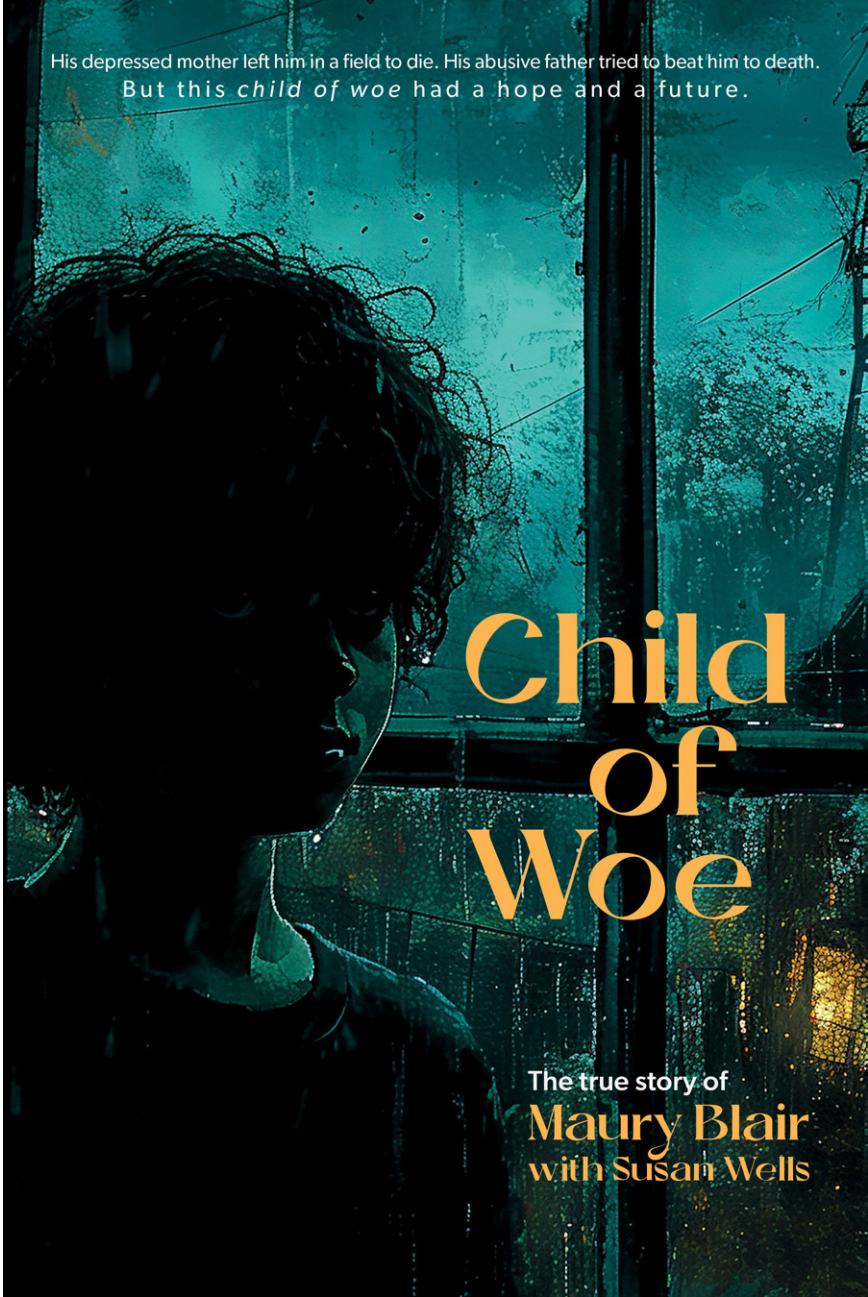


His depressed mother left him in a field to die. His abusive father tried to beat him to death.  
But this *child of woe* had a hope and a future.

# Child of Woe

The true story of  
**Maury Blair**  
with Susan Wells



A young boy with dark, curly hair is shown in profile, looking out of a window at night. The window is covered in rain, and the view outside is dark and blurry, suggesting a rainy night. The overall mood is somber and reflective.

His depressed mother left him in a field to die. His abusive father tried to beat him to death.  
But this *child of woe* had a hope and a future.

# Child of Woe

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**Maury Blair**  
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# What Others Have to Say

I heard Maury speak of his childhood years ago, barely able to process his story. “Child of Woe” has revealed more of the horrific world he grew up in, but there’s much more. I was profoundly moved when reading about the prayers of Christians who perhaps wondered if God would ever answer.

God’s incomprehensible ability to help a young man who had never known acceptance to welcome the simple and unending love of God. At its core, this is a story of the miraculous and transforming power of God’s love.

*Rev. Patti-Pierce Miller — Lead Pastor at  
Evangel Church in Montreal, Quebec*

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In this compelling revision of *Child of Woe*, Maury Blair brings forth a poignant narrative that resonates deeply not just with those who have endured suffering, but also with believers and ministry leaders dedicated to serving the most vulnerable. Through the harrowing yet hopeful story of resilience and redemption, this book provides a profound resource for anyone engaged in front-line ministries or working with at-risk individuals. It challenges us to reflect on the power of faith and the transformative impact of compassion in our communities.

As someone involved in leadership within a faith-based organization, I found *Child of Woe* to be not only a testament to the human capacity to overcome adversity but also a call to action for all of us in ministry. The inclusion of a graphic novel format expands its reach, offering a unique and accessible tool for engagement in our outreach efforts. This book is a crucial addition to any collection seeking to inspire and equip those who serve on the front lines of ministry.

*Rev. Kevin Shepherd is the CEO of Crossroads and YES TV. He is a credentialed minister who has served in pastoral and ministry leadership for over twenty-five years.*

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A book like this one started Maury on the road to recovery, leading him to encounter Jesus while reading in his bedroom. A wounded child encountered something deep within his soul, he was transformed by

personal faith in Jesus, the healer. He expressed, “God was in that room. I just met God.”

Maury Blair’s story is a perfect example of how an abusive past does not have to determine the future. It’s a miracle that Maury survived and grew into a healthy, compassionate, forgiving and positive man — as well as loving husband and father.

Maury has made his life work one of helping many deal proactively with the effects of abuse. Susan Wells crafts an updated and well-told story, showing that recovery from severe childhood abuse is possible. If you minister in challenging situations, this book is a practical, hope-filled resource for you and the people to which you minister.

*Rev. Bob Jones, Leadership Coach, Author at REVwords, Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine*

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I was captivated and deeply moved by Maury Blair’s harrowing childhood. While all seemed hopeless, God had an incredible plan for him.

The narrative vividly portrays Maury’s experiences, evoking a sense of sorrow for his vulnerability and suffering. I highly recommend this book to anyone desiring to help and understand the minds of those trapped in abuse.

*Cathy Ciaramitaro is President and founder of Windsor Life Centre, a rehabilitation centre for women desiring to overcome abuse and drug and alcohol addiction.*

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I’ve never not known Maury. I remember him sitting at my parent’s kitchen table, eyes wide, arms waving, talking so fast he didn’t seem to breathe. He couldn’t sit still.

Maury shared his story, from pulpits to check-out lanes at the grocery store, on street corners, prisons, schools, playgrounds, and restaurants! In the six decades I’ve known Maury, his unbridled enthusiasm has never lessened!

*Sue Ozard Keddy  
Daughter of Jack Ozard, Maury’s first pastor  
Founder/President, “Dream Big With Us”*

# Child of Woe

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Monday's child is fair of face,  
Tuesday's child is full of grace,  
Wednesday's child is full of woe...  
~ Nursery Rhyme, circa 1697

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The Captivating True-Life Story of  
Maury Blair  
with Susan Wells

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Child of Woe

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**The creation and publication of this book has been made possible through the financial generosity of individuals and the volunteer efforts of many. Thank you to those dedicated to supporting abuse survivors on their healing journey, for anyone seeking hope.**

# Introduction

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Doug Brendel authored the original *Child of Woe* several years ago, drawing from extensive recorded interviews. I have had the honor of rewriting this book, also filling in some missing links, and including updated content. Maury's first-hand recollections have remained unchanged.

Doug described his interviews: "As Maury, his wife Bev and I discussed the sordid details for hours, we noticed a remarkable lack of malice. The characters who harmed him most were described with care and consideration. I was cringing as I heard of irresponsible, even criminal behavior."

"Maury continually seemed to hold back. While an outsider's reaction might be anger, Maury felt compassion for those who wronged him. The grotesque nature of some scenes is by no means exaggerated; if anything, Maury insisted that the nastiest extremes be toned down."

Is Maury Blair for real? When I expressed my horror at all he'd endured, a refugee in his own home, Maury responded with that youthful exuberance he still possesses. "Oh – Susan, if it meant one person coming to faith in Christ, I'd do it all over again!"

I gasped, "Well, maybe not everything."

It would be natural to assume that a composite of the "ideal Christian" had been molded into a Maury caricature. Any friend or colleague will confirm that Maury is indeed the real deal! His compassion for his tormentors is surpassed only by his love for others. Spend a few minutes with Maury and you'll feel better the rest of the day!

A neglected child's delight in the smallest of distractions — Maury's unflappable sense of humor and his irrepressible optimism weaves their way through his remarkable journey of faith and tenacity.

A nightmarish childhood, whose account should leave you disheartened, will instead inspire you with hope, fresh purpose, and a commitment to do the same for others.

*Susan Wells*

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# Forward

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We live in a broken world. While we can theorize “the multiple contexts of brokenness,” Maury Blair’s life story, “Child of Woe,” does not allow us to leave family disappointments, abuse, and even abandonment “out there.” He brings the harsh realities home with his compelling account of being an unwanted child, enduring parental violence, isolation and emotional abuse.

Maury’s motive is not to lash out at his perpetrators. Neither does he seek to sensationalize his childhood experiences. The raw truth is powerful enough. Maury wants those on similar journeys to see someone who has walked that path, an overcomer who can point to the hope of transformation for a “child of woe.”

The story, though bleak, leads us to witness healing and wholeness in a young man desperate for change. He beautifully describes how individuals, and a small church, were instrumental in enabling him to discover a new life. Transitioning from being a recipient to a messenger, Maury embodies that hope available.

In “Child of Woe,” the brokenness is real, but so is the longing. In a broken world, people of faith can provide life-changing relationships so that more children of woe can become messengers of hope and transformation.

On a personal note, we honor Maury and Bev for sharing their story, ministry, and most importantly, their lives. My wife, Susan, invested heavily in preparing this edition of “Child of Woe”; she knows what an intervention by one person of faith can do.

Read the book, lament the pain, and celebrate the transformation, but then please decide to live as a valued child of God who can bring a message of hope to those living a life of woe.

*Rev. David R. Wells  
General Superintendent  
The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada*

# Dedication

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*Dedicated to my wife, Bev,  
Given to me by God as a gift,  
Used by God as a vessel of  
Healing and encouragement.  
Her support has been vital,  
But in the full scope of my life.  
And to our daughters,  
Lisa and Laury,  
More precious treasures than  
This child of woe could ever have imagined.*

# Chapter One: The Animal's Prey

*Before I was born, the Lord called me: he has spoken my name from my mother's womb.  
~ Isaiah 49:1*

The boy's appearance was striking – a skeletal frame with hollow eyes betraying his seven years. His skin, which should have been aglow with the flush of childhood, instead bore the pallor of illness. Thin strands of black hair, poorly cut and far from clean, scattered at will across the top of his head.

Statue-like, he would press into the darkened corner of the upstairs bedroom as if trying to melt into the walls. His gaze was fixed outside the window for hours, tracing the stretch of train tracks that faded into the distance.

The boy had perfected his technique. Standing motionless helped to evade attention. With no hiding place except in the shadows, the upstairs landing acted as a buffer, providing a short distance between him and the frightening scenes he'd faced. The stillness was his camouflage, a means to cloak himself from the dangers that stalked his home.

***The decrepit stucco shack they lived in creaked and groaned, betraying every sound as the mundane rituals of daily life crept into his involuntary hideaway. The brothers and sisters could be playing, chatting or bickering on the lower level while Mother worked in the kitchen. He could hear them, each voice, a bitter reminder of his isolation.***

The solitary child could hear all of them. When danger wasn't present, he'd slip to the floor, lying flat on his skinny belly, chin resting on his knuckles. From the landing, he could peer through the gaps in the floor vent—a prisoner's view of the world below. Those narrow slits, along with the bedroom window, were the only portals into the child's world.

He would dare to gaze through the beams of light as if they were a

familiar friend, the kind one grows up with, kicking a ball in the streets. But this child had no such friends.

The creaking announced that the tormentor had arrived. Downstairs, the children would settle into an uneasy quiet as the drunk lumbered up the porch steps. The screen door squealed when opened, hissed and slapped at you when you let it go.

The “old man”, the children’s name for him, was home. He roared and cursed in a drunken stupor as he stumbled around the lower level. Everyone made room for him, much as one willingly gets out of the way of a menacing animal. But his actual prey was elsewhere.

Upstairs, the telltale slapping of the screen door shot a silent scream through the child. He sprang from the vent and slipped through the bedroom door to the corner window. His survival instincts warned him to move quickly as he disappeared into the shadow’s embrace.

He had learned not to hide under the covers. He had learned not to hide at all. It was useless. Standing silently in the blackened corner, he only hoped to avoid the horror.

The obscenities would build, sometimes stretching to hours, before the old man would head for the staircase – a countdown to the boy’s impending hell. The child suppressed a shiver as each stair bowed under the monster’s weight. He had to control the trembling; it might trigger the old man’s wrath.

The predator could take two routes. As he climbed the stairs, his poison snaked through the house. Depending on the extent of his drunkenness, he would mutter like a threatened dog or rage like a bull.

Near the last step, he might turn toward his bedroom or continue straight through the door of the child’s room. The prey could feel him mounting the top step. He waited in the shadows as he desperately prayed that the old man would make the turn. God never seemed to care.

He could sense the child’s angst, relishing the fear as he approached the landing. He’d make the child squirm while deciding which direction to

take. Distinguished by his bald head and stained mustache, the old man seemed massive.

He was no more than a standard build. Nevertheless, his strong hands were punctuated by powerful, stout fingers. Staring into the bedroom at the child's slender silhouette, the old man looked like a volcanic mountain craving to explode.

Unlike the other fairer Wick kids, the boy's darker hair and complexion made him different, an involuntary outsider who fueled the man's tirades. The threats were always the same, "You black bastard... I'm going to kill you." His words tightened the child's muscles. Too many times, the boy's worst fears would be realized. The footsteps led not away but towards the waiting prey. "... I'm going to kill you."

The child could feel the predator's heat. He could smell the liquor. He could almost taste the rage. With terrifying precision, the old man seized him by the upper arm, his massive fingers wrapping around the child's limb like a broom handle. With his other hand, he pushed the boy against the unforgiving wall as he closed his fingers into a colossal fist.

The mother would try to stop the old man before he got to the steps. But he always managed to shout her down or — more often — waited out the confrontation until he slipped around her to the stairway. The children downstairs trembled at the thud of the boy's body hitting the wall upstairs. The children could not ignore the horrors. The older ones stared helplessly at each other, or the floor. The younger ones searched for an explanation, pleading for someone to stop the shrieking.

The old man punched the child until he grew bored. He'd throw the boy to the floor like a rag doll, proceeding to kick him. The screaming stopped when the cries choked in his throat. He struggled to breathe. With the scene's horror pressing in, the boy remembered not to resist more than he had to. Resisting made the old man crazier.

Finally, with his rage released, the old man came to rest. Still muttering about the "black bastard," he'd lurch around the corner into the bathroom. He would relieve himself of the liquor if he could stand up long enough.



The child lay in a heap, gasping and crying quietly, his body pounding with pain, his mind spinning, *“Why does he hate me? Why is this happening to me? Why doesn’t anyone want me?”*

Only when the old man had dumped himself onto the bed would the child risk picking himself off the cold wooden floor. Sometimes, one of his brothers would be there to help him up, check over his bruises, or ensure that no bones were broken.

## **Are you alright?**

Other times, when the child failed to respond, the brothers would tap him, *“Maury... Maury... Are you alright?”*

It was strange, in a way, to hear that question in connection with his name. There was nothing “right” about him. He was despised, but he had no understanding as to why.

---

*“You Black Bastard” was the only name Maury’s stepfather ever called him. Though it wasn’t meant as a racial slur, it was intended to wound. Maury’s black hair and darker skin set him apart from his half-siblings, marking him as different from the other Wicks.*

*His distinct features reminded Maury of his status as the “bastard child,” the product of Alice’s love affair with another man. Cyrus felt a victim of the town’s gossip.*

*Many have experienced the feelings of a helpless child facing a daunting “monster”—the pain of being judged simply because of their appearance or because they didn’t meet others’ expectations. While this may not seem evident at the time, there is always hope for change.*

## Chapter Two: Side-Tracked

*When a lovely woman stoops to folly,  
and finds too late that men betray,  
What charm can soothe her melancholy?  
What art can wash her guilt away?  
~ Oliver Goldsmith, 1766*

Alice showed the most promise of the seven Peters sisters and two brothers. Her mother, a stern woman whose demeanor was matched only by the zeal of her religious convictions, was thrilled when Alice set off for a bible school in New Jersey.

It was a far cry from their small-town life in Paris, Ontario. Alice felt the weight of expectations upon her and focused on excelling. She did well in school. Her preaching talents hinted at a bright future.

Being Mother's favorite had its drawbacks. When Mrs. Peters took sick, she wanted no one else to care for her. Her enthusiasm for Alice's passion ended when her health was concerned. The other sisters were less inclined to lend a hand to the cranky old woman.

Alice reluctantly left her place of promise — but only for a little while. She'd tend to her ailing mother first.

Money was scarce, Alice had to also search for a job as she settled into her caretaker role. Depending on the mood, her mother was either crabby or pitiful, which grated on Alice. One could hardly maintain a positive attitude with her burdensome patient constantly whining.

A chance encounter happened when Alice went to get the strange noises of their aging car fixed. She met Bob Wick – a mechanic whose rugged charm, hi-lighted with the streaks of grease and the sheen of sweat, stirred an unexpected attraction within her.

Bob Wick was a fun-loving socializer, a worldly-wise gentleman who

would join his friends in the hotel bar at the end of each day. Alice accompanied him, reluctantly at first. She soon grew accustomed to Bob's patterns, gradually immersing herself in his lifestyle.

Tongues wagged. The townspeople loved good gossip, and this relationship provided the best fodder. This beautiful woman seemed to have forsaken her spiritual path and was now in love with the rough-hewn mechanic.

Alice focused on hints of his goodness. He was a gentleman who made her his object of affection. Alice imagined that true romance must feel just like this. It became easy to rationalize her new direction in life.

Her mother was horrified when Alice married — yet the union seemed to solidify. When the firstborn came along, Alice struggled. The daily complexities of motherhood and homemaking strained Alice's limited domestic skills. Despite displaying symptoms of postpartum depression, there was no awareness of the condition, leaving Alice to face her inner turmoil alone. The idea of a new mother feeling "blue" was unheard of, not to mention a taboo subject to seek help for.

Bob and Alice adapted to the rhythm of working-class life, maintaining regular contact with their extended families. Children came along, one soon after the other.

With each birth, Alice's day-to-day existence became more complex. Funds dwindled as the "Great Depression" drained the continent of almost all commerce. Patience wore thin. Life was hard.

Still, Bob and Alice managed. A northern winter wind was blamed for bringing pneumonia to the area. Bob got sick, forcing him to bed as his lungs filled with the poison, choking off his air supply. The croupy cough that echoed throughout the house was interrupted by the crying of babies and the staticky noise of the cheap radio.

There was little money for a proper burial. Bob's mother, ever hateful toward Alice, couldn't help. However, Bob's older brother Cyrus, who was fond of Alice, provided some financial aid. He felt badly for her, stranded

and penniless with three children. He had always looked kindly on Alice, if for nothing else than the hints of beauty she still possessed. Her hair had thinned, with tiny wrinkles starting from the corners of her eyes. Still, she remained a lovely woman in her early thirties.

Cyrus lost his wife in a tragic neighborhood fire years before. He never had children. Now he had an opportunity to renew himself as a man and father figure by pursuing a romantic relationship with Alice. As Alice relied more heavily on Cyrus for emotional support, he warmed up to the idea of making her his own.

While he mulled over the possibility of proposing, Alice was wrestling with her circumstances: the care of three children, medical bills, and the whispers of the town. Cyrus provided a tower of strength. Alice needed a friend who would listen and support her. Cyrus was there to attend to her needs. As Cyrus mused over the object of his growing affection, the “object of his growing affection” was musing herself.

The authorities were another source of mounting pressure. They were harassing Alice, a single woman, to provide for her children more adequately or risk court action. Her spiritual heritage and the life she had once lived now lay buried under the burden of daily struggles.

She dismissed the notion that she had let her life pass by. It was becoming increasingly more complex to separate her fantasies from the bleak reality of her existence. A cloud of guilt followed her. Could she ever make things right? No, everything was already too wrong.

Alice sensed Cyrus Wick was going to propose. She wanted to resist and re-group. She wrestled with the conflict, but Cyrus offered security. It was tempting to accept his offer — even though he was twenty years her senior.

On the other hand, Alice wanted to run from the pressure and escape the nagging authorities. She longed to start a new life with her children, a safe place free from gossip and judgement.

## **Attempts at a Fresh Start**

Alice considered her sister's offer. Moving to Flint, Michigan, offered a

glimmer of hope against her tribulations – her opportunity for spiritual revival in a new setting, unaware that no geographical escape could provide the sanctuary she needed.

In his wildest dreams, Cyrus was unprepared for her rejection. He roared inside like a wounded lion. It was unconscionable that Alice would turn him down. His brother had been good enough for her, and now he wasn't.

Despite his inner turmoil, on the outside, Cyrus was gentlemanly. He lied that he understood. The snubbed lover helped her pack, all the while inwardly fuming. As she drove out of sight, Cyrus continued feeding his demons, recalling the many times he had been there for her. Then came the shock when she casually replied she couldn't marry him.

He had a great capacity for kindness. Alice would later discover that Cyrus also had an unlimited capacity for revenge.

Upon arrival in Flint, Michigan, signs reading “No Help Wanted “ hung like tombstones outside the front doors of most employers. A business that survived the collapse, *Irving Machine Parts*, was looking for workers. They hired Alice!

One employee caught her eye. Her introduction to Maury Blair sparked a new romance, temporarily carrying her away from past stresses. He was good-looking, with a strong, square jaw and prominent cheekbones. Maury Blair possessed a keen sense of humor. She quickly fell in love.

Alice didn't talk about her children who were still in Paris, even after several dinner dates. She never mentioned Cyrus, who had been left behind to brood. She only revealed she had been married and that her husband had died of pneumonia.

Maury seemed to free Alice from her complicated life back in Canada. She would not chance spoiling this relationship. The charming Maury Blair possessed neither Bob Wick's roughness nor Cyrus's aging crankiness. They picnicked in the local forest preserve as Alice floated far from the worries that had driven her to Flint in the first place.

Unfortunately, the pleasantries of life seemed to come in narrow



interludes for Alice. As the days grew hotter, Alice felt sicker by the day. Then, she realized that she was pregnant.

She feared the consequences of the news and the complications it could mean for Maury. She didn't want to witness his devastation when she revealed her pregnancy. Perhaps, in his gentlemanly way, Maury would ask her to marry him. However, this would also force the revelation of her three children back in Paris and the tangled story of her past.

Life had turned on her again. She felt circumstances burying her under a tidal wave of tragedy. She hastily concluded that she could never lean on her faith again. She wept, hurting over herself, her lover, the children in Paris, and now the child within her.

She picked herself up, wiping her face as she tossed her clothes into the trunk. Overwhelmed with pressure and uncertainty, Alice made a painful decision to flee without leaving a trace.

No note was left for Maury Blair. She couldn't find the words. Alice could not bring herself to lie to him again.

When she failed to show up for work the following day, Maury immediately sensed the worst. He found her place vacant. He searched for clues, but there was nothing. No one at Irving Machine Parts had heard a word.

A dull ache settled in. He wanted to know if she was carrying his child. But he could not know for sure — not for many decades — that he was indeed my father.

It wasn't until Alice revealed the truth behind her journey many years later that my father's identity would finally be revealed.

---

*When a lie is born, you are confronted with the task of preserving the truth. Alice didn't want to face the judgment of others. Unfortunately, she believed that avoiding difficult circumstances was her sole choice. This deceitful act started to foreshadow the potentially devastating consequences for Alice and*

*her children. Being “sidetracked” has the potential to initiate a negative cycle in anyone’s life.*

*Support from caring friends or neighbors could potentially alter Alice or Maury’s downward course. Can they experience change, even in their hopeless circumstances?*

# Chapter Three: Strike the Deepest Blow

*Jabez was more honorable than his brothers.  
His mother had named him Jabez, saying,  
“I gave birth to him in pain.”  
~ I Chronicles 4:9*

As the miles toward home dwindled, Alice’s mind raced with concoctions of half-truths to justify her pregnancy – the whispers of the town were a foregone conclusion. Alice loved the child within her as much as she loved Maury. If only she hadn’t had to ruin everything.

She needed to find an explanation for the town gossips. Her expanding stomach would soon force her out of her clothes and into maternity wear.

Alice bit her lip, paying little attention to the road. She could imagine her mother’s disappointment. Alice could picture her sisters turning their heads from side to side, doubting her story. Hypocrites would nod understandingly as they faced her, then sneer as she walked away.

As the miles slipped by, Alice collected bits of truth to produce the best lie.

“I met a wonderful man in Michigan.”

“Yes, Alice,” they would reply.

“But of course, those overnight courtships never work out.”

“No, Alice, of course not,” they would say, with little credibility in their voices.

“And we were divorced last month.”

“Oh, Alice,” “We’re so sorry.”

“Then I found out I was pregnant.”

Alice would know if her story had been accepted by the seconds between her explanation and their response: if they failed to answer quickly, the lies had not held up. She had only been gone awhile; no one had heard about this marriage, yet she was returning undeniably pregnant.

Her version of the truth would have to do. It was all she had, no matter how absurd. She would call herself *Mrs. Blair*, which gave her an air of respectability. *Mrs. Maury Blair*. The name sounded acceptable.

She could sense if her tale was not being believed by everyone. No one laughed in her face — no surprise — but the gossip mill was heavy-laden for weeks as Alice's pregnancy became obvious.

Cyrus was waiting, open-hearted by all appearances. Once again, he provided an active social life, making her feel womanly. It was an investment that would pay off when he got this pregnancy out of the way.

She sensed an anger inside him — her earlier rejection and the child she was carrying by another man. As Alice's desperation mounted, money problems grew worse. She felt sick. The children were irritable — and the house was a disaster.

With her stomach growing and the child kicking, Alice longed to see Maury Blair again. As the Canadian leaves dried and died, she accepted that she had lost the love of her life.

## **An Ominous Beginning**

There was no money for a hospital birth. When the day came, Alice called Zeke Virgil, the pool hall owner, to drive her to Brantford, a nearby town. She dared not ask Cyrus to take her to a house where impoverished mothers delivered their unplanned babies. And she was never going to tell Maury the truth about where he was born. In haste, and feeling shamed, the child remained unregistered. Her secret seemed safe.

He was a sickly baby, not fitting in with the world he had been thrust into. There appeared to be a foreshadowing of future agonies. He seemed to absorb germs from the air as if his system, in some perverse way, required them to survive. It looked like every bug had invaded his frail

body.

Alice was dizzy with the pressures of life as she attempted to recuperate from another childbirth. Every decision weighed against the mired backdrop of her past — and to whom she had told which versions of the truth. Amidst this, the new infant was named after Maury Blair, the man she had lied about marrying and divorcing.

Alice should have filled out the documents necessary to register the child for a birth certificate. She did not want to implicate Maury Blair as the father. Although Alice did not grasp the ramifications of her hasty decision, little Maury Blair would have no legal existence!

When Alice returned to Paris with the sickly infant, familiar stirrings returned when she saw Cyrus. There was still that twinkle that told her he was a possibility. As they sipped beer at the Paris hotel bar, they made their way through the tense niceties. Alice revealed her big mistake, how badly Maury Blair had treated her (though she hadn't told others this version), and how she had discarded the jerk after only a short time in Flint. Cyrus had difficulty measuring the truth from the nonsense as he nodded in agreement.

Cyrus loved that the penitent lover needed him so badly. The smoldering hatred — now many months in the making — could weave its way into a devious plan.

***He looked for a place to strike the most profound blow, to leave a wound that would not heal but could only grow more painful. And he thought of the baby, Maury Blair.***

Her eyes would light up when she looked fondly at little Maury. Cyrus could tell Alice had reserved a special place in her heart for the child, and it infuriated him. Alice still had a deeply rooted love for the man who had fathered that little bastard. Whoever that lover had been, he had found his way into Alice's bed during that humiliating summer Cyrus had been rejected. He boiled with rage at the child, the living evidence of his spurned affections.



He would have his cake and destroy it, too. Cyrus Wick revealed his abhorrent scheme. “Oh Cyrus, you can’t be serious,” Alice scolded him nervously. Cyrus looked at her, his eyes expressionless. “I am.”

She knew he meant what he said: he would marry her, but she must get rid of little Maury.

“Cyrus, he’s just a child.”

Cyrus’ nostrils flared. “I’m not going to father *that little bastard*,” he growled, his face reddening as he spoke. “I’ll take care of my brother’s kids, that’s all.”

But to give away her baby — Maury Blair’s baby. The thought stuck in her throat. He was a frail boy, nearing one year of age. Something about him brought out extraordinary affection every time she looked at him. Maury’s big eyes and dark hair made him different than her other children, he looked just like his handsome father.

Alice took Cyrus’ big hand in hers. She needed to diffuse the situation. She was sure he would eventually change his mind.

Cyrus held fast. Days trudged into weeks with the house, the children, and the squalor closing in on Alice. Alice spent more time with Cyrus, charming him to drop the conditions he had established for marriage, but he continued to hold a sword over her.

## **An Unthinkable Alternative**

Alice’s relationship with her children seemed to be a mockery of motherhood. She had no financial or emotional resources to care for them. There would be no more help if that “black-haired bastard” stayed around — the only name Cyrus ever used.

The warring emotions sunk her into depression where she sometimes considered horrible alternatives – each ending with Maury’s disappearance!

The government authorities could take him. Alice had heard horror stories of the institutionalized homes where little lives wasted away in a

bureaucratic maze. More often, her meanderings took her to darker places.

***There were undoubtedly many ways to kill a child. She wondered if she could do it herself.***

Explaining to the family that she needed a break for a few days, Alice wrapped the baby and headed for his birthplace of Brantford, where her sister Isabel lived.

The house stood in a rural setting, with fields all around. Alice announced that she was going to take Maury for a walk. Isabel pattered until Alice returned, the sun was setting and the air turning cooler. The baby was not with her!

Sitting at the kitchen table, Isabel looked up at her younger sister. Alice stared at the floor, muttering about the weather and the next day's meals, sighing as the room fell silent.

"You can't do this," Isabel finally announced. "Where is he?" Alice would not answer, her eyes glazed and blank.

"Alice, I won't be part of a murder!" Isabel cried. She slid her chair away from the table as she stood up. "We've got to find him."

Alice sat at the table while her sister headed into the fields. Her imagination swirled with pictures of Cyrus, the other children, the wreck of a house back in Paris — then the image of the helpless infant she had left in the high grass. She shuffled to the kitchen counter, wearily leaning against it as she waited. She could not decide whether she wanted Isabel to find the baby or not.

It could be an "accident," and no one would ever know.

What seemed like hours later, Isabel pushed open the back door, cradling the shivering child. Isabel's face was blotchy red from the cold; she had nothing to say to Alice. The next day, Alice returned to Paris with Maury, buried under the weight of her actions and the chaos of her life.

She struggled with her youngest baby as the other children tried to keep some semblance of order. The air hung like a heavy cloud; an unpleasant

odor permeated the unkempt place. Each room held a dingy lightbulb that poked through the ceiling. Worn-down furniture littered the house.

Cyrus' offer stood. As the bills piled up, the pressure mounted. She fled, this time to nearby London, Ontario. While resisting Cyrus' insistence to give Maury away, she became pregnant a fifth time, a pregnancy draped in secrecy to this day.

A new baby, Mark, was born out of Alice's despair. Meanwhile, a sickly Maury was registered as a patient in the same hospital, under treatment for multiple illnesses. Years later, the hospital's record books would reveal that the infant Maury Blair was visited by someone who signed in as "Mr. Maury Blair". The visitor's actual identity has never been found.

Alice would have to settle to keep from being entirely consumed. She'd face the townspeople and the hard-edged Cyrus Wick again and perhaps negotiate an arrangement with him. With Maury a little healthier, maybe Cyrus would reconsider his harsh ultimatum.

Alice was only in her thirties, but she felt old. Could she love Cyrus despite his demands? Could she build a relationship on the slim thread of affection they had felt? It seemed possible.

She hobbled back to Cyrus, hinting that her retreat to London had been therapeutic. He mocked her. She could no longer lie with finesse. Sensing her desperation, like a lion preying on a wounded animal, Cyrus raked her mercilessly over the one concession he demanded. If she wanted him to rescue her, marry her, and father her children, the "black bastard" must go.

It seemed senseless to strangle her own life and her other children for the sake of this one sickly child.

With her problems mounting, she boiled the conflict down to a single option: she could either give up Maury or she would lose her sanity completely. She accepted the offer as they nursed beers in the bar one evening.

"I'll do it," she whispered.

He looked at her. “Hm?” he grunted.

“I’ll let Maury go,” she repeated. Cyrus was silent for a moment, then exhaled noisily.

“Well, see that you do,” looking away with caustic nonchalance. “We’ll get a marriage license tomorrow.”

Alice sat motionless, absorbing the weight of her decision. She swallowed nervously, wondering if she could really follow through with it.

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*Infanticide, the tragic act of a mother ending the life of her young child, can sadly take place when a deeply depressed or overwhelmed parent believes their child would be better off, “elsewhere”. This heartbreaking decision is sometimes viewed by the mother as an act of selflessness.*

*Although Alice couldn’t bear the thought of her son enduring potential mistreatment in an institutional environment, she found herself contemplating the unthinkable - that death might be the preferable alternative.*

*Maury, a sickly child, did not freeze to death in the grassy grave where his mother abandoned him. Against all odds, despite the temptation to give up most times, we see signs of a child who is determined to persevere.*

*This story underscores the incredible power of perserverance which can overcome even the most overwhelming challenges.*

## Chapter Four: "I'd Kill You If I Could"

*'I think we are in rats' alley,  
Where the dead me lost their bones.'*  
~ T.S. Eliot, 1922

Sundays offered a brief reprieve to the routine of violence. Uncle Bill was a barber. He used to come over on Sunday afternoons for dinner, cutting the kids' hair afterward. I listened from the floor vent above, smelling the aroma of food wafting up from below. The dialogue rarely varied.

"Well, Alice, why don't you bring Maury down," Uncle Bill lightheartedly suggested, "and we'll cut his hair too."

Cyrus growled at his older brother. "No way is that black bastard getting his haircut."

"Oh, come on, Cy," Uncle Bill chided. "You crazy old bugger, let him come down."

Cyrus cursed and refused.

"He'll probably be the best damn kid you have!" Uncle Bill teased.

Cyrus exploded into fits of cursing. Uncle Bill was not intimidated.

"Ah, lay off the kid, Cy."

"One of these days," Cyrus shot back in a gravelly voice, "I'll kill him." I shivered but knew I was safe on Sundays. The old man never beat me when Uncle Bill was in the house.

Mom secretly advised me to drop by Uncle Bill's barber shop on my way home from school for that much-needed haircut. "Get out of there as quickly as you can, Maury." I could read the desperation in her eyes.

There was good reasoning behind her advice. The first time Cy found I had been brought into his house, against his wishes, he kicked my

eighteen-month form like a football against the wall. As I crumpled to the floor, my older brother cradled me, convinced that I was dead. He held me until he eventually felt me stir.

Mom found ways to avoid sending me away in the early days of her marriage, unrealistically wishing that Cyrus would grow accustomed to my presence. He never did. Cyrus fumed whenever I was in view. He saw me not as his stepson but as an embodiment of her betrayal – the resentment was inflamed by his alcoholism that thrust him deeper into bitterness.

***I had no memories of a first beating; I could only remember being abused, always being hit.***

Cyrus drank heavily as his wife's mounting problems became his own. He'd stalk home from the downtown hotel tavern and direct his drunken rage at me. Mom sometimes wrapped me in blankets and walked the streets, waiting for Cyrus to tire of his anger before collapsing into a drunken sleep back home.

Like a hunted animal, I learned to walk and then to run. Cyrus would grab me by the arm and begin pounding me until Mom could pull him away. If I escaped, I knew the repercussions would be more severe. Against all instinct, I'd go limp, letting his big fists strike me at will. If I couldn't escape his noticing me in the first place, I could not run at all.

Patterns emerged as Cyrus' alcoholism drove him to an even deeper hatred of me. As dinner hour approached, he walked the same route home from work via the tavern. I created hiding spots — a fence, a bush, or my favorite tree, just outside my solitary window — where I could disguise myself as I observed him coming. I trembled, gauging his drunkenness by his walk.

Each evening, I'd decide whether to slip home ahead of him by way of my well-worn shortcuts. If I was home when he arrived, I might be beaten ferociously — if he were in that frame of mind. I needed to remain watchful, observing him on his way home to decide what steps to take.

I'd evaluate how miserable the old man was, how badly he was feeling,

and how likely he was to head straight for the bathroom or bedroom. Mercifully, his drinking created terrible digestion problems, sometimes forcing him to skip my beating.

On some nights, he was simply cranky, wanting his supper and wanting it now. Rapping his cup on the table for a refill of tea, he'd scowl, "Where the hell is that newspaper I brought home?"

I could be sure of a beating if he were uncomfortable enough to be enraged. Sometimes, I stayed away, hoping he would forget my absence and pass out for the night. I found places to sleep around the neighborhood — under a veranda, beneath a porch, in a thicket, or simply on the frozen earth of a nearby lawn.

Many times, a concerned neighbor would rouse me and bring me inside. With my teeth chattering and flesh trembling from the cold, the townspeople knew my fear of the crazed Cyrus Wick kept me from going home.

Taking advantage of rare moments when Cyrus was absent, I would join the family at the dinner table. Most often, I listened from the vent upstairs, "Let that black bastard starve," he snorted when one of my brothers mentioned me. One might slip me a few scraps of food when they could, like a naughty teenager feeding the family mutt on the sly. Other times, they couldn't, leaving me hungry and hopeless.

As dinner hour neared each evening, the trauma repeated itself. I could wait outside, face the weather and the terror of hiding, hoping someone would sneak a few scraps of to me. Alternatively, I could retreat indoors to seek physical warmth and face the icy expanse of an emotional tundra. There, I would take my chances with Cyrus.

If I was in the bedroom, the terrible countdown began as I heard him push through the downstairs front door. I stood in the darkness, having learned that it infuriated him to see me enjoying even a lamp-lit room.

I made the mistake of hiding under the bed covers only once. Bunched up in a terrified ball in one corner of the bed, terror pulsing through my

skinny frame, he lurched up the stairs and into the blackened room. It was too dark to see anything, but Cyrus didn't turn the light on. Instead, he began to hunt as he cursed in the darkness, groping wildly along the walls, under the bed, and finally around the edges of the mattress.

"I'll find you... you black bastard," he promised repeatedly between his gritted teeth. "And when I do, I'll kill you."

My choices were of no use. If I hid, the old man would eventually find me. He would beat me harder for having to ferret me out. I could not let out a cry. I could not call out. It would only double the abuse.

I felt his hot fingers wrap around my ankle. "I've got you now," he growled like an animal. With a single snapping motion, he yanked me off the bed. In a split second, I could see him silhouetted against the moonlight through the window, his fist rising above his head. I closed my eyes while waiting for the blows to begin.

Each impact crushed my face or arms until I felt myself fading. The images melted together as I struggled to maintain consciousness. I could hear my brother Mark as he clung to Cyrus' pant leg, pleading with him to stop. Still, he pounded me repeatedly before kicking me to the floor. The punching would begin again. I could feel the cold wooden floor beneath me and the freezing steel bed frame against my face. Cyrus unleashed a final solid blow to the back of my head, and I was unconscious.

I awoke to the aching pulse throughout my body, beginning in my face, where my skull had been butted against the bed frame. My little brother Mark cradled my throbbing head in his arms, looking into my bruised face.

"Maury," he whispered, "are you all right?" I mumbled something through swollen lips. "Maury," Mark said in a terrified, breathy voice, "I thought you were dead."

The thirst for revenge fed his alcoholism as the drinking increased. I was told he had suffered a terrible wound on the battlefield. A bullet ripped into the corner of his eye, and out the back of his ear — but there was no scar. Others unrealistically surmised that he went away to war and came



back a different person.

Now, I was the target of his irrational anger. He could never be satisfied with the damage he inflicted. Cyrus would stop beating me at the last moment when he could not be sure of my survival. Flinging me to the floor as he lumbered away, he'd curse, "I'd kill you if I could..."

I was the victimized symbol of his hatred. The ultimate vengeance was against my mother, Alice. I was the offspring of the man she had loved — the man she had fled to instead of Cyrus during that impassioned summer. She'd been horrified when he first began hitting me. She'd hurry to my defense, pulling me away from him as she shouted down the old man.

As the years dragged on, her defenses spiraled downward. Cyrus loaded her with insults and terrible names. She numbed as hopelessness took over.

The other children were victims as well. Rose, Jay, and Frank knew him as "Uncle Cy", although everyone called him "the old man" behind his back. They kept their distance, trying to avoid his outbursts while holding him in disdain.

Times were tough for all of us. We boys slept in one bed, with only Jay on his own as the oldest. After Cyrus Jr. and Hal came along, we lay the wrong way across the mattress to fit everybody in.

***Sometimes, my brothers hid me under their bodies when Cyrus was on a late-night rampage. Sometimes it worked.***

Across the landing, the girls' room was slightly better than ours. Baths were rarely taken, and there was no tub in the house. Changes in socks and underwear were an unknown habit.

Instead of bathtubs, we washed in the river. Our house stood on a ridge beside it. The hill, supported by a cement wall, ran in either direction from our place. The current had eaten away the cement at one end, corroding the weakened structure into vast chunks of concrete. They stood in the water like stubborn soldiers refusing to give up the fight. We played among the rocks at "The End," the closest we came to regular bathing. We rarely considered removing our shoes and socks to keep them dry.

With no replacements, we threw the damp articles in the corner as we went to bed, only to pull them back on in the morning. They were either musty and stunk after a warm night or musty and stiff after a cold night. During warm weather, my feet were covered in rashes from rubbing against the damp socks.

## **Humiliated On All Fronts**

Each child was responsible for their laundry, although it rarely got done. When enough students harassed me, and teachers sent notes home to my mother to wash my clothes, I sometimes scooped up my few belongings and headed to the river. It was the same spot where the town's children went swimming. I scrubbed my clothes with red-faced shame while the kids jeered.

*We were the kids other mothers warned their children not to play with... the family that the rest of the neighborhood wished were not there.*

Everyone knew I had been singled out as a target of continual wrath. One day the old man marched home, livid with rage, belching his liquor and spilling obscenities with every breath. He lurched down the cement steps behind the house into the cellar, snarling curses, seizing his ax by the handle.

“Where is he!” he shouted as he huffed and puffed back out of the cellar. “I’m going to kill that black bastard! Where is he!”

I had seen him coming down the street, sensing his unusual fury. I was crouching behind a hedge. I could see him elbow his way out through the back door, clutching the ax handle and looking wildly from side to side.

“Come here!” he roared as he headed my way. Terror ripped through me. I watched motionless as he stumbled in my direction, the ax blade glistening ominously. Realizing he could cut me to pieces, I darted from my hiding place and flew down the street. He roared as I put more and more distance between myself and the raging animal.

I stole a fleeting glance into someone's backyard, breathless and sobbing with fear. A neighbor lady poked her head out the back door, her forehead

drawn into a tense frown. “Maury!” she hissed. “Come inside!”

She hid me for the night. The old man finally gave up the search and crashed back at the house, where he vomited before passing out.

*I never knew the history. I never understood why my stepfather had singled me out, why his hatred focused solely on me. I knew only the hate and the feeling of being unwanted.*

Children, yearning for love, possess an innate instinct to seek security. When my attempts to reach out were met with failure, I experienced the hollowness of rejection. I grappled with the confusion of why this predator singled me out. Too frightened to seek answers from others, I remained isolated in my desolate solitude, burdened by the belief that I was at fault.

Cyrus’s rage built with no relief. I was a trapped rat, and there was no escape from the revenge from old man Cyrus Wick.

My mother would disappear for days or weeks at a time, visiting a sister, her mother, or a neighbor, I agonized over my safety. I slowly began to realize that Cyrus wouldn’t harm me when she wasn’t around. It took years to understand the ugly dynamics of their relationship. Cyrus would not lash out unless it could serve his twisted purpose of teaching Alice a lesson in anguish. When she was within earshot, he rarely failed to abuse me, pointing to that great crime she had committed against him — rejecting him to take up with the mysterious Maury Blair.

## **My Mother’s Erratic Defenses**

He ensured that every familial joy, like ice cream or birthday celebrations, became a battlefield, denying me the smallest token of affection or normalcy. When the other children were handed ice cream, Mom tried to wrangle some for me as I lay on my stomach beside the gap in the floor upstairs.

“Oh,” she would lead off smoothly, “let’s take some up to Maury.”

“Give that black bastard some ice cream?” he snarled, scraping his chair from the kitchen table and rising like a grizzly roused from sleep. “Where

the hell is he?”

He headed up the stairs, cursing as he vowed to kill me. I leaped from my forbidden vantage point in the floor, slipping to the far window of the bedroom, awaiting judgment. Mom came after him, pulling him away as best she could to draw his attention away from his target. Grumbling, Cyrus reluctantly stopped on the landing. He pulled his arm away as he muttered a few final obscenities before dumping himself into the unkempt bed.

The revenge never let up. Cyrus tortured her in every way he could. My mother could never throw a birthday party for the child of Maury Blair, never express any open affection toward me for fear of making my hell even more damned than it already was.

At the end of one rainy spring day, vehement and noxious, Cyrus mounted the steps. Instead of turning at the landing, he lumbered ahead, pulling me from the corner. The old man struck blow after blow, but that wouldn't be enough this time. He picked me up, thrusting me through the bedroom window.

I hung in his grasp over the rain-swollen river that ran along the ridge just behind our house. I screamed, terrified of falling. I was too afraid to kick or squirm. The vice-like fingers of Cyrus Wick were my only hope for survival.

Mom, hearing the screams, ran up the stairs. In disbelief, she stood in the doorway, but only for an instant, before marching toward Cyrus with a fierce maternal determination. She sank her fingers into his neck, “In the name of Jesus, pull that boy in and put him down.” Her words shot out like arrows. Cyrus froze.

My heart raced, anticipating his next move - unsure whether he would plunge me into the river or heed my mother's authoritative command. After what seemed like an eternity, he pulled me back over the windowsill, allowing me to fall to the floor.

He would not look at my mother, cursing as he stalked away. She waited

for him to leave the room before turning to me. I was trying to compose myself, trembling uncontrollably.

***I longed for her to take me in her arms and convince me it would never happen again, that she would protect me from the old man. I wanted so much for someone to love me.***

Instead, my mother patted my shoulder, staring at me through sunken eyes that exposed her depression. But she could never console me.

Once again, the question sounded absurd: “Maury, are you all right?” She barely waited for a response. She couldn’t afford to. If she lingered, the grizzly would return. She knew it as well as I did. There would be no stolen embrace, no furtive moment of affection. She was suffering in her own hell.

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*“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” Matthew 18:10*

## Chapter Five: Fragments

*'We make war that we may live in peace.'*

*~ Aristotle, circa 375 BC*

Word flashed through town that a convict had escaped from a nearby prison. Some insisted that he was holed up somewhere in Paris. It was the week's excitement as homemakers gathered over afternoon tea while their husbands elbowed to the town bars to discuss the most titillating news in months. Every sound in the night seemed to signal the presence of the escaped convict.

I lay awake between my brothers, trying to sleep. I heard a loud knock outside and we all jumped. I could hear my mother whispering to the old man. She heard a sound in the backyard. The terrifying truth flashed through all our minds — the con was on our property!

There was little hesitation on Cyrus' part. He was too vicious to wait for someone to sneak in and attack him. He bolted out of bed and charged down the steps.

As soon as he was out of earshot, we tumbled out of the rickety bed and squeezed around the window. I pressed my face against the dusty glass to get the best possible view of the action. From our upstairs perch, we could see the dark figure of the old man charging out of the house. His fists were closed and ready to hammer his victim to a pulp.

Empathy welled up for the escaped convict. If the old man ever caught him, I could imagine the con fleeing in a panic with bruises and cuts all over his body. I imagined him running headlong back to the prison, banging wildly on the front door, pleading hysterically for the warden to let him back, promising never to escape again after meeting that monster in Paris.

We found out later that the con was recaptured miles away. He had never been to Paris! Unlike the escaped convict, I had no prison to flee to.

Suspended in limbo between unwantedness and deprivation, I had no other source of shelter.

Winter brought a deeper sense of isolation as I'd frequently find myself on the outside looking in. I'd lean against the house, letting the tears freeze against my blotchy face. I struggled to comprehend the reasons for my perceived unworthiness. The old man's relentless verbal abuse served as a constant reminder of my supposed inherent badness. Why was I so despicable?

In my helpless state, I cried out to an elusive entity, a distant overseer, whom I desperately hoped one day would hear my cries – God.

## **A Little Church**

The small Pentecostal congregation in Paris, Ontario welcomed us to their *Gospel Cadet* meetings. Our smell preceded our entrance, which was followed by our filth.

The church was a short walk from the house, just around the corner. We both found ourselves in the same run-down neighborhood. We were welcomed on Friday nights, and it was a madhouse! Games of all kinds had been designed to drain the energy out of the dozens of street kids before a time of bible stories and singing.

The leaders, nameless to me then, seemed identical in their scrubbed cleanliness. They were kind and patient with us — knowing, I assumed, what was happening back in the Wick house. Despite our difficulties, the church people gave us a sense of belonging and acceptance.

It was during these gatherings that I first heard about God. A spiritual connection with a higher power was an unfamiliar concept to me. Establishing a personal relationship with God had not crossed my mind. Though I had no tangible proof of his existence, I had no reason to doubt the sincerity of those who spoke of him.

The leaders spoke passionately about prayer and its power to help people overcome their problems. It's now apparent to me that the foundation of my basic prayer life was established through their teachings, bit by bit,

every Friday night.

One freezing winter day, seeking shelter from the biting wind, I leaned against the south side of our house. As the peeling paint from the wall scraped against my worn-out shirt, I was overwhelmed with despair. At that moment, I reached out to God and poured out my heart. It was a raw and honest cry for help, born out of my hopelessness. He seemed not to care.

Our attendance was sporadic at best. We wouldn't have shown much promise to those beleaguered teachers as they attempted to keep us corralled for an hour.

Occasionally, Mom gathered us around her and told us bible stories, but there was no clear-cut message. She was a masterful storyteller, capturing our attention with her wide eyes and expressive voice. In those rare moments, we were transported to another world, another life, and introduced to the strange and mystery-draped characters of the past.

Ironically, I was most fascinated by the story of the two women who asked King Solomon to settle the dispute over who had mothered the surviving baby. Pretending he was equitable, the wise monarch ordered that the child be cut in half and shared equally by the two women. The natural mother, in her love — and according to Solomon's good gamble — preferred to give the child up rather than see it senselessly destroyed.

***I was unaware that my mother had made the opposite choice. Unable to part with her infant, she had chosen instead — by default — my virtual destruction. I was the child in dispute, torn in two. Cyrus was the sword. There was no wise Solomon to make the best decision — nor, in fact, any decision.***

Mom's sporadic storytelling sessions did not bring about change or produce hope for our fragmented family. I acquired my first bible at school. At the time, an organization, The Gideons, would present Bibles to the students. However, the event brought more humiliation than hope.

Each name had been engraved on their personalized pocket-sized bible.



As the organization's representative called out each person, my schoolmates marched to the front individually to claim their prizes. My heart beat faster as the A's were dispensed and the B's began.

I heard the terrible mistake.

"Mary Blair?" the man announced.

I was horrified. The class exploded with laughter and catcalls, another reason to mock the weird outcast Maury Blair.

"It's Maury Blair," I corrected him lamely, my face burning with shame.

The rest of the class carried their bibles home at the end of the school day. I went home empty-handed to face a hell the old man would once again bring. A few days later, my corrected Bible would be handed to me privately after school.

I rarely read it and could only understand a little of its old-fashioned language. Not till years later would its impact be felt in my life.

People were concerned. They were praying for me — but I never knew at the time. The leaders at "Gospel Cadets", suspecting the turmoil in our home, were praying for us. People driving by our house would pray. Watching her kids hitchhike from place to place always had our mother praying.

By today's standards, one would wonder why concerned neighbors, or teachers, or the community didn't report the blatant abuse to the authorities. These incidents took place in an era when one did not "interfere" in the "private lives" of families.

While a "single mother" might be unfairly targeted, an "intact family with male head" had a better chance of evading authorities. With almost no governmental social services or legal protection for children, it was not uncommon for even the most sympathetic neighbors to offer little more than kindness when they could.

Across the river from our house stood a mill. On their breaks, the workers watched as we romped in our steep "backyard". We'd balance on

the rickety fence, threatening to tumble into the river at any moment. In winter, we'd slide down the hill on scraps of cardboard. Employees who watched us growing up on the riverbank wondered how we ever survived.

I recall interludes of relief and long summer days when school was out, and Cyrus was safely cloistered at a client's house with his plastering business. Fear broke free, taking its form in wild antics. We played hockey with a tennis ball in the front yard. Our property became the neighborhood boxing ring or baseball diamond. We brought mounds of dry leaves from the neighbors and dumped them in our yard to play in. The old man came home swearing every time.

"We don't have a damn tree on the property," he fumed, "and look at that mess!"

My brothers and I excelled in neighborhood terrorism. Next door, Mrs. Dudley became a favorite target. We climbed her trees against her protests and knocked out her windows while playing baseball.

Beyond Mrs. Dudley's place lay the Michaels' residence, another favorite playground. Our mischief was often rewarded by an angry Mrs. Michaels stomping onto her front porch, wagging her finger in consternation. Across the street lived the Hartman's, whose daughter Donna inspired us to take up rock-throwing with other guerrilla tactics.

One grandma lived down the street. Sitting on her veranda, she resolutely ignored us as our rock missiles bounced around her! We called her "the Old Hen." Years later, I learned from a family member that she had prayed for me faithfully despite the harassment inflicted on her.

The ridge over the riverbank seemed like the perfect castle wall. When anyone plunked down to fish, we showered them with rocks. Mothers warned her children: "If I ever catch you hanging out with any of those Wicks ..."

Dangers lay in our wild kingdom. I located a group of burly workmen constructing a veranda and found a perch above them. From that vantage point, I could bounce rocks off their hard hats.

One of the men meant to stab his shovel into a mound of earth and hurl its contents at me.

The shovel flew into the air when the gloves slipped off his sweaty hands. I had no time to dodge the blade. It smashed into my forehead and split the flesh. I tumbled off the perch and instinctively scrambled away, blood flooding my face.

Stumbling towards my front door, I realized the trouble I'd be in if I bled inside. I could imagine Cyrus grabbing me and pounding me, shouting curses. Dizzy and desperate, I knocked on the door and backed down to the ridge, my bleeding wound held well past the edge.

Mother came to the door, reacting with alarm. She led me to the kitchen sink and began to wash the blood away, only to find that the bleeding had not slowed.

“Oh, Cy,” she called nervously into the living room, “I can't get it to stop.”

Cyrus sneered. “Ah, let him bleed to death.”

Mother wrapped my head in a towel and hurried me to a doctor who administered the necessary stitches.

Whenever Mom was visiting her sisters in Flint, her absences could stretch to weeks at a time. Invariably, she took Mark and Cyrus Jr., leaving me behind. I was terrified. It was the most painful rejection — but my brothers were younger, and she did not trust the old man to properly care for them.

I sat in my bedroom for hours, gazing beyond my favorite tree towards the train bridge across the river. It was the last spot I had seen the train as it took my mother and brothers away. Inside, the emptiness ate me up.

During her absences, a strange transformation would take place. Cyrus never hit me when she was gone. Why waste energy when punishing Alice was the whole point? Otherwise, the abuse remained as vicious as ever. When Mom left money with my oldest sister, Rose, to take us all to the circus when it came to town, Cyrus intervened.

“You’re not taking that black bastard anywhere,” he informed her.

“I am Uncle Cy,” Rose pouted. “Mom left enough money for me to take him.”

Cyrus grew angrier as Rose held her ground. I listened to the unfolding drama from my place next to the floor vent upstairs, my stomach tight with tension and hope. Cyrus finally grew tired of the arguing and settled for hateful acquiescence.

“All right,” he growled, “take the black bastard — and throw him over the bridge on the way home.”

## **Thrills & Spills**

There were a few futile attempts at showcasing my manliness. The vines down at “The End” were submerged in the spring, but as the river ran shallower in the summertime, the slender cane weeds became exposed to the hot sun. I could break off a dried piece and light one end. It would glow like a cigarette while I sucked on the other end. However, the manly experience took its toll. I smoked the whole cane down, spending the next day vomiting.

By the fifth grade, I had graduated to stealing cigarettes, which I carefully hid from my mother and older sister, Rose. When I ripped my coat and Rose mended it, she detected the telltale odor.

“I smell cigarette smoke,” she said with a frown as she stitched.

“Really?” I asked in my calmest voice.

“Maury, have you been smoking?” she quizzed me suspiciously.

I pretended to be aghast at the very suggestion. “Who, me? No! Not me!”

Amidst these occasional triumphs, playing a good game of softball provided a fleeting sense of accomplishment. We proudly called ourselves the “Indians” (accepted lingo back then). To emphasize our team spirit, my brother, Frank, made us colorful cardboard armbands.

Despite the thrills in victories, my distorted perspective on life hindered me from genuinely relishing those accomplishments. There was only one instance when one sport elevated me to sheer, giddy fulfillment.

The bases were loaded with two outs, and as I stepped up to bat, something magical seemed to charge through me. I deliberately let the first two strikes zip by me without attempting to swing! In a bold gesture, entirely beyond the realm of my puppy-whipped character, I pointed boldly toward the deep center field, “Babe Ruth” style. (One of the greatest legends in baseball, Babe Ruth, famously pulled this stunt, a story that will forever be one of the great moments in sports history.)

The kids on both teams laughed, booed, and hooted at me, but I remained resolute. The pitch came, and I threw myself into the swing as the softball soared up and out over the far edge of center field.

Stunned silence momentarily filled the air, swiftly followed by the manic cheering and whoops of my teammates.

The impossible had become possible. As I trotted around the bases, following my three teammates, I experienced an exhilarating rush of single-handed victory. It was such a rare high that I hardly knew what to do with it. Nevertheless, I learned that once I returned home, the old man would bring me crashing back down to reality.

If softball provided an emotional cushion in my life, years before, anticipating my first classroom experience had filled me with terror. With no sense of security at home, the unknown environment of attending school terrified me. I couldn't comprehend a place that could be absent from fear. From my earliest memory, I'd experienced none of these things.

As I approached first grade, my imagination had been filled with dark images: a vast brick building, each classroom housing a clone of snarling Cyrus.

Once I'd made the initial adjustment, I found that the schoolroom could be a source of more attention than I had received in my short, unhappy life. I quickly learned that the kids around me giggled and approved of me

when I deliberately botched my schoolwork. The teacher saw through the ruse and strapped me soundly. I quit going for laughs and withdrew into a lonely shell, unable to make friends unless I was being mocked.

We occasionally had a few days off in the upper grades due to teachers' conferences. On one such day, I walk to school alone. My older brothers Frankie and Jay passed me in the back of a pickup truck, hitchhiking a free ride. I felt so lonely. I wanted to cry.

Two friends and I were determined to gain recognition by sneaking back into the classroom and startling the older teacher. As we crept up the aisle, she suddenly looked up and jumped with fright. We squealed, reveling in our delightful scare. She grabbed me by the arm and shook me violently as I lashed back at her.

"Get your filthy hands off me," I spat as I broke away, running as fast as I could for the stairway.

Scrambling down the stairs, I came face to face with the principal, staring me down for my speeding violation. I turned back to go up the stairs but was cut off by the enraged teacher looking down at me from above. Panicking, I clutched my stomach as I screamed, "I'm sick!" fleeing past the principal and out of the building.

Upon reaching home, my mother dutifully made me return to school. Sheepishly, I faced the teacher again, expecting to be severely strapped.

My punishment was miraculously spared. Instead, the offended teacher chose to show mercy. She asked if I'd like to stay after school to help straighten the classroom. I jumped at the chance to escape from the doldrums and terror of home, gladly helping her the rest of the year.

Nevertheless, it was an embarrassing way to let me off the hook, almost worse than getting the strap, for it told me she knew the grueling humiliation and mental torture I was being subjected to at home.

***It made me even more distant and withdrawn to think that the townspeople could see through the terrible truth: I was a rat trapped in my own house.***

My distorted upbringing showed up in unexpected ways. One incident involved me running down a staircase in the school building, only to trip and fall headlong into a brick wall. The impact knocked me unconscious. I awoke, only to find teachers and students trying to bring me around.

Instinctively, I covered my face with my arms, kicking and fighting to escape. “What’s wrong with you, Maury?” they yelled as they tried to calm me. Suddenly, I realized that Cyrus had not been beating me. I had no answer for my strange behavior.

## **Rare Tranquilities**

Escaping the miseries of home became a constant challenge. I created dozens of distractions. Rubber “rings” found in the gutter were worn like treasures. Marbles recovered from sewer holes became prized possessions.

One summer, inspired by a friend who appreciated wildflowers, I ambitiously pursued gardening! I discovered a plot of rich soil on the ridge behind the house, a secret place Cyrus was least likely to find. I transplanted wildflowers collected from various “exotic” locations around town. Sources of flora ranged from alleys – to rich folk’s gardens. Like a single-minded gardener, I lost myself in that pitiful “botanical wonder” for hours. I huddled over my watering, puttering away as if mine were prize-winning blooms of the highest variety.

I would sit quietly on the back steps with infinite patience, waiting for robins to take the breadcrumbs dropped around my feet. I managed to befriend a field mouse, feeding him scraps and taming him enough to run up and down my arms, in and out of my tattered pockets. I kept him in a makeshift cage near the garden until a heat wave rolled through, leaving my tiny prisoner dead of thirst. As I buried his stiff corpse, a lump forced its way into my throat. Resolutely, I refused to let myself cry.

Summers brought new dangers. Cyrus was inclined to take off from work early on warm days, heading for the tavern in the hotel, where he’d become falling-down drunk. His erratic schedule made it more difficult to gauge his frame of mind. There were times when he returned home ahead of schedule, and if I was caught downstairs – the ultimate taboo, it guaranteed

a torrent of hideous curses and even more severe beatings.

The tension swelled with the seasonal changes. Summer raised tensions in our house until my mother would farm me out to neighbors for a day or two until things cooled off. Not many were inclined to take in such a rank little ragamuffin, but the folks from the local Pentecostal church showed kindness and hospitality. It was nothing short of a miracle that they agreed to let me be around them in the first place.

The separation from the familiar — despite the horrors of home, disturbed me. I never felt at ease in anyone else's house. One night, my mother sent me to the neighbors across the street. Laying alone in bed was a luxury, but I was nervous and fidgety. The foreign atmosphere — the cleanliness and the embarrassment of being rejected at home, kept me awake.

The host stopped by my room to check on me and found me out of bed and dressing.

“What are you doing?” he asked, a little startled.

“I'm going home,” I replied with determination. “I'll take my chances.”

He tried to talk me out of my decision, but I could not stay. I was too disturbed to settle in, even for one night.

The man knew what I would face at home. “How will you get in?” he asked.

“I'll find a way.”

My choice may not have seemed logical to me or my compassionate neighbor. It would take years to understand that behavior like this is not uncommon for psychologically injured victims. There is a perverse security in choosing what is familiar, even if it means enduring the abuse that comes along with it.

Minutes later, I stood at the front door, peering at the bedroom window above me. The house was completely dark. I knew if I awakened Cyrus, I would be dead.



I roused my mother in a shrill, hoarse whisper: “Mom! Mom!”

I sighed with relief when she slipped silently into view in the window. She understood immediately and calmly signaled me to be quiet. She disappeared, and in a minute, she slowly pushed the front door open for me. I snuck to bed.

For once, I had gotten away with something under Cyrus’ nose!

In one dreadful sequence, I found myself sucked into a swirling black tunnel. Someone I could never see was waiting at the end to crush life out of me. I clawed, screamed, and tried to hang on, avoiding the end at all costs – until I woke up quaking with fear, afraid to go back to sleep with the possibility of facing the tunnel again.

Other nights, I found myself floating helplessly down a river. A ghoulish rope floated with a tangled knot in the middle. The knot was alive, seething and breathing, anxious for me to be drawn into it so it could drown me.

Sometimes, lions chased me; other nights, I ran to escape an unknown predator. Time and again, I awoke screaming or lay screaming in my sleep, my mother trying to quiet me to keep Cyrus from being aroused in the next room.

My mother experienced her share of distress. Cyrus took perverse delight in sitting at the kitchen table with her, hurling insults. He’d threaten her with physical violence if she got up and left. Other times, she sat for hours through the night, absorbing the abuse, tears refusing to flow, even as her heart was aching.

At night, my mother stole money from his pants pockets for groceries. He continually demeaned her, forcing her to grovel.

One spring, Cyrus became incredibly violent. Mom grew more fragile as the hot summer sun baked our town, especially this early in the season. Life became a sweltering pressure cooker.

My mother feared that I might not last the summer. She never said anything but saw the signs that it would be terrible for all of us. She was

sending me away. A silent scream welled up. I was aghast at the thought of leaving my home. That gruesome household was the only source of security I had ever known. Why would she do this to me?

I cried as I watched her pack my hopeless little wardrobe into a cardboard box. If I could look into the future, I'd see my nightmares shortly become a reality.

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*Maury's ability to find the "good" in difficult situations was crucial to his survival in childhood. When good was not to be found, he created rare moments of "goodness."*

*Despite his brokenness, Maury sometimes found light in the kindness of others. The folks at the small church on the "wrong" side of town reached out to the "worst" kids in town. They demonstrated that even in "hopeless situations," actions can make a difference —although it may not be evident at the time.*

## Chapter Six: Strange Connections

*'One would be in less danger  
From the wiles of the stranger  
If one's own kin and kith  
Were more fun to be with.'  
~ Ogden Nash, 1945*

It was the serene, rural stereotype of a Canadian farm, with a barn and horses, chickens and pigs, Lud and Selma and a grandmother. An observer might surmise that this was a place of peace and tranquility. All I saw were shades of ominous gray. The situation was dangerous from the moment I stepped onto the property.

Lud, a friend of Cyrus, was bigger than him, over six feet tall with bugling muscles making him nearly twice as broad. He was an unsmiling brute of a man. Selma seemed to be continuously annoyed. Always complaining, she found me to be nothing more than a nuisance. And then there was the grandma, the self-righteous disciplinarian, wagging her finger at every opportunity.

The farm, for all its charm, provided no place of comfort. It was as if wandering through some ill-fated Hitchcock movie. Witnessing Lud beheading chickens, listening as their nervous systems expired in frenzied fits of kicks and tremors. I shivered. The sounds became magnified, the chickens' claws grabbing against the inside of my skull.

The grandmother, the supreme voice of her family, grew angry with me at the dinner table one evening. She pulled me from the chair, yanking my trousers down to my ankles. She spanked my bare bottom in front of the others and stood me in the corner against the wall. The sense of shame and humiliation was overwhelming, and I wanted to return home, regardless of the danger.

The summer's humiliations led to chronic colitis, which destroyed my

digestive process and all hope of controlling my bowels.

Although Cyrus and I had no blood link, it seemed his awful digestive problems had been passed on, as if he could transfer the worst possible inheritance to me by sheer meanness. From my earliest childhood, my intestines, prompted by nervous tension, knotted up stubbornly, only to relax without the slightest warning.

I'd scramble for the bathroom, often arriving too late. Red-faced, my composure devastated, I peeled the filthy underpants off and washed myself at whatever facility I could find – a faucet, a water pump, a creek. At home, I found the most convenient route was to run down to the river bank. I often encountered other kids swimming and playing who never failed to hoot and jeer as I washed my dirty laundry.

At the farm, with no explanation for what my body was doing to me, I found myself more prone to such problems. I hid my dirty pants under the bed until Selma finally searched for the source of the stench and furiously washed them all. Afterward, Lud stepped into the picture, angry with me for upsetting my hostess and declaring unilaterally that this was “a filthy habit and nothing more.” He warned me sternly not to let it happen ever again. “It” was out of my control, so the inevitable occurred.

The brutish Lud seized me by the neck, lifting me off the ground. I dangled like a rag doll as he stomped out of the house towards a huge circular rain barrel. My stomach tightened as I saw his purpose unfold. Standing next to the barrel, cursing me ferociously, he violently thrust me under, entirely submerging me in the cold water.

My head spun as I struggled to hold my breath. His strong fingers pressed solidly into my neck and shoulder; there was no escape. Terrifying possibilities flashed through my mind, including the ultimate – he would kill me right there. My lungs burned, screaming for oxygen. I could feel the pulse in my temples like a death knell pounding through my skinny body. Waves of terror and nausea swept over me in rapid succession. It felt that if my lungs weren't replenished, they would explode.

His fingers tightened as he pulled me out of the barrel. My face broke the

water's surface, gulping air into my burning throat. I desperately coughed and sucked for more as he pushed me back into the water before I could recover.

Again, he held me under until my chest ached for relief, and again, he hoisted me up at the last possible moment. I had barely gulped a swallow of oxygen before he had thrust me under the water for the third time, and then a fourth.

When he felt he had made his point, he set me down with a jolt beside the torturous barrel and walked away. "See that you break that filthy habit," he muttered as he stalked up the porch steps and into the house.

I wobbled before collapsing in the dirt, leaning against the barrel, too traumatized to cry, too weak to stand up and wash my sloppy underpants. It was a strange feeling to long for the safety of my own home.

## **Strange Kinships**

Two companions wandered into my troubled life, each destined for a sad farewell. Skipper was a mixed-breed Labrador retriever. The bony tan dog appeared out of nowhere one day. We formed an unbreakable bond.

He was never my pet, only my buddy. I never put him on a leash, yet he stuck with me. It was a loyalty born of our mutual circumstances. We ran and played together, even when he occasionally disappeared for brief adventures. I was always confident of his return.

My instincts warned me this time that something was wrong. The air was eerily still as I sensed a problem with Skipper. I searched the neighborhood, asking every friend and acquaintance if they had seen the dog.

According to the rumors, Old Ed DuPuy had Skipper tied up behind a shed at Wincey Mills, where he worked. If I stood on the ridge behind my house, I could see where Skip was supposed to be.

I knew that if I whistled for him, he would answer. It was the call we always used, three short, shrill tones. I strained to hear a response as whistles echoed down the ridge and across the river. Wild barking came

back across the valley. My heart skipped, delighted to hear the familiar sound. At the same time, I was despondent with the sadly resolved mystery.

Each day for a week, I took my position on the ridge and whistled the signal to my old friend. Each day, without fail, Skipper barked wildly. I could imagine him straining at the chain, his neck muscles pulling against the choker, his paws scraping at the earth. It was to no avail.

I had to see Skipper. I had spent too many hours staring grim-faced across the river. Early one evening, before the day shift ended at Wincey Mills, I sneaked behind the little shed. Recognizing me, Skipper bounded like a gleeful puppy once again. I hugged him as if he were a long-lost brother.

I could not free Skipper. It hurt me, but too many people knew we had been inseparable. If I were found out, I would only have to return him to old Ed. The hot tears stung as I held Skipper for our final moments. I walked away in agony. He strained at the chain, trying to follow as I left.

I never knew his last name. Bill hung around with kids younger than him. His pants were too short, exposing ugly sores on his legs. He was the sullen enigma every town has and doesn't care for. Mothers worried about what he was up to and how he might influence their children.

He had been rejected at home and spent most of his time sitting on curbs in neighborhoods like ours in Paris, mumbling in low tones to the few who would answer him. As a fellow reject, I became one of the few.

One fall day, we gazed across the river at the train bridge. With leaves dying their beautiful autumn death, it was a moderately inspiring sight for two oddities like us. Finally, Bill broke the picturesque silence.

“How would you like to go for a ride on the train, Maury?” I stared at him in disbelief. I had never received such an astonishing offer in my life.

“Gee, I'd like to,” I answered breathlessly. But I could still hardly believe it. “You mean a real train ride?”

“I’m going tomorrow,” he responded casually. We arranged a time the following morning when he would come by. I would be waiting outside the house.

I lay mesmerized in bed that night, imagining the powerful chug-chug of the great engine as it vibrated the floor of the train car beneath me. I dreamed of fall leaves stirring up miniature tornadoes as the enormous wheels of the train thundered down the track.

The following day, I waited for him in my red cotton coat. He came by as planned. I stepped alongside, working up a little sweat to keep up with his long-legged stride. We collapsed under a tree when darkness overtook us. I was tired, worried, and weak from hunger. We hadn’t eaten since we left.

I had difficulty falling asleep, the unfamiliar surroundings triggering my nervous system. As I lay in the grass, a shuffling silhouette appeared. Alarmed, I squinted at a grisly old drifter in tattered clothes. I was frightened, but he didn’t bother us. As far as he could tell, we were just a couple of “drifters” ourselves. He was partly correct. He kept moving along as I fell into an uneasy sleep.

Back home, Mom discovered my absence and had begun the search — slowly at first, confident that she would soon locate me. The situation intensified when it dawned on her that nobody had seen me all day. Perhaps it would’ve solved some of her problems to get rid of me, but her maternal instinct would not allow her to arrive at that conclusion.

In her own broken way, she loved me. Furthermore, Cyrus had so demonstrated his vile character over the years that Mom had little hope left for him ever to reform, even if I somehow vanished.

The likely point of disaster, everyone knew, was the river. Searchers finally concluded that Maury had slipped over the cement wall and plunged to an awful death. My brothers and sisters scrambled along the bank, peering intently across the river for my pitiful red cloth coat.

A local radio station began broadcasting my description, urging the townspeople to be on the lookout. A troop of Boy Scouts fanned out to

search for me, perhaps hoping to get a badge of merit for finding the body. Several people joined in the hunt. Nevertheless, the hunted boy was not to be seen.

By nightfall, Mom was despondent. “Good,” Cyrus grunted when he heard I was missing. “I hope the black bastard is dead.”

Bill and I set out to cover more ground on the second day. I was worried, wondering where he was taking me, how I would ever get home, and what Cyrus would do to me when I arrived. We trudged onward, as I remained silent about my fears.

“Hey! Where are you going?” a man shouted from his house as we walked through his neighborhood.

“Woodstock,” Bill called back.

The man began walking toward us, smiling broadly. “Hop in my car; I’ll take you.”

I was grateful. My legs were sore. As I settled into the upholstery of the back seat, I could feel my muscles beginning to relax — finally.

We sat in his driveway for a long time, waiting for him to return from the house and help us on our way. Suddenly, without warning, a police car pulled into the driveway beside us. My heart pounded as the policeman jumped out, throwing open our door. Before I could react, they had dragged Bill out and stuffed him in the squad car.

“Are you all right, son?” he asked me in a friendly tone as he turned back toward me.

“Yes, I’m okay,” I replied. But I was scared.

We were driven to the police station, where I insisted that I get home. The chief of police answered gently. “It’s okay now, Maury,” he assured. He turned to Bill, cursed him angrily, and demanded to know what the devil he thought he was doing by kidnapping a child my age.

“Well, he didn’t have to go,” Bill whined. “He wanted to.” The chief, red-



faced with anger, abruptly kicked Bill in the butt.

My mother was mourning, holding little brother Cyrus Jr. at the living room window, when she saw a police car pulling up the street. My equally worried face pressed against the glass. Startled, she stood up, losing her grip on the little boy who tumbled to the floor. Mom dashed through the door to greet me.

It felt good to be missed, a sensation I had rarely known. My mother poured a big bowl of porridge and set a huge Danish pastry in front of me. I was worried about the old man, but it was Saturday, and Mom assured me he was drinking over at the hotel.

Bill disappeared forever, a victim of his own solitude and troubled circumstances.

Cyrus was disappointed to discover me alive and well. He was especially cranky for the next few days. I was cautious to stay out of his way.

These odd connections and relationships were defining moments in my life, leaving lasting impressions and shaping my understanding of the world around me.

At the same time, Cyrus was growing old.

The friendship of a dog with a troubled boy may have been the cheapest form of therapy!

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*Amid Maury's bleak life, he created rare moments of happiness. Though infrequent, the smallest demonstrations of acceptance sometimes managed to break through the crusted wounds of rejection. Despite the overwhelming gloom, glimpses of 'good' continued to be discovered.*

*Potential —The resilience of the child left to die by his mother and hated by his stepfather kept emerging. Maury showed hints of promise—if someone could find that "good."*

## Chapter Seven: Fail and Farewell

*At mealtime Boaz said to her,  
“Come over here. Have some bread and  
dip it in the wine vinegar.”  
~ Ruth 2:14*

As he aged, the old man’s powerful body slowly broke down. By the time he had entered his sixtieth year, the decades of alcoholism had weakened the vital organs as his energies sagged. The walk home took longer, his digestive system performed more spitefully, and the liquor was harder to hold down.

You could hear him breathe if you sat in the same room, as his lungs required more and more effort to do their job. For hours, he aimlessly worked on newspaper crossword puzzles. His hair, even his nicotine-stained mustache, had thinned.

He took a less taxing job as a spinner at a textile mill, but Cyrus still missed work while nursing sore joints and muscles. What was once a simple trip to the tavern became a troublesome effort. The former destination of pleasure had become a mandatory fix. By the end of the evening, he’d vomit through the night. To recuperate, he’d swallow a sickening mixture of vinegar and raw eggs.

The money Mom secretly retrieved from his pockets dwindled. A crisis was approaching, and with that, her impulse to flee. She had to suppress it. She was too old and worn down to escape her troubles.

The restaurant was my mother’s idea. Given our family’s history, she still felt we could run a business — an absurd notion. Yet none of us considered that. We only heard that we were getting a restaurant. We followed because we had not ever been able to express our own opinions.

At the restaurant, one could escape the old man. While he spent days

recuperating, the restaurant, in theory, would meet our financial needs. After a lifetime of failures, nobody questioned my mother's hope of succeeding in her first venture. She had occasionally waitressed in restaurants and coffee shops.

We were to live in an apartment above the business, meaning our house on the ridge would have to be vacated. It had been the scene of endless hurt, the catalyst of so much trauma. I should never have minded leaving. Every corner held horrific memories, but this was the only world I had known. It was my only security.

I felt glum the day we moved out. Memories played in my mind. Each event was displayed and then replaced by the next scene — the brutal beatings, every stolen meal, riotous rounds of play with my brothers in the yard. I relived those moments, at the same time beginning the tortuous process of learning my real origins.

## **Who am I?**

My mother could not recall my birthdate, not for sure anyway. She had traveled to Brantford on that day in a panic. Was it April 27 or the 28th? Children ask questions about their birth as part of the natural course of growing up. Cyrus never allowed a birthday party or even an acknowledgement. I discovered at school that everyone else knew their birthdays, and I wanted to know mine.

Mother made the mistake of wavering. Caught off-guard by the question, she was unprepared to choose one date over another. "April 27... 28," she responded without thinking. "No, the 27th."

"Which is it?" I quizzed.

"Oh, Maury, it's not important," she answered, realizing what she had done. I couldn't get any further. She dodged and ducked, ending the conversation.

My schoolmates found it a great source of taunting that I "thought" my birthday was April 27 or 28. It became so embarrassing, I resolved to do what my mother had not been able to do. I arbitrarily settled on April 27,

and then pretended, with conviction, that this was indeed the accurate date.

I was a freak to my schoolmates in every way. “Hey, Maury,” the teasing always started, “Why are your older brothers and sisters Wicks, and your younger brothers and sisters are Wicks, but your name is Blair? You don’t even look like them.”

I had to find the answer from my mother. I had to have an explanation for my classmates. It must have been a piercing question, bringing her ugly past to the surface. Between foggy memories and layers of lies, she could no longer recall what story she had given to whom. She sighed as I looked into her once beautiful eyes, now weary after years of depression and abuse.

“Just tell them that I was married three times. And you were born to that middle husband.”

“But what happened to the first husband, Mom?”

“He died, Maury. Your father was a hero, and he died in the war.”

*As a child, I could accept her stories. Growing up, I began to see how implausible the accounts were. Quizzing Mom was as painful for me as it was for her. Her response, when I cut deep, was to retreat into self-pity. She’d make me feel guilty for doubting her past. Passive-aggressive, the most skillful defense, avoided the pitfalls of more lies.*

She couldn’t help making mistakes. Remembering the shame of her speedy return to Paris from Michigan, she informed me that I had been born in the U.S., Byesville, Ohio, a small town in the east-central part of that state. She had never been there and perhaps chosen the town randomly from a road map. In her mind, an artificial heritage would keep me from the painful reality — that I had been conceived and delivered in “shame.”

## **Sibling Bonding**

As I watched the old house being emptied of its contents, I could see that each child was reliving horrific memories.

On the street, my half-brothers and half-sisters had defended me as we supported each other against the nasty insinuations of other children. They'd repeat their parents' stories about "those Wicks."

We brothers took the classic familial gang approach to threats, punching the daylight out of rivals. I was not above taking on little girls as well. In first grade, my little brother Mark reported tearfully that he had been hit. Angrily, I marched up the street to the girl's house, where she was raking leaves.

"Did you hit my brother?" I demanded. "If you ever hit him again, I'll punch you!"

"If you take one step toward me," she shot back, "I'll hit you over the head with this rake."

"You," I sneered in return, "haven't got the guts!"

With her challenge, I took the forbidden step. She swung the heavy metal rake, landing its teeth over my head. I ran home screaming, blood running down my face.

There were times of great camaraderie among the Wick children with their odd Blair brother. When a neighbor asked my mother if she could give me a little red wagon, we had to keep the information from the old man. Thrilled as I was to receive such a rare gift, I was not one to hold such a delight to myself. My brothers and I piled into that new wagon. We pushed, pulled and rolled ourselves all over the neighborhood.

When an outbreak of measles hit town, all of us came down with it. The town put quarantine signs on the front of the house, leaving us cloistered inside like sickly monks until the plague passed.

Only Cyrus' vindictiveness separated me from my siblings. On Christmas morning, Mark was always the first to awake. He reported from downstairs: who got what, how much stuff lay around the tree. We shared the scene, squealing with delight — until the rest of the children went downstairs.

Because of Cyrus, I took my position above the vent in the floor, smelling

the turkey, listening to the laughter and the oohs and aahs. Upon spying my siblings with their new toys, I only hoped someone would bring me a little something.

A week later we brothers would face a New Year's Eve ritual. My mother and Cyrus always went partying, which meant leaving us home. Before they left, Mom lined us up to give each of us a kiss.

*I was always squeamish when she approached me. I had rarely known her embrace, not any physical expression of affection. Her kissing me now was disturbing. I squirmed, but she grabbed my head and gently pulled me toward her. I turned just enough that her kiss would land on my cheek. It was as much as I could take.*

With parents out the door and the pressure off, we threw our own New Year's Eve celebration, complete with mad-dog pillow fights and general chaos. For a few hours, we enjoyed unadulterated exultation. However, as dawn approached, we scrambled to clean up our disasters.

Those few good memories were now being carted out of the house and dragged downtown to the home above the restaurant. Afterward, I wandered inside, feeling an odd emptiness that matched the echo of the stripped-down rooms. I was a displaced thirteen-year-old, wondering what would happen now that we were leaving our old neighborhood, now that we would run a business, and now that the old man was sick.

Wreaking revenge on Alice's *black bastard* became more of a task. It was not as easy to throw around a gangly thirteen-year-old as it had been to toss about an underweight child. As I grew taller, Cyrus shrunk. While he could still hurl verbal obscenities; the physical abuse became more challenging.

Once the house was emptied, I studied the staircase he had climbed so often. My eyes followed it to the bare bulb at the top. Its pull chain had been tugged many times on his way down the stairs, leaving me alone in the dark. I stared at the familiar vent in the floor, the channel of light I had befriended, now about to be abandoned forever. For all those hours I'd laid on the floor, peering through the grating at the activity below, I felt a void

at the thought of leaving it behind.

## **More Changes**

The old man could be avoided as his movements slowed. Staying out of his way meant I could move more freely around the house. Just when freedom was becoming a possibility, we were leaving. I would never have the chance to know what happiness felt like in that house.

We named the restaurant “Wicks Slop Shop,” which infuriated Mom. She had duly named it *Wick’s Restaurant*. It was a typical greasy spoon joint with booths on either side of a narrow aisle. She had borrowed money to renovate the place. I swept floors, washed dishes, and served tables with my brothers and sisters. We exhibited all the solemn seriousness of the *Marx Brothers*. Our diner uniforms were a poor coverup for our zany frolicking.

When our friends dropped money in the jukebox, we showed them how to make it work for free. We gave away credits for purchases to school buddies, never expecting payment.

I was to start high school the month the “slop shop” opened. Education was doing me no visible good; the restaurant could be fun to play in, and the family — a new revelation — needed me. The school did not.

Four months passed. I got away with not attending until a former classmate got caught working without a permit to quit classes. He argued with the school official. “Maury Blair is doing it! Why can’t I?”

The chief of police came snooping around. When I defied his orders to return to school, I wound up in front of a local judge. “You’re so young,” the concerned judge observed. “Your marks are good, and you’ve got potential. You should be in school.”

I argued that I was needed at home, but he didn’t buy it. Reluctantly and bitterly, I returned to the classroom. I slipped into a new legal category on my birthday and decided to try again. I applied for an entry-level job at the local mill but still needed the chief’s approval to quit school legally. With my principal’s sympathetic backing, I went to the police chief to make my

plea. He promised he would think about it and let the principal know. I could check on Friday.

I had to start work on Monday, so the tension was building. The thought of attending school was overwhelming. I had no money for textbooks, and my pants were too big. I never removed my old army jacket because I was ashamed of what I wore underneath. Students laughed at my decrepit appearance. I had to get out and get to work.

As I stewed over the coming confrontation, I grew angry. Before leaving for school on Friday morning, I filled a pocket with metal “alley marbles,” determined to use them if the principal gave the bad news. I knew they would kick me out of school if I hurled a handful into a teacher’s face. Thankfully, I never needed my “Plan B.”

That Friday was the last day I spent in high school. I had been officially released.

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*As Maury grew taller, Cyrus seemed to shrink. At some point, an abused child will experience changing environments and with that, new challenges. As Maury embarked on this new “wilderness,” the next chapter of his adult life statistically held little promise. However, statistics do not always determine one’s fate.*

*Cyrus despised Maury, yet wished for his surname to be changed to “Wick”— a distorted deathbed request. Cyrus seemed fixated that his obituary would be his ultimate disgrace. The “Blair” stepchild would be eternally remembered as the “bastard from another.” Even in death, Cyrus would be ridiculed.*

*“He looks kindly on the lowly... he sees them from afar.” — Psalm 138:6,7*

*“Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.” — Victor Hugo, Les Misérables*



## Chapter Eight: Wretched End

*'To the last moment of his breath  
On hope the wretch relies,  
And e'en the pang preceding death  
Bids expectation rise.'  
~ Oliver Goldsmith, 1764*

The household was emptying. My oldest sister Rose had married. Jay and Frankie made their exits when they turned eighteen to join the Canadian Armed Forces. Each visit ended in tears. My mother missed the boys. She was haunted by guilt for the life she had provided them. In their absence, she felt empty.

Experiencing my freshly claimed room was an ironic luxury. With that, I found myself sinking into depression, spending time alone listening to the radio. My mill buddies drank, but I never developed a taste after suffering the effects of alcoholism from the old man. Eventually, I could smoke freely as the air in my room grew stale and gray.

My life seemed worthless. I muttered suicide threats to my only safe audience: my younger sister, Sharon. She grew up with a loneliness similar to mine and could be trusted not to repeat my words to our mother. "I'm going out," I told her, "and I don't care if I ever return. If I have my way, I'll get killed in a car wreck."

The car wreck never happened. Something held me back when I tried to fling my vehicle into a tree or over a bluff. I assumed it was childish fear, making me even more depressed. Unknown to me, an invisible hand was restraining me, but I could not recognize it as anything but my weakness.

Feeling restless, I searched for diversions. I was intrigued by the art of boxing, often listening to matches on Zeke Virgil's poolroom radio on Friday nights.

A guy could box if he were sixteen; I lied about my age and began at fifteen. Strangely, this brought out Cyrus' only expression of interest in me.

Mom unexpectedly informed me that Cyrus could teach a technique to help me with my boxing. As I watched, bewildered by the demonstration, he showed me how to throw a punch with the heel of my hand to save my knuckles from damage. His interest waned as quickly as it had begun. The scene was never repeated.

Despite the tips, I still needed to improve. With my poor vision, I couldn't clearly see the punches. Smarting and bloodied, I stopped training after a few gritty months. Cyrus' feeble expression of concern had failed to produce anything more than confusion on my part.

The pool room filled many of my evenings as a haven for silent brooders like me. With none of the expected socializing of other sports, the pool hall became a cocoon as my monotonous teen years dragged by.

There were odd, undisciplined releases reminiscent of the madcap rock-throwing excursions in years past. As a teenager, I enjoyed driving through a nearby Christian campground, Braeside. My buddies yelled at the girls, shouting wisecracks at the "holy-rollers." I watched scenes where people went to the front of a church service to dedicate their lives to God or bring their prayer requests. I didn't have the slightest understanding of what they were doing. At the mill, my friends and I told grossly exaggerated stories about what we had witnessed.

Most of the time, I was locked inside my shell, shooting pool at Zeke Virgil's pool hall. Trapped in my shroud of silence, only the clacking of the smooth balls and the small talk of the other players broke the monotony.

Until... one day, small talk cut through my gloomy mood.

## **Where do I belong?**

"Yup, I remember the day you were born, Maury," crusty Zeke Virgil offered when the awkward subject of birthdays came up. I wasn't sure if he was telling a joke.

I half-smiled as I replied, "Oh yeah? How do you remember that?"

"I drove your mother to a house in Brantford where she gave birth to you."

"Not me, you didn't," I insisted, standing firm even as I felt an uncomfortable stirring inside.

"Sure!" he insisted. "I've known you since you were that big!" Zeke held out his hands to show me.

"Impossible," I retorted. "I was born in America." All eyes in the pool hall had shifted toward the two of us, but now I felt uneasy in the glare of attention.

"You were not," Zeke answered, his brow furrowing. "You were born right outside of Brantford. You'd better go home and check with the old lady, Maury. I know I drove her to Brantford the night you were born."

My face grew red with embarrassment.

"What's the matter with you, man?" someone jeered from a corner of the room. "Don't you even know where you were born?" I pretended not to hear the remark, though it had stabbed like a knife.

"Come on," I muttered as I stiffly chalked up my cue. "Let's play." Before long, I had made a feeble excuse to leave. I had to find an answer to this new puzzle.

Smarting with humiliation, I walked into the apartment and dropped myself into a chair at the kitchen table, looking squarely at my mother. "Where was I born?" She responded in the same dismissive way she had always had.

"In Ohio."

"Well, that's funny," I retorted, an edge of sarcasm rising in my voice, "because I was just down at the pool hall, and Zeke Virgil says he drove you to a house in Brantford the night you had me." I watched her face. She looked down, her eyes clouding as her shadowy past drifted into the

present. Instinctively, she started trying to construct an alibi, but within seconds, she knew she would have to confront the truth. It had been a needless lie in the first place.

“It’s true,” she softly responded, but she would answer no more questions. Her recollection of those old pressures was more than she could emotionally withstand.

*When I pressed for details, she fell silent. As much as I continued to defend her actions, for the many times I buried the reality of her neglect, the reality was, her abuse of me — the emotional violence of these endless untruths — would continue.*

I sat for an hour, trying to absorb the revelation. I was Canadian. I had no birthright and no known ancestry. I had been imagining my citizenship all along! I sucked in a long, slow drag of cigarette smoke, not quite knowing how to feel.

Cyrus’ decline continued. I’d slump in the chair beside him, watching the fights and hockey games on our run-down, black-and-white television. We rarely spoke except to exchange comments about sports personalities or teams and their relative worth or worthlessness. For all the hours we spent together, Cyrus guzzling beers, the two of us smoking endless cigarettes, we never had any meaningful communication. I was too old to beat; he was too sick to run me down. With no reasonable alternative — we sat in silence.

*Strangely, we were growing closer. I had never known this sensation of being tolerated, so I interpreted our interactions as having a relationship. During the final years, I grew to feel close to Cyrus, even with little evidence of his acceptance.*

Cyrus remained the complainer. “How the hell did I ever get mixed up with this bloody outfit!” he often shouted. He saw himself as a victim, set up by fate to carry the burden of this odd family and the troubles they brought. Wallowing in self-pity, he sank lower into ill health.

The foreman at Penman’s Textile Mill lost patience. Cyrus was getting

sickly and missing too much work. The apartment echoed with his cackling cough, the guttural noises of a dying man.

No longer able to provide adequate care, Mom and I helped Cyrus into the car as we drove to the hospital. We were met at the door by a white-uniformed nurse. As Cyrus awkwardly dumped himself into the wheelchair, I felt a curious pity for this once-giant ogre who had been so strong, a bulwark of terrifying power.

After years of beatings, I somehow admired his former strength. Looking down over his bald head, I could observe the feeble veins in his arms, the deep wrinkles in his hands, his loose flesh hanging on a once-mighty frame. I felt pity.

Medical science couldn't heal the ravages of alcohol and hate, leaving his declining process irreversible. Discomfort decayed into agony, grumbling into silence. Cyrus lay in the hospital bed, the sheets stretched across him like the wrapping of quiet surrender. Mom and I visited often. He was always conscious, making it an even more pitiful death. I sat, listening to his occasional cursing and groaning. It was a remarkable spiral from the rages of years ago.

## **Final Acceptance**

Mostly, we sat in silence, listening to our heartbeats and Cyrus' labored breathing. During one visit, his sunken, yellow eyes rolled toward me and then to my mother. She knew what he was saying as she turned to me with an odd look of satisfaction.

“Maury, he'd like you to change your name to Wick.”

I stared at her, shocked and motionless. After a lifetime of alienation, it had never occurred to me that the old man would invite me to take his family name. Even as a child, it had rarely occurred to me to want it. Now that he lay dying, she was conveying his twisted offer.

Of course, he had not made this request directly. He could never go there. Cyrus had never learned to talk directly to me as people usually do. Even in this final gesture, he could not muster the civility to suit the

occasion. Instead, he had talked to my mother, the eternal go-between, as she relayed his perverse invitation.

I felt no resentment. As Mom and Cyrus looked for an answer, I could not respond. Take the name Maury Wick after seventeen years as Maury Blair? I didn't cringe because of all that the name symbolized. I felt only an odd sense of alienation. Too much had happened to "Maury Blair" to suddenly shed the name and take on another — any other.

Perhaps this was his final abuse. Cyrus could no longer hit me, and with my place as the oldest resident child, he could no longer ignore me. He would strip me of the one possession I had managed to hang onto for myself: my identity.

I politely thanked him for the offer but could not commit. I was unwilling to part with my name; it was the only thing in life I could consider genuinely mine. My mother cautiously changed the subject.

The end was inevitable. During his final hours, after the doctors had shaken their heads, they left the room for the last time. I sat on a wooden chair, alone in the corridor, listening to the awful sounds of death conquering life. The monster was dying.

I heard him deliriously crying out, "Oh, God!". Although I had no relationship with the Almighty, I prayed that the old man would make his peace with God. If any redemption was available for a life so ill-spent, I wanted him to have access to it. No more suffering for suffering's sake.

When the nurse came out, reporting that he had died, I stood up and walked to the foot of the bed. He lay still, as he had for days, his mustache tinted by nicotine the same brownish yellow as his right hand's first and second fingers. The monster, so terrible in life, lay pitiful in death, the life sucked out of him by some greater, even more terrible force.

The next day, I returned to the hospital to pick up his hat and coat. It was difficult to maintain my composure as I carried the empty garments down the corridor and out of the building. He had vanished. All that toughness had been forced to submit. Viewing this wasted end of a wasted life, all I

felt was sadness.

At the funeral, I watched the parade pass, each participant dutifully shaking my hand. Their furtive glances reminded that I was the odd one, the one he had hated. Lud and Selma, from the horrific farm experience, were there. They refused to acknowledge me as they went through the funeral motions.

Following Cyrus' long-lost heritage, a church service was performed. I heard little of the minister's packaged sermon. The casket held the stiff profile of the man who had brought chaos to my life. As his lifeless flesh lay still, I recognized the one person that I had come to rely on.

*He had always been there. Perversely, he had become a source of security for me. He had inspired fear, turned my intestines into cramping knots and destroyed the formative years of my life. He had always been there, a hub, a source of sameness. My mother had come and gone, often leaving home for weeks. She had been irresponsible and flighty, often guilt-ridden, which led to her further depression. The siblings had drifted away. Only Cyrus remained.*

As the shell of the old man lay cushioned in white satin, the rock had finally been crushed. No matter how destructive it had been, that depraved cornerstone of security had always been there — until now.

## **Attempts at New Beginnings**

I would have to look for a foundation of security and consistency somewhere else. My mother was numbed by the loss. Although it had been expected for a long time, it must have brought a measure of relief to her.

With Cyrus gone and the restaurant failing, my mother's instincts were, once again, to run. I hated the idea of leaving town, particularly with the upheaval caused by Cyrus' death and my work solidly established at the textile mill. Life seemed to be finally working out. Nevertheless, my mother insisted on making a succession of unhappy moves. It served to blacken my mood in the following months.

We stored our worn furniture in Rose's basement, left the younger

children with relatives, and headed for Flint, Michigan. One of my mother's sisters thought she could get Mom a job in the department store where she worked. They tried to find a position for me. I sat at home for weeks, waiting, bored and restless.

I finally got a job in the store's shipping department. As a Canadian-born alien without a work permit, I reverted to my mother's old lie, that I had been born in Ohio. When an American hockey team trounced a Canadian team, my co-workers sneered at the "stupid Canucks." I bit my tongue.

The work was tedious. I missed my life back home. I was relieved when Mom decided she wanted to return. We headed back, where we moved into the upstairs rooms of a friend's house. It was to be a temporary arrangement until we could locate a place.

Mom knew a man in town who rented houses. Health officials had condemned the only one available. He agreed to let us stay there on the sly, for a couple of weeks, until something else opened up. "Something else" never did. The hovel became our home, with no jobs available.

No one was supposed to live in this dilapidated structure until it was repaired. Slats in the walls had shrunk and warped as the wind whistled through. The plaster had cracked in the upstairs rooms, revealing industrious mother birds feeding their young in cozy wall nests.

I had gravitated to the position of 'head of the house'. I had the will to work and proceeded to renovate our home with great vigor. My younger brothers and I knocked out a wall to enlarge the cramped living room, repaired other rooms, and repainted the dreary exterior.

I was nineteen years old and without a future. A persistent loneliness dogged me, an inner hunger that refused to be fed. I stretched out in my bed beside the solitary lamp, where I spent hours reading novels while tuning the dial on my dusty radio. I liked rock music and sometimes jazz, yet I also found myself listening to Billy Graham. He invariably interrupted my programs, especially on Sunday evenings, with his annoying program, "Hour of Decision."



A friend of my mother loaned her a book, "Stay Alive, All Your Life." Mom passed it along to me. She had skimmed through it and figured the self-help book might give me a boost.

That led to the explosion...

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*Despair inevitably works its' way to the mouth where hopeless words are formed. Not wanting to live is a sure sign of an unclaimed identity.*

*'Who am I' is a portal to finding the One who says, 'I Am'.*

# Chapter Nine: Chain Reaction

*For God so loved the world that  
he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him  
shall not perish but have eternal life.  
~ John 3:16*

It was just another book – one of many I was reading out of boredom under the yellow light of my bedroom lamp. I thumbed through its pages with indifference, not expecting much.

There was no personal crisis to generate an interest in searching for “The Answer”. My entire life had been a crisis, and no person, institution, or philosophy had brought resolution. The book sat untouched.

I felt compelled to give it another chance. That night, sprawled across my bed, I delved into the book, finding myself on a journey to an unexpected place.

Profound, yet elemental truths, emerged as a revelation. They echoed the lessons from bygone Sunday School classes and in the desperate prayers I’d offered up those freezing nights. That same God, omnipresent and omnipotent, loved me. The revelation wrapped me like a comfortable blanket. “That’s it! That’s what I’ve been looking for!” God loved me!

I revisited the idea, savoring it like a shiny red apple, marveling before biting into it. God loved me, the wet rat who had been unwanted and forced to scavenge for food in the streets. God loved me, the child born a mistake and brought up in a world of sorrow.

I said nothing. No one would have noticed a change. Inside, I’d experienced a revelation — the Supreme God, Creator of the Universe, loved me! I did not understand what was happening. The closest I had come to love was wanting to be wanted — but that was little comparison! I

did not understand what I was experiencing but knew I wanted more and wanted it to last.

This newfound understanding didn't come from any organized religion. It was a personal awakening, kindled by words on a page that somehow made sense of my existence. I discovered that God knew me and wanted to have a relationship.

*The best-selling book that I'd read was primarily regarded as "motivational reading". However, the seeds of God's love that had been planted in that little church's Sunday School had been activated. I'd learned the basics of prayer at their rambunctious kid's club. Faithful church members continued to pray even while seeing no hope for change. All those years of prayer and witness had led to this moment. All I needed was a gentle reminder of God's love for me.*

Jesus told a parable of a farmer who plants in faith that one day, the seed will yield a crop. However, someone else comes along to water, while others reap the harvest. The prayers of strangers, encounters with Godly people and my childhood exposure to scriptures and prayer at church had worked together. It all led to this moment!

What might have been a self-help book for others, became a catalyst that activated faith that had been birthed long ago: the soil had been prepared, the seeds planted, tended, and harvested. They had all worked together.

My mother sensed a change right away. I shared the impact I had felt the night before. She reacted with a restraint — perhaps holding back, having grown accustomed to bad news following good.

Driven by my newfound hunger, I raced to the local library, determined to find more books. The religious section had never existed for me before. I had rarely been inside a library. Still, it seemed a bustling marketplace where a current of spiritual power could be accessed. The lending limit was four books. I walked to the check-out counter. The librarian knew me. She looked at the four book covers and then up at me, a blank expression on her face.

“These are religious books,” her tone matching her facial expression.

“Yes,” I replied evenly.

“You’re checking them out?” Her eyes reflected a subdued shock.

“Yes,” I affirmed.

She looked down and paused. “Okay,” she answered, stamping the return dates inside each book.

The return dates weren’t necessary. I lay awake reading until morning, devouring all four books. With little knowledge of God’s personality and character, I learned as much as one person could in a single night’s reading. Each revelation lifted me to a higher plane of satisfaction, yet I was far from satisfied.

The next evening, I faced the librarian, the same books in hand.

“You didn’t like them?” she asked, her facial features implying, “I told you so.”

I enjoyed them very much,” I replied with a smile.

She was startled. “When did you read them?”

“Last night.”

“All of them?”

“Yes,” I nodded with a grin.

Leaving the librarian mildly stupefied, I searched for the next four acquisitions.

Each night, the scene was the same in my room: the lamp, the books, the child gobbling up newfound knowledge. My mother encouraged me to keep going. When I grew frustrated about reading bible verses in my books without owning a Bible, she dug out her mother’s old one. It was full of Grandma’s comments and my mother’s notations from her days in bible school.

As I delved into its pages, I saw parallels between my experiences and stories in the Bible. “If any man is in Christ,” I read in the apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, “he is a new person... all things are made new!”

I came across Christ’s encounter with Nicodemus in John’s Gospel. I realized that I had been “born again” like him, both accepting God’s love.

Even programs like Billy Graham’s “Hour of Decision,” which I had previously avoided, had new meaning. My voracious reading continued as I slumped into my bed, smoking and immersing myself in the wisdom contained in those pages. I drank coffee at the kitchen table while reading even more. The revelation of God’s love continued to overwhelm me. He knew all my weaknesses and faults, yet he still accepted me.

When I absorbed as much as possible in one sitting, I walked to the nearby Grand River. As the sun dipped below the horizon, I would meditate on the truths I had learned as a transformation was taking place within me – the bigness and the goodness of the Heavenly Father. I wanted to know even more.

Amid this spiritual awakening, financial hardships struck, and our fuel supply dwindled. Desperate, I prayed for God’s help. Surprisingly, a local businessman visited the next day, asking if we could test a load of green wood to determine its quality before he made a larger purchase.

With that revelation of God’s love for me, I eagerly unloaded the mass of timber from his wagon.

## **Not Without Stumbles**

I still had a lot to learn. I soon experienced my first setback. There would be others, but I knew from this experience that life is never a straight road. There are twists and turns, ups and downs, but there is always a path forward.

While strolling toward downtown one evening, depression settled in. I felt too damaged to have any place in God’s family. I struggled under the weight of worthlessness. Standing on the street corner, I pleaded with God to leave me alone.

I was convinced I was unworthy of his love, believing it was too late for me. I planned to return to my old life, resigned to surviving this loss as I had survived everything else. But as I threw myself across the bed and reached for the radio, the unexpected happened.

As I turned the dial, the Hour of Decision's choir sang "How Great Thou Art." The message gripped me. Graham began preaching. "You don't just walk away from God." I could almost see my Heavenly Father feeling the same rejection I had felt. I saw Him weeping as I walked away on that street corner. But He hadn't walked the other way. He followed me. He had been following me along.

I clutched my pillow, pleading temporary insanity. "I didn't mean it," I cried. When I realized that He had not given up on me, even though I tried to give up on Him, my entire outlook changed.

*I never looked back. My mother loved me, but she had not always been there. Cyrus had always been there, but he never loved me. I had never known anything like what I was experiencing now. I had the love of a Heavenly Father.*

## **Back to the Little Church**

We began attending Sunday School, the one I'd attended as a child. It was frightening at first. I assumed everyone would turn around and stare at Maury Blair, "What's he doing here?" Instead, I felt a friendly hand on my shoulder as we waited for class. Turning around, I noticed the pastor, Jack Ozard, smiling down at me.

"Hi, how are you doing?" he asked.

"Fine, thanks," I responded stiffly.

"We've got a youth class upstairs. Would you like to join us? We'd be glad to have you."

I was too startled by the friendly offer to accept it.

"No thanks, I'll stay here."

“Are you sure?” he asked, smiling easily. “We’d love to have you join us.”

“No, thanks.”

I turned around in my chair, wishing I had responded differently.

Eventually, Jack’s warmth drew me in. I ended up joining the class he taught, with other young people my age. In time, Jack would become my most valued counselor and friend.

The enthusiasm spread as my younger brothers and sisters also attended Sunday school. I mustered up the courage to ask Jack if we could attend a church service on Sunday night.

He was astounded by the question. “All right?” he replied. “We’d be delighted to have you there!”

I was surprised that there was no hesitation, no pause to consider the ramifications of inviting “those Wicks” to a worship service. Jack opened his arms to us, and the family felt wrapped in the pastor’s and his congregation’s love.

I hadn’t been aware of the many “hidden saints” who had played a role in my faith journey. In that first service, I was distracted by the pianist, who kept wiping away her tears throughout the service. What could have made her so sad?

Afterward, I approached the stranger, “Are you alright?”

Like many other townsfolk, Mrs. Mathie was a local schoolteacher who could not have helped but seen my tormented life. “Oh, I’ve been praying for you all this time! I was overcome as I saw you sitting in church this morning.”

*Years before, this small congregation had welcomed the unkempt, trouble-making Wick kids. People whose names I couldn’t recall had extended kindness to me when it was nowhere else to be found. Although I couldn’t see God’s love for me then, they had been His hands and feet, faithfully doing what they could when they could.*

Over time, the church became an incubator for growth and friendships. I prayed to be baptized in the Holy Spirit. It was a beautiful, quiet experience in my room. I turned yet another spiritual corner, giving me renewed hope and energy.

God also provided help in practical ways, including a job at the Wincey Mills, where I discovered that my superintendent, John Richardson, was a fellow Christian. My brother Mark had established a bad reputation working under him. John had hired me on a gamble before we saw each other at church the following Sunday morning. We began a great friendship, one of many that would be invaluable in my spiritual and personal growth.

When my brothers visited, they were shocked by the changes in me. I had begun praying for Mark and Frank. If God could save anybody, it might be them. Mark, who was in the Navy, came home on leave. He was disgusted to learn that we had been praying for him.

As I sat at the table reading my Bible, Mark lectured me about “Christianity”. As he stood up to get more to drink, he passed out. I helped him to bed. The following day, he came downstairs to find me reading my Bible.

Mark performed erratically when he returned to Navy duty and was soon under the analysis of a navy psychiatrist. The doctor advised, “Wick, there’s something you are not doing that you need to do, and whatever it is, you better do it.” Mark came home for Christmas. His New Year’s Eve plan was to take out an old girlfriend who was unhappily married. We urged him instead to join us for a service at our church. Mark came, that evening, he made the decision to become a Christian.

Frank had been living in Michigan. When he visited us, we persuaded him to attend a service at the Pentecostal Camp outside town – the same campgrounds I had cruised by years earlier with my buddies, mocking the church folks. At the sermon’s conclusion, the speaker invited people to follow Christ. Frank dashed toward him. For a terrified moment, I thought he would give him a beating, but as Frank approached the man, he fell to his knees and began weeping.



My other brothers and sisters would experience their own spiritual journeys. My mother realized that God had reached her family despite her failures.

In the same church where I had been welcomed as a filthy, unruly child, I continued to experience growth. Friends came alongside. They encouraged me when I doubted my worth, advised me on practical life skills, and guided me through my struggles. My pastor, Jack, remained a mentor, continuing to see the potential in me.

***I began teaching a Sunday school class, eventually overseeing the church's program for young boys – the same club I had attended as an unruly child. In time, I served in leadership on the board of deacons.***

I enrolled in a Bible correspondence course where my studies began at five every morning.

From seven to five, I worked at the mill, returning home for a quick supper. I napped till 8:30. It was back to the books, usually until morning.

After four hours of sleep, the day would begin again, fantasizing about becoming a twentieth-century Apostle Paul!

My life seemed far from my nightmarish childhood and even further from the man who had fathered me — the original Maury Blair. But I knew that one day I would face him.

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*Maury experienced a profound supernatural encounter, but soon was drowning in self-doubt and depression. The situation seemed paradoxical.*

*Years of abuse left Maury and his siblings with scars. Their commitment to faith did not instantly heal their futures. Our damaged humanity often bears wounds that, if not addressed, can perpetuate the very world we strive to escape. Seeking help, leaning on others, and being willing to be mentored, as Maury did, are signs of strength, not weakness.*

*Rick Warren reflects, "I used to think that life was hills and valleys – you go through a dark time, then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I*

*don't believe that anymore. Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe that it's kind of like two rails on a railroad track, and at all times you have something good and something bad in your life. No matter how good things are in your life, there is always something bad that needs to be worked on. And no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something good you can thank God for."*

# Chapter Ten: You Don't Exist

*The least initial deviation from the  
Truth is multiplied later a thousand-fold.  
~ Aristotle, circa 375 B.C.*

The pace of work and study took its toll as the doctor quickly diagnosed the source of my fatigue. My idea of serving in the West Indies was ruled out, fearing the heat would destroy my weakened condition.

I was offered the position of pastor in a small church. I felt uncomfortable with the idea, especially as a single person. I had no desire to marry; I had seen quite enough of the pitfalls!

One option was to attend bible college for a year. The doctor thought it would be a chance to slow down and focus on my studies. As I prayed about applying to the school one Sunday afternoon, I fell asleep. Awaking an hour later, I felt at peace with my decision.

My year at Eastern Pentecostal Bible College was a restorative experience. Studying the Word of God deepened my spiritual understanding. At the same time, my dorm mates and I played practical jokes on faculty and students alike. Among my close friends was a mission to find me a partner. They orchestrated a "Maury Blair Day," putting up billboards declaring my availability for dating.

I underwent personal and spiritual growth. Loneliness and many insecurities gradually faded, revealing a more comfortable, fun, and loving side of me.

My personal and spiritual growth would be tested in my first position after college. I became a counselor at the *Teen Haven* residential home in Montreal, Quebec. Under the leadership of Pastor Robert Johnston, young people who had lost themselves to drugs or alcohol were housed and cared for.

The work was often tense, erratic and disturbing. Without the skills that I had acquired at school, I might not have survived.

At Teen Haven, God began revealing that my childhood, horrible as it was, could be used to help others. One day, I noticed a young boy looking sad and directionless.

“What’s the matter, Jake?” I asked, sitting down next to him.

He sighed, “Aw, *you* wouldn’t know anything about hiding and being on the run.” he replied.

I felt empathy for him. For the next few minutes, I shared my story. He looked at me in amazement, not seeing the rat-like child I described, but instead, a renewed child of God. It was the beginning of a new life for Jake.

Since that encounter, I have had countless opportunities to share the pain of my childhood with young people who felt, as I did – that God could never want them since no one else did. I’ve watched the faces of troubled teenagers light up as they sensed the love of a Heavenly Father who had been there all along.

It was during my work at Teen Haven that I met Bev. For the first time, I considered leaving bachelorhood. I was already past thirty when Bev’s big brown eyes and exuberant personality captured my heart.

She shared my faith, and great fun. When I was with her, I felt caught up in her presence. When I was away, my mind kept wandering back to her. But there were things about me she should know. I could not anticipate how she would react, but I knew I could not let her find out some other way.

“I need to tell you something,” I offered tentatively one Saturday evening. I meandered through my reasons for being at Teen Haven, my hopes for helping young people, and finally, I came down to my own youth.

“I had some problems,” I revealed in a casual tone. “I was an unwanted child.”

She was puzzled at the term, “What do you mean?”

I explained delicately, watching her face to see if the new insight would drive her away.

“I’m so sorry for you,” she replied. Her heart swelled with compassion. *“It would be wonderful”, she prayed, “if I could make a home for him and show him another side of life.”*

Before that, Bev would have to see more of my life’s old side.

## **I Don’t Exist**

Mom was happy when I told her I was getting married. Several brothers and sisters met for a makeshift reunion where Bev was introduced. It was a polite encounter, with the nervousness customarily felt when relatives-to-be meet. However, things took an unexpected turn when Bev asked my mother for my birth certificate.

“I don’t have one,” I was forced to answer. For years, I had avoided discussing the subject with anyone.

“Everybody has a birth certificate,” Bev replied, “Just apply for it.” But my mother had failed to register me, and there was no document to request.

I gathered the courage to confront my mother. “I know I wasn’t registered,” I began quietly, as I could see her face droop. “But I need a birth certificate to get married, Mom. What do I have to do to get one?”

She took a long breath. Her past could no longer be dismissed. “We could go to the registrar’s office and check on it,” she replied, avoiding eye contact as she looked down at the floor.

Perhaps she foresaw the ordeal to come. The gruff, older man, the registrar, began with the simple questions, name, age, address — then he bore into the challenging material.

“Why wasn’t he registered when he was born?” he sternly confronted

My mother replied with uncertainty, “Well, he was born in a house. He was born out of wedlock.”

“That’s no excuse for not registering him,” the man growled. He turned to me. “Have you ever signed any legal documents?”

“Well, I guess I have. Why?”

“It’s illegal,” he snapped, “because you’re not registered.”

My mind flew through the documents I had signed — mortgage papers, auto financing, and a dozen others.

“You don’t even belong here,” the man continued. “You’re presently a citizen of no country. You don’t belong here; you don’t belong anywhere.”

Mom was crushed. The registrar seemed to feed her guilt. “For all intents and purposes,” he continued, “you don’t exist. How do I know this woman is your mother? How can she prove you’re her son?”

My mother was humiliated, and I was angry. I shot back, “This happens to be my mother. And if anybody should be mad at her, it should be me — not you. So please treat her with respect.”

He backed down, surprised by the reprimand. We proceeded to work out a system for getting the documentation as to my existence — Mom suggested my stay at the London hospital as an infant, which I had not known about. When those records arrived at the registrar’s office, a birth certificate was generated and sent to me. Finally, I existed.

More of my past was to be dredged up.

Bev and I worked together as husband and wife with increasing enthusiasm, first at Teen Haven, later in a church in Hanover, Ontario, and then at the Teen Challenge Center for Youth Rehabilitation in Toronto. Bev was my “second revolution,” the perfect companion to help me grow spiritually and emotionally after the amazing “first revolution” of redemption. Her patience and kindness continued to transform me as she continued to work by my side.

Lisa was born in Toronto. I wept as I looked at the tiny newborn baby. It was the first time Bev had seen me cry, but the flood of emotion was too much to hold back. This infant was mine — ours — and God’s.

Studying her tiny kicking legs and flailing arms, the little round face so full of hope, I sensed God's graciousness. I was born in the squalor of hushed scandal; God had allowed me to give my child a different start. A few years later, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Laury would follow Lisa. Both symbolized the transformed heritage God had graciously given me.

At the Vancouver Teen Challenge, and eventually, as the Director of Toronto Teen Challenge, God was using the crises of others to bring my abusive childhood into a new perspective. As I ministered with my staff members from rock festivals to alleyways, on street corners to crash pads, I found young people in desperate need.

As I gained a new perspective, the struggles I'd faced paved the way for me to make a difference in others. A young man named Phil came to the center one day, telling me his two brothers were about to crash and burn. They were holed up with some friends nearby, feeding on acid and speed. He wanted me to see them right away. I agreed.

"Let me warn you before we go," Phil added. "Sometimes their friends get high on LSD. I've seen them running through the house with machetes, doing crazy things."

A red flag went up. "Now, just a minute," "Let's talk about this whole thing."

"Don't worry about it," he assured. "They'll listen to me. I can get you in there to talk to these guys, and I promise they won't do anything to you." With much hesitation, I agreed.

"You can't go dressed like that," Phil replied, startled that I would even consider it.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"They'll think you're a cop if you go in like that," he responded. I was wearing a sports coat and dress pants.

I changed into blue jeans, and we took off.

On the way, Phil unloaded his story. He had once been a Christian but

had come to Teen Challenge because he knew God was his brothers' only hope. When I told him my story, he responded with fresh hope.

"That's what these guys need to hear. You've got to tell them."

We parked the car in front of a rundown house. A couple of doors down, I noticed a home with several motorcycles parked on the front lawn.

"I wish I could take you in there, too," Phil said. "A guy is dying of drug addiction. But they'd kill you as you walked in the front door."

I breathed a sigh of relief. One crash pad in a day was more than enough for me.

"Just a minute," stopping Phil at the door. "Before we go in, we're going to pray."

"Pray?"

"Pray."

"Are you scared?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

"We're going to pray and ask God to help us say the right things when we get there." I bowed my head and quickly prayed, both for Phil to renew his commitment and for his burned-out brothers inside.

As he opened the door, we were blasted by the summer's sweltering heat and the stench of pot and urine. We walked over intertwined bodies, until we came to a narrow kitchen. I instinctively glanced around for escape routes, but it was too late. The back door was on the opposite side of the room, past two guys sitting on chairs along the wall. A big guy with a red beard guarded the front, four others were sitting around the kitchen table rolling joints.

There was only one window, almost at ceiling height, and too small for an adult to climb through. I was trapped. I would get out of this place with



the approval of my hosts, or I would not get out at all.

Phil and I stood next to the grimy refrigerator as Phil addressed the rag-tag group.

“All right, you guys, listen. This guy’s name is Maury Blair. He’s a friend of mine, and I want you to shut up and listen to what he’s got to say because I think you need to hear it.”

Phil turned and walked out of the room. I never saw him or heard from him again — ever. I was too startled at his abrupt exit to stop him. As the kitchen full of people stared at me, I struggled not to sound nervous.

“Hi, guys,” I began. “I’m Maury Blair, a staff worker from Teen Challenge on Broadview Avenue.”

It was the worst thing I could have said. The big guy with the red beard standing at the doorway growled.

“Teen Challenge? You guys kicked me out of there a couple of months ago.”

My heart pounded even faster. “I don’t know anything about that,” I assured, “but I’m here to tell you that there’s a better trip for you than the one you’re on.” *If these guys go wild, I’m dead.* Going out in a blaze of glory like the Apostle Paul seemed a lot less appealing.

“I don’t know why you got kicked out,” I pressed on, “but God loves you and wants to change your lives. He did it for me and wants to do it for you.”

“What’s God going to do for me, man?” the red-bearded guy sneered. “I’ve got a disease in my liver from sticking dirty needles in my arms. I’ve got nine months to live. What’s God going to do for me?”

“Maybe God could touch your life and heal you,” I boldly suggested.

“What about my kid brother?” he asked, pointing to his right. “He’s got the same problem. What about him?”

I realized that these were the two brothers Phil had brought me to see.

“God could do the same for him,” I responded.

I shared my story, telling them God had rescued me from the seemingly impossible. When I finished, I added, “Look, you guys, here’s the truth. I didn’t have to come here tonight. I came because I knew God wanted me to. Phil told me what was happening here. I’m here taking all the risks to tell you God can change your life.”

“Hey, you know something? He’s right,” someone agreed, “He didn’t have to come.”

With the ice broken, the group began talking, asking questions about my past and faith, allowing me to share Jesus with them. I felt like the best friend these guys had ever had. They eagerly took every piece of literature I had brought with me. They slapped me on the back, shook my hand, and smiled. A minister who cared — it was a novel concept for them.

Two hours later, I left, exhausted from the tension of the experience. Only God could have given me the words in answer to my desperate prayer. My tragic experiences, shared in this heartbreaking setting, had been used to help others.

Three weeks later, I returned to the center from a speaking engagement to find a message. Two young men had visited and asked to see me. The message they left: “Tell Maury Blair that we dropped by to say thanks for having the guts to come up to us and tell us what God did for him. We’re brothers, going home to our parents, and we’ll stay there where we belong. Just tell him thanks.”

As my ministry unfolded, my history did as well.

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*“You don’t exist...” Maury’s existence was not validated by a government certificate, his stepfather’s hatred, or the rejection of others. He refused to be defined by their perspectives. Instead, Maury used his experiences to help others break free from similar limitations.*

*“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish*

*what is now being done, the saving of many lives.” — Gen. 50:20*

## Chapter Eleven: Finding Maury Blair

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,  
before you were born I set you apart;  
I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”  
~ Jeremiah 1:5*

Before my mother succumbed to cancer, a shadow of her former beauty, she confided in Bev over many cups of tea. Mom unraveled mysteries that had bound my past for years. She spoke of my biological father, her feelings towards him, and her decision to flee the factory upon learning of her pregnancy. Amidst those revelations, there were details that were hard to verify or difficult to believe. I was left forever uncertain of the full truth.

Towards the end of her life, my mother remained apologetic and defeated. “Maury, I’ve made such a mess of my life,” she’d whimper. I’d emphasize the message of forgiveness. She carried the weight of her past, not understanding what the repercussions of depression and abuse would have had on her.

With my mother’s burial, I felt a newfound freedom to search for my biological father. As my interest grew, Bev encouraged me. With that, the concern of hurting anyone in my family motivated me to proceed slowly and carefully.

I had never harbored anger toward the mystery man whose chromosomes I carried. I had known too little of him, introduced through a maze of half-truths. I never got a complete account or a detailed description of the original Maury Blair. Was he a war hero? It became clear years later that he was not. He may have had a military background that gave impetus to my mother’s farfetched lie. Did he die in a war? We determined that to be untrue altogether.

Who visited the London hospital during my stay there as an infant and signed in as Maury Blair? Had the original Maury Blair surfaced for some

unknown reason? Or was it someone else, using a name my mother had supplied? She never provided an answer. The answer will never be known.

Prior to my mother's passing, Bev and I had secretly begun our pursuit of my mystery father. Bev's tactful questioning of her revealed that Maury Blair had moved from Flint to Fort Wayne, Indiana. Bev called the Fort Wayne telephone operator, asking if there was a listing for a "Maury Blair."

"No," she replied, "but we have a listing of Maurice Blair." Undeterred, Bev placed a call to the number in Fort Wayne, asking the operator to ask for Maury Blair instead of Maurice. I listened as a male answered.

"Yes, this is Maury Blair." Hearing my voice on the other end of the line felt unreal. The match was undeniable!

Bev inquired if he was Maury Blair who had lived and worked at Irving Machine Parts in Flint, Michigan.

"Yes, I'm that same Maury Blair."

Bev explained that her husband, a minister with the same name, was trying to locate his father and that the search had led to him. "Are you the right man?" Bev asked eagerly, sure that he was.

There was a moment of silence, followed by a tense response, "No, I don't think so."

Bev bit her lip. She realized she had revealed too much too soon and now had few options. She cut the conversation short — "All right, thank you" — and hung up.

Amidst the drama of encountering my biological father, we were not sure what to do next. Set it all aside and forget it? Pursue him? Try to meet him? What had we done to this unsuspecting man? Had we filled him with fear? Did he expect us to blackmail him? What did his family know about Alice Wick of so many summers ago?

After careful consideration, we decided to call back. When I introduced myself, he asked me to wait a moment. I heard him put the phone down as the door closed. I explained my story, avoiding accusations that would put

him on the defensive. I figured this could be my last shot. After our conversation, Maury Blair could change his phone number, move to a different city, or lose me forever through other methods.

Instead, he was intrigued. He asked me questions about my work, family, and situation in life. He never admitted to fathering me, but his interest in me was fatherly and intense. We agreed that I would call him again sometime in the future and talk further. I hung up, out of breath.

The one long-distance encounter satisfied me for a while. Life continued, our work continued, and the ministry commanded our attention with few let-ups. However, the seed of the unknown had taken root. The following autumn, Bev and I were driving home from a conference in Missouri when we decided to stop in Fort Wayne.

I located the address of Maurice Blair. Nervously, we drove by the place and took pictures of the house. We parked the car and prayed that he would walk out the front door so I could see him without the trauma of knocking on his door.

Instead, the impulse seized me. I jumped out of the car, walked to the door and rang the bell. If anyone else answered, I would ask for directions to an imaginary address.

I read the name on the door: Maurice D. Blair. When he swung the door open, I had the odd sensation of meeting myself — face-to-face. He was perhaps thirty years older than I, taller, broader, and yet virtually identical to me in all other respects.

Our eyes locked; the effect was so startling that we were both stunned, unable to speak. *The “child of woe” gazed into his father’s eyes as the accidental father looked back at his unknown son.* In that rare moment of truth, our shared DNA seemed undeniable.

As I stood transfixed, I heard voices in the house. I knew better than to introduce myself by name, but he didn’t know what might happen next. I could read his mind as I followed his eyes; for all he knew, I could ruin him. Behind those eyes so much like mine, he was masking the terror of

exposure.

I ached to tell him who I was, to resolve the question that would linger forever if I didn't. Were we father and son? I knew there could be no other explanation for the many coincidences that had converged on his doorstep. Would talking with him, filling in the innumerable gaps, somehow complete myself?

I read the fear on his face as I asked for directions to a fabricated address. He replied that he could not help me, and that answer was true in many ways. I answered that I would try further down the street. As I walked toward Bev, I did not look back. Observing the scene from the car, she watched him step onto the veranda, watching us until we were out of sight. For the rest of the silent drive to Canada, I felt numb, unable to talk about the incident.

After thirty-five years, I confronted the man who had given me life. For the moment, the encounter had drawn life out of me. I did not have the heart to pursue him.

Over the following months, I'd come close to picking up the phone. I could only imagine his terrified response, perhaps like a grown-up version of mine when facing Cyrus.

It was a year before I finally placed the call. We had a cordial talk, a short conversation in which I suggested having coffee together sometime when I was in Fort Wayne. He pleasantly agreed as we finished the call. I did not mention the incident at the door. We could talk about that in person.

We never talked again. The following year, Maury Blair died of a heart attack.

I later tracked down Maurice D. Blair's younger brother, discovering I had half-brothers and half-sisters living in Fort Wayne. The quest was essentially over. I had found my father.

My completeness never hinged on discovering the source of my genetics. Instead, it had taken root in that little house in Paris, Ontario, where I first encountered the Father, who had been watching over me from the very

beginning.

God had never been confused about my bloodline. “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.” He declared in Jeremiah 1:5. “Before you were born, I set you apart.” My earthly bloodline had never limited his claim on me. As He continually revealed Himself, I became the person I was destined to be, despite the marred heritage that marked my past. Once the child of woe, I became instantaneously a child of the King.

The painful memories of my childhood abuse still resurface from time to time. I have worked diligently throughout the years to prevent them from overshadowing the person I have become.

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*The victimization of the innocent can never be fully explained in this lifetime.*

*We grapple with the unanswered “whys”. However, the answer lies not in the “why” but in the “who”. Jesus declared, “I am” and it is in Him that we find solace and redemption. He is the one who saves the lost, redeems the past, and ultimately completes our lives.*



# Epilogue

By Maury Blair

God has entrusted me with a mission: to use my troubled past as a beacon of hope for others. It has been an honor to counsel those in need, sharing the lessons learned from my struggles. I founded BreakThrough Ministries to offer counseling to troubled youth and provide a 24-hour helpline. My journey has also led me to connect with people on the streets, host kids' clubs, and share my message through mass media. These experiences have filled my life with a deep sense of purpose. I've had the privilege of speaking at youth camps, prisons, rock festivals, and international venues, spreading hope and faith.

My Heavenly Father has redeemed the years I once thought were lost. If He could rescue me, He can save anyone from anything!

God was never out of control as I grew up under the weight of neglect and abuse. He wasn't struggling to make sense of my life's events. I was always in His care, destined for transformation. And you are in His care at this very moment. Just as the Father waited for me to embrace His love, He's waiting for you.

God's acceptance doesn't require you to be 'good enough.' I certainly wasn't. Often, the children He adopts are misfits, like me. His love is unconditional, no matter what we've done or who we are.

You are not a lost and forsaken child, wandering without hope in a mindless universe. Your place at the Father's table was set for you before birth. Your place in His heart was established long before you could ever love Him back. It wasn't earned by your goodness; it was given to you because He loves you—just as you are.

When you accept that love and take your place at the table, your destiny unfolds, and your identity becomes complete. He knows your name and whispers it, waiting for you to respond.

*Maury Blair*

## About the Authors



Maury Blair's courage and determination in overcoming childhood abuse stand as a powerful testament to the power of prayer and the unwavering support of a dedicated church community.

Maury dedicated over two decades to serving with Teen Challenge, a residential program focused on faith-based recovery from substance abuse. Known for his sharp humor, humble personality, and compelling narrative, he has been a sought-after speaker at events ranging from youth conventions to rock concerts. Maury's first love has been to engage in one-on-one settings like ministering in prisons.

Maury lives with his wife Bev in Cambridge, Ontario and is the proud dad of two daughters Lisa and Laury. He is a credentialed minister with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

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Susan Wells is a speaker, writer, and business entrepreneur who is deeply dedicated to inspiring others. Her mission is to uplift and motivate people to live with purpose by blending faith and hope.

She has authored several publications, including her memoir, *A Place at My Table* and *Child of Woe*, a graphic novel version. In addition, she writes insightful articles on faith and resilience while embracing life's challenges.

Known as "The Decorating Coach," Susan has hosted TV's "Interior Design on a Dime" and authored multiple DIY home makeover guides, helping others transform their living spaces with creativity and style!

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# Hope is Here!

*Would you like to talk to someone about how you feel about the book? Or would you just like to talk to someone about what you are going through? Someone would be happy to listen. Please contact us:*

**[maury@overcomingabuse.ca](mailto:maury@overcomingabuse.ca)**

*Perhaps you would like someone to pray with you? Please call our friends at the 24-hr Crossroads prayerline. A kind and affirming person would be happy to listen:*

**1-866-273-4444**

*Find out more about Maury. Watch his inspiring videos and interviews:*

**[www.overcomingabuse.ca](http://www.overcomingabuse.ca)**

*Coming soon, “Child of Woe” adapted graphic novel! Free version online:*

**[www.overcomingabuse.ca/child-of-woe/print/](http://www.overcomingabuse.ca/child-of-woe/print/)**

*For organizations working with those living on the margins, those at risk or in abusive situations, “Child of Woe” graphic novel will be an invaluable way to connect with Maury’s story, and your message of hope.*

*Please ask about bulk orders or how we could help you:*

**[www.overcomingabuse.ca/non-profit-resources/](http://www.overcomingabuse.ca/non-profit-resources/)**

*Perhaps “Child of Woe” book or “Child of Woe” graphic novel would help you in your work with the broken, those living “on the margins”, those at risk. Please contact us about bulk orders or how we could help.*

# Back to Maury's Childhood Home

Watch the full video or listen to the podcast: [www.overcomingabuse.ca](http://www.overcomingabuse.ca)



The window Maury was hung from over the Grand River.



The tree Maury often climbed to hide and watch for Cyrus.



Maury in front of the cellar door—a sometimes hiding place. There was no escape if Maury were to be found though.



Maury in front of his childhood home.



Maury & Bev Blair

# Graphic Novel



NOBODY  
LOVES ME.  
NOBODY  
EVER  
WILL.



WHY AM I SO  
DIFFERENT? WHY  
SO HATED?



THE SIMPLE THINGS MADE  
ME HAPPY ONE SUMMER  
I CREATED MY OWN LITTLE  
GARDEN WONDERLAND IN AN  
EMPTY ALLEY THAT CYRUS  
WOULD NEVER FIND. FOR  
A LITTLE WHILE, LIFE WAS  
"PERFECT" AND KIND AND  
BEAUTIFUL.

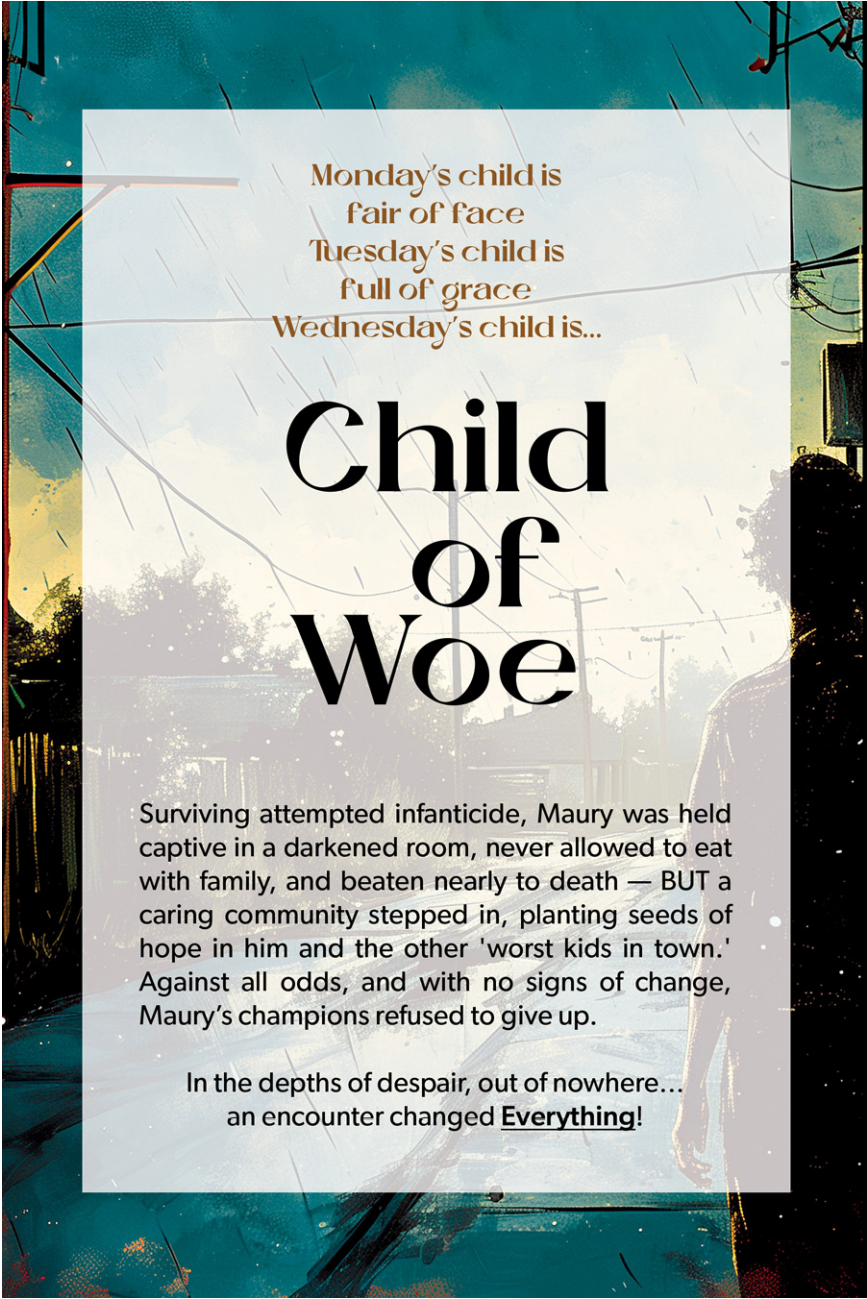


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Monday's child is  
fair of face  
Tuesday's child is  
full of grace  
Wednesday's child is...

# Child of Woe

Surviving attempted infanticide, Maury was held captive in a darkened room, never allowed to eat with family, and beaten nearly to death — BUT a caring community stepped in, planting seeds of hope in him and the other 'worst kids in town.' Against all odds, and with no signs of change, Maury's champions refused to give up.

In the depths of despair, out of nowhere...  
an encounter changed **Everything!**