on my finger to help stop the bleeding while my grandmother Leona got a strip of fabric from her sewing basket to tie around my finger for a bandage.

After that incident, I was given a tin cup to drink out of, but I did not adjust well to the change. I'm told I cried for several days, missing my bottle. My grandfather went outside and hitched up his mule and wagon to make a trip to Jenkins General Store. He bought a pacifier for me, but I bit a hole in it. After I bit through several more pacifiers, my mother asked my grandfather not to buy any more. A few weeks later, my mother gave birth to a baby boy. She named him George. After my mother had the baby, I became very close to my

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grandparents, especially my grandfather. He held me in his arms and played games with me because my mother was busy with the new baby. I wasn't

jealous of the new baby because my grandfather kept me busy and entertained. And when I got into trouble with my mother for wrong doing, he shielded me from being spanked, and pleaded my case until my mother was convinced, but told me not to do what ever I did again. I knew that I was the apple of his eye and could do no wrong in his sight, and he was always an arm length away when I needed him. He often hitched up his mule and wagon, and we made several trips to Jenkins general store daily to buy what ever I wanted; he spoiled me that way. Mae's sister Vera came over to visit, to see George. When Vera went into the room and saw Mae and her baby, Mae told Vera something was wrong with his feet. When Vera looked at the baby's feet, she said, "Oh, my God, you done mark that baby at a chicken." Mae's voice croaked with tears welling up in her eyes. She told Vera that while she was carrying George, she wanted a chicken for dinner, but her husband Ted refused to go outside and kill one. Vera told her, "That's why your baby was born with chicken feet. (congenital talipes equinovarus or club foot)

At a year old, George was still sliding around on the floor on his butt. He never learned to crawl, and he wasn't pulling up to learn how to walk. He was beginning to talk, though by the time he was almost two years old, he began pulling up on chairs and holding on to them while trying to learn how to

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walk. My mother and father decided to take George to a doctor in Savannah. When they returned home, Mae told her parents that the doctor wanted to operate on his feet. She said the doctor told them that he would have to break the bones in George's feet and reshape them.

"I told the doctor that I don't want him to break my baby's feet because then he may never learn how to walk."

George was walking by his second birthday with an unsteady gait.

Two weeks later my mother gave birth to a baby girl named Corrine. The family's house was getting too small for all the family members to live in comfortably. Around the end of 1956 my parents decided to build a house of their own. My

grandmother Leona gave Mae and Ted an acre of land next door to her. Leona's oldest daughter Vera, drew up the paperwork for her mother, and witnessed her signature on the paper to be filed at the court house. After all the paperwork was in order, the deed was given to Jim Walter Homes to build a modern shell house called the Holiday next door to my grandparents' house. The deed served as the down payment for the house to be built.

The house was completed during the summer of 1957. It had three bedrooms, a small space for a bathroom, a living room, dining room and a modest sized kitchen. The house had a small front porch with white rails around it. It was painted yellow with white shutters framing the front window.

All the windows in the front of the house were

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jalousie windows that rolled out with a hand crank.

The living room had a large picture window with small jalousie windows on each side. All the other windows were the standard type window. The front door had two small glass windows near the top, and the back door had a half glass window with a screen. The shell house cost two thousand four hundred and ninety five dollars with a monthly payment of fifty eight dollars and forty cents for five years.

Before daddy and Mama moved into the house, daddy covered the interior walls of the master bedroom with white sheets hanging from the ceiling. Two kerosene lamps were used for lighting the main areas of the house. Mama put up curtains at all the windows and in the master bedroom doorway. Daddy was still cutting pulp wood to make a living for his family. They could only afford to buy one rollaway bed and a small table with four chairs because money was very tight. After grandmother gave them the bedroom set from the front bedroom, we moved in.

I spent most of my time at my grandparents' home because my mother was busy with two small children. Just about every day my grandfather hitched up his mule and wagon, and the two of us rode down to Jenkins general store. I always came back home with some candy or a box of Cracker Jack. My grandfather bought me a parasol to keep the sun off my head. Every Sunday I attended Sunday

school and church service with my grandparents. When my grandfather went out into his garden, I was with him most of the time. Sometimes I stayed

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in the kitchen watching my grandmother cook on the wood stove. My grandmother never learned how to cook on the gas stove; she was afraid of the flames. When my mother moved into the new house, she took her gas stove with her.

Curtis lived near the pecan tree in a one room house where I played while my grandfather worked the field. Sometimes Curtis came out and helped my grandfather in the field. I was afraid of Curtis because he stuttered when he talked. Curtis was a short dark-skinned man with a mixed gray beard. He wore overalls and an old felt hat with holes in it. One day my grandfather was out in the field and Curtis came out to help. He was holding a small brown bag in his hand. He said "Here, here Tooooootie" Tootie was the nickname that he called me. I ran and hid behind my grandfather. My grandfather said "Come on out yeh baby, that your uncle, he ain't gonna harm you." When I came out from behind my grandfather, Curtis handed me the small brown bag with candy in it.

While my grandfather and uncle were out in the field working, I sat on the bench in front of the smoke house playing with my doll. The smoke house was attached to the barn where my grandfather kept his mule. One day while they were working in the field, they heard a whistling sound coming from the corn field. I looked up and saw them running out of the field near Curtis house. My grandfather called out to me to run over to where they were standing. Aunt Vera's husband Uncle William was sitting on his front porch, when he saw us running

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out of the field. Vera and William lived in a gray three bedroom house next to Curtis.

Uncle William walked out in the front yard.

Curtis, my grandfather and I walked over to where he was standing. My grandfather told Uncle William that they heard a coach whip whistle in the corn field, but they didn't see it. That's why they ran out of the field. Curtis went into his house, and

my grandfather and I went and sat on my uncle's porch. Pulling a handkerchief from a pocket in his blue overalls, he wiped the sweat from his forehead, gasping for air as he sat in a rocking chair. When we left to go home, we walked down the lane instead of taking the short cut through the field. We walked hurriedly toward the house, looking back over our shoulders. Rushing through the front door, my grandfather quickly closed it behind us. Leona, hearing the door slam, got up from her straight- back chair and asked her husband, "Why y'all back so soon?" He said, "We heard a coach whip whistle, but we didn't see nuthin. We ain't going back out dey today"

Coach Whips are thin bodied snake with a small heads and large eyes with rounded pupils. They vary greatly in color, but most reflect a proper camouflage fitting their natural habitat. They are extremely fast moving snakes. Coach whips are oviparous- producing eggs that hatch outside body the mothers' body. They are curious snakes with good eyesight, and are sometimes seen raising their heads above the level of the grass or rocks to see what is around them.

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In September 1956 I started first grade at the age of 5. On the first day of school, I wore a white short sleeve blouse, a gray felt poodle skirt, black and white oxfords, and my hair was braided in three plaits with a white plastic head band across the center of my head.

My mother and I walked to Eulonia Elementary school, which was a mile south from where we lived on Highway 17. The school had several white wood buildings that sat on cement blocks three feet off the ground. There were four individual white buildings that were used for the first and second grades. The large white building in the center of the school yard was used for grades 3 through 7. Construction was being done on a large red brick building that would later house grades 1 through 5.

After my mother registered me for school in the large white building, she walked with me to my classroom. It was a one story white building with steps leading up to the front door. Inside, a pot belly stove sat in one corner of the room, and a

wall of windows were on another side of the room. The teacher's desk and blackboard, and American flag were in the front of the room. Each student had an individual small desk with storage space underneath it.

I took a seat in the middle row of the room, and my mother sat along the wall near the front door in a fold up chair. The teacher introduced herself to the class.

"My name is Ms. Timmons, and I am going to be your teacher. When I call your name say here."

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Several hours after roll call, recess for lunch began. My mother handed me a tin lunch box with a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in it. A short lightskin lady, with freckles and mixed gray hair from the large white building came around selling small cartons of milk for five cents. My mother bought a carton of milk for me, and left the room.

I saw my mother walking toward the highway to go home. I ran toward the road crying and screaming for my mother. A lady who was walking in front of my mother told her that her little girl was running behind her. My mother turned around and took me back to the school.

She told me, "You gotta stay here. I'm going back home. The school bus will bring you home. I will meet you at the road, and walk you home."

"No Mama, I replied, I wanna go with you."

"Come on Rudy, you got to stay here with us. I will make sure she gets on the right bus, Mae."

"Okay, thank you, Ms. Timmons."

I always enjoyed going to school. I made friends with a class mate named Sally. During recess Sally and I played jump rope, seesaw, jump board and swings. I was interested in learning new things, and I didn't want to miss any school days. Several weeks after school started on a Friday afternoon, I went over to Aunt Vera's house. Aunt Vera and several other family members were busy in the kitchen. Vera's aunt Adline was in the kitchen making custard for the homemade ice cream. After she poured the custard into the ice cream churn, she placed the bowl on the kitchen table. I stuck my

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finger in the bowl, and Adline slapped me on the hand and scolded me.

Just about that time, Uncle William came over and said, "Don't you ever put your hand on Rudy. Here Rudy, you can lick the bowl."

Aunt Vera turned around and said, "We always give Rudy the bowl to lick after we finish."

Adline told them "That chile gonna get worms eating that raw batter."

"Oh, that want hurt Rudy, Uncle William said, looking Adline in the eyes.

Ain't none of us never got no worms from licking the bowl."

Adline stepped back from the table and didn't say another word.

"Rudy, come on home, it's getting dark."

Okay, Mama."

"Rudy you ain't been over dey worrying sister because she trying to get everything ready for the wedding tomorrow."

"Mama, Adline hit me."

"What you done for Aunt Adline to hit you?"

"Nuthin!"

"You muster done suppen for her to hit you."

"Mae, did I hear Rudy say Adline hit her? I utter go over dey and give her a piece of my mind. It ain't her place to be hitting on that child."

"Papa, Rudy muster done suppen for Aunt Adline to hit her."

"Come on Rudy, Papa, we'll see you tomorrow."

"Night!" "Night!"

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The next day around noon, family members from out of town begin arriving at William and Vera's house for the wedding. My mother dressed me in one of my Sunday dresses with a cancan under skirt and my Sunday shoes. After all the other family members were dressed for the wedding, we walked next door to Vera's house. On the way to Vera's house, my mother scolded me for playing in the sand.

"Rudy, come over yeh and walk with granddaddy"

"Okay, granddaddy"

"Mae you need to stop Rudy from playing so much in that sand before it'll take her hair out."

“Yeah, Mama, I know.”

“Hey, y’all come in.”

“Hey sister, you need any help with anything?”

“No, we bout got it whipped”.

“Rudy, you stay out here on the porch, don’t go out dey in that sand.”

“Okay, mama.”

“Sister whey Nettie at.”

Nettie is Vera’s only child. She is getting married to Duffy.

“Mae, I’m back here in my old room, come on in.”

“Hey, Nettie you bout to break your neck!”

“Yeah, we just are waiting for Rev. Harvey to get here.”

“Good luck to you and Duffy.”

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“We don’t get to see you much, since you live in Savannah.”

“No, I am working at the hospital on the evening shift. We are getting ready to buy a new house.”

“Yeah, that will be nice. Me and Ted ain’t finish with the inside of our new house yet.”

“It takes time.”

“I hear some noise outside. Let me go see what’s going on.”

She yelled, “There ain’t gonna be no wedding here today. Duffy, you come on out that house right now.”

Duffy scorned ex-girlfriend Emma had come by Vera’s house to stop the wedding. Standing near the passenger side of a black pick-up truck Emma yells out again for Duffy’ to come out side.

Vera’s husband William came out on the front porch, and told Emma to get off his property.

“I wanna talk to Duffy, right now, she insisted”

“You bet not be here when I come back with my shotgun.”

William went into the house. Emma got into the truck and left before he came back out. As Emma was leaving, Rev. Harvey’s car was coming up the lane.