Still on the Journey:

"I am a blessed child of God"

By Mary Garth

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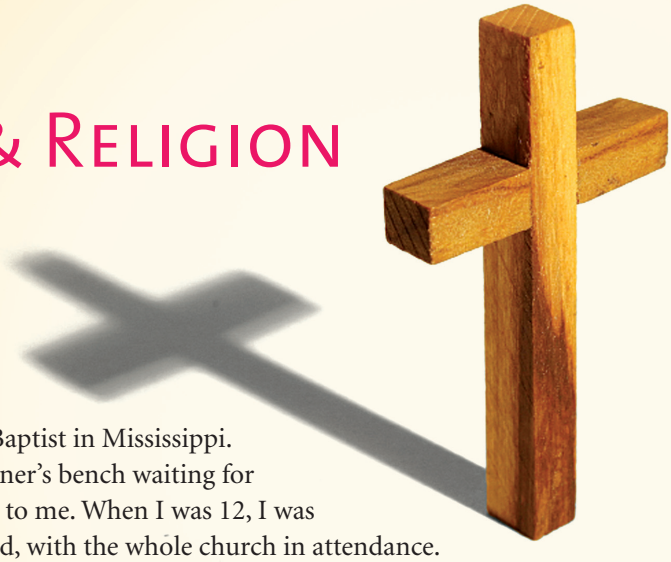
Introduction

Over the past year, I have had the privilege to work with Mary Garth on her second book. We were partnered for this project through Professional Dimensions (PD), an organization to which I belong. For the past two years, PD has adopted the Dominican Center as its main charity, offering financial support and volunteer assistance. Through PD and the Dominican Center, Mary and I came to meet. This is Mary's second book.

I hope that writing this book was a release for Mary. There were many points of pain in the past year, particularly the deaths of her son Kenny and her goddaughter Tammy. The book is told in different parts; there are stories that Mary wrote with Sr. Elise (who helped her start the book in 2005) or me. Additionally, some members of Mary's family have worked with her on their own stories. More poignantly, there are poems and letters that Mary wrote by herself. Often, these came to her in the middle of the night, when writing provided a constructive outlet for her feelings.

Amalia Schoone
—writing coach for Mary Garth

God & Religion



I was raised as a Baptist in Mississippi. I sat on the mourner's bench waiting for the Lord to speak to me. When I was 12, I was baptized in a pond, with the whole church in attendance. There were more snakes than human beings there, yet nobody got bit. The pastor dunks you three times. Up here, all the kids got sprinkled.

When I moved to Milwaukee, the Presbyterian Church reached out to me. We serve the same God, although we may praise God differently. I have worshipped at Christ Church Presbyterian since 1950. The original church building on 18th Street was torn down for the freeway project. The "new" church just celebrated its 50th year on 20th & Walnut, two blocks away from the original structure. Looking at the programs from over the years, I'm reminded of all the volunteer jobs I've done at church. I am an usher, worked in the food pantry, visited the sick and started the Angel Choir. God also called me to be a deaconess. I served communion once, after I was sick. Before that, I wasn't ready. You need to carry the tray properly, with two hands. You're serving God's blood, you need to show respect. My daughter Barbara is an elder now at Christ Presbyterian.

I have a hallelujah good time when the spirit hits me. Pastor Miller brings the word of God, but it's up to us to listen. He can only bring the word to us, but he can't save our souls. When I pray, the Holy Spirit puts words in my mouth. Not fancy words, I just do what he tells me.

The Choir

I started the Children's Angel Choir at my church in 1969, with Pastor Glenn, for kids aged three to twelve. The Angel Choir stopped at twelve because that is the age that Jesus began speaking in the synagogue. After twelve, the children would move on to the Youth Choir. These children were my babies, even though I didn't give birth to them. I took the 25 children to the suburbs and everywhere to sing. The children always knew how to behave; I taught them how to sit straight, not to chew gum. The suburban people had no idea how nice our choir children could be. We have a van to take the children around.

When my grandson Tim was five, he sang with the Choir at a breakfast for Milwaukee Inner City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH). There was a piano, so I told him to get up and play. He didn't want to, but he reluctantly walked up and played a new song. The choir backed him up, and everyone was pleased. Now Tim leads choirs in New York and Germany.

After leading the choir for 38 years, the last few with my daughter Sandra, I suffered a shoulder injury. I had planned to quit the choir soon because I had been involved for so long. While I was out, the church gave the choir to another director, without telling me. I found out when I went back to church. That day, my daughter Barbara took care of me, it hurt me real bad. Pastor Miller should have told me about the new choir director.

I made an appointment to go into session with the 12 elders and the Pastor. I wrote out my feelings for this meeting. My daughter Sandra was there, she was really, really upset how it happened; she worked very hard with those children. I had to tell her it was time to go. Pastor Miller said he decided to take over the choir.

Since then, Sandra and I have forgiven them for taking away the choir, "let it go." This Sunday, a sweet little angel sang a song in church. She was in the choir when I directed it. When she sang, she looked at me. When she got through, she came and gave me a big hug. She is so sweet and has such a beautiful voice. There is something special about this little one. I love them all.

The Old School

I am from the old school. What I mean about old school: I don't mind hard, dirty work. I am not out front; I don't care about being seen. That's okay as long as the work gets done.

I love Christ Presbyterian Church. I learned how to work very well with the little ones in the Angel Choir. I was all over but not seen. I also worked with some very nice folks like the late Carl Spear, painting the inside of the church, and working in the food pantry. We had beautiful flowers in the front of our church and rose bushes in the back of the church. I used to walk to church in the summer just to water the flowers. That was my responsibility. I did it because I wanted to, not to be seen. I am an usher. About four of us started ushering at the church on 18th Street—Loretta Malton, Shirley Mann, May Perry, Mary Lathan and me. After that, we had others join us too, and some are still working, including me. My daughter Sandra is one of them now.

Well, I am very tired and we need more young people to come in and help. Lord, send us some more families at our church. We will keep praying, I know you hear my prayers, Amen.

The Dominican Center

God sent me to the Dominican Center four years ago. I had attended MATC in the early 1970s, and I wanted to go back to school, however, I didn't pass the test again this time. MATC referred me to another church for tutoring, but the last spot was filled. That church told me about the Dominican Center. When I first came here, Sister Ann met me at the door; she looked like a little Angel. When I call the Dominican Center, if I hear Sister Ann or Sister Sue, I feel calm. It's a different feeling. Sister Elise gives me rides to and from school, and sometimes Sister Mary Catherine does too. Even if I'm sick, I make it to this school. The sisters aren't going out and telling anyone my story. I can cry here.

Through the Dominican Center, Rebuilding Milwaukee came to paint my home. We moved all my furniture outside to a storage shed—my bedroom, living room, TV room and kitchen moved

all outside and locked up. They gave me brand new carpeting in several rooms and fixed a lot of broken items and areas. If I had not come to the Dominican Center, if God had not blessed me to come here, none of this would have been done.

I've learned so much since coming to the Dominican Center. I'm not studying to pass my GED; I'm here for my own self-improvement. I still have the "down south" talk, and I'm trying to speak more correctly. I'm also gaining self confidence. Now, if someone says something wrong, I will intervene. Before, I wouldn't do that. Yet, I'm still struggling. I still say things all at once. God is going to help me, that's what I'm praying for.

Pray

Thank you Lord for your son,
Jesus who died on the cross, for my sins
Three days later, he rose again.
Just for me.

Lord, I was lost, but now I am found. Was blind but now can see.
Thank you for everything you give me in this life.
My children, grandchildren, friends and other family members,
My church family, and cousins, who I have not seen in a long time.

Last but not least, bless the Dominican Center,
And all the Sisters there,
In Jesus' name.
I am blessed, the Sisters are just Angels.
They help everyone here to study.
I am thankful for the school, Sister Ann and all the Sisters.

First, everyone who comes to the Center is welcome.
Some people come from the street, just to eat,
see the Sisters just for a little while, and they are gone on their way.

I am so blessed for the Sisters at the school.
Sister Elise picks me up every morning to take me to school.
Sister Mary Catherine, Sister Sue and Elma also take me home.
I am blessed with so many friends at school.
I love them all very much.

By Mary Garth

Poems and Prayers

Prayers

I am here today, Lord, because you watched over me
when the wind was blowing so hard.
The lights went out and I couldn't see,
but I felt your presence close to me.
I know everything will be all right.
You sent your angel to me last night.
1-25-05

I don't have any time for myself!
It's always, "MOM, MOM, MOM!"
Well, things have to change.
I need my space, so
I can go when I get ready to go;
Come home when I get ready to come home.
I need to pray so God can use me
ANYWHERE AND ANYTIME.
I am tired.
11-3-05

It's a good day, not raining out.
The wind is blowing, but not too stormy.
I thank God that He woke me up this morning
And started me on my way.
I am at school now with my friends.
I am glad that I am.
My daughter broke her wrist last night.
That is sad, because she can't do anything in the house now.
I will have to help her until she feels better.
That is going to be a great day.
11-9-05

Lord, I am willing to run all the way.
I will be with you some day.
As I live and so what's right,
You will show me that great light.
11-9-05

Thank you, Lord. You gave me another day
to praise you and to work with friends at school.
I wanted to do some work at home,
but it can wait until this afternoon.
I pray someone will be there to help me.
If not, I know you are always with me.
Such a beautiful day to work outside
Covering the air conditioner,
getting the flower pots off the steps,
and putting them away for the winter.
11-21-05

Lord, you have been so good to me.
You open doors I could not see.
You're always by my side, showing me the way,
Long as I know, I will not go astray.
1-24-06

Oh, you who love the Lord, look up!
The battle has been won.
No matter who hurt you here,
The best is yet to come.
Though pain may rack your body now,
You will not feel anything.
Just keep the faith and look above.
God's shining stars will fall on you.
Ah, yes, the best is yet to come.
9-26-07

When you go to church on Sunday,
Thoughts come to your mind.
Don't you feel that more than ever?
God is really truly there when you
Listen to the choir
And you thank the Lord above.
You forget the things around you and a smile
Comes on your face.
Yes, God is really there.
Oh, yes! He is everywhere.
9-26-07

Child of God

I am myself
I am just God's child
And my friends know it,
And I know it too.

I am myself
And the way I express everything
Is what makes me special.

I have a different way of going about things
That says I believe in myself
And in God, my savior Jesus Christ.

And yes, I am a woman of God
And I do believe in myself…
In my style
In my beliefs
In my freedom
And in all I do.

Oh yes, I do believe in myself.
11-29-08

Faith

I do not know what tomorrow may bring
Maybe I will cry or sing or
Maybe I will be alone

Left all alone like an old woman
With no home
Then the storm will claim my land
And I will feel God's guiding hand
But I will trust that he is with me
Giving angels I can't see

I will have faith all by myself

I will have faith that I do not fall

I do not know what tomorrow may bring
Maybe I will cry or maybe I will sing
But, with God on my side
He will take care of everything

I will win the battle
Everywhere I go
He lets me know he loves me so
There are things he lets me know

Never knowing what
tomorrow may bring
Maybe I will cry or
maybe I will sing
1-6-09

By Mary Garth

Gentle Touch

God must have known there would be times when we need
A gentle touch.

A tender, understanding heart
To love us very much.

He must have known we'd need someone
To listen to our cares
To comfort and remember us
In loving thoughts and prayers.

So in his boundless wisdom,
He sent us from above,
The dearest blessing in the world.

A mother's precious love.

A Song

A man can accuse, and carry bad news.
Gossip is cheap and low.
So unless you make no mistakes in your life,
Be careful of the stones you throw.

My Family

My Brother Quedellas

The Fall of 2005

While sitting at my table today with nothing to do, my mind goes back to the older brother I have always loved. There were seven in our family. He was the second and I was the fourth. This is a beautiful day, but also sad. My brother won't be talking to me anymore in this life to tell me how much he loves me and his employees. He died and now I am the only one left.

My brother had a business in Denver, Colorado. After he died, someone else bought the business and fired all who worked there. My brother would be so sad. They didn't even get their last pay check. I pray they find work to support their families. My brother would talk about them all the time. They worked so hard and he loved them as his friends.

I talked to my brother the day before he died. His voice didn't sound right and when I asked him how he was he said, "Baby, I'm

By Mary Garth

fine. Now don't you worry about me." The next day he went to the bank to take out money to pay his workers. When he came out and returned home with the money, he fell next to his van in the parking lot. We don't know how long he was there on that cold day, when the postman discovered him in a state of unconsciousness. He was rushed to the hospital, but never regained consciousness. He died shortly afterwards.

I'd like to tell you about a couple of the children of Quedellas, my nieces whom I dearly love. Loving them does not mean I approve of all they do. They tend to be manipulative and often stretch the truth until it breaks! As much as I love my family, I am glad my dear brother has gone to his reward because he'd be so disappointed that his children are fighting over his estate. He taught them to love by his example and they have so soon forgotten. But God hears His children when they pray and I pray for them.

My nieces told me how much they needed me in the absence of their father. I will always be there for them until I go home, but most of them do not call. Perhaps they feel they do not really need me but they need somebody; someone with wisdom, age, and experience to help them get on the right track and successfully get through this loss. I'd love to tell them to be fair, honest, and kind. Don't burn your bridges behind you. Pay your honest debts. God is watching, keeping records that we all must face again. I'd love to tell them to respect each other, love each other, forgive each other and be patient with each other. We are family. We should love unconditionally. Lord knows, I'm trying to learn that kind of love.

My Children

My Son Kenny

When my children were growing up, I taught them "respect, respect, respect."

I kept my children away from drugs and stuff like that. My children have first cousins who they have not met because I didn't like what they were into. I had a lot of help from Christ Presbyterian Church. Mr. Walker taught them how to play ball and wrestle. They didn't have time for any of that stuff. When the boys grew up, they did what they wanted to do. I had to believe in their goodness, after all,

Kenny gave up his life to Christ at an early age. Later I found out that Kenny lived his life differently than I do. He was incarcerated many times for drugs, yet I would not go visit him. I attended class to learn how to deal with his drug use.

Kenny was my baby, he loved me. I miss him so much. He had such a beautiful, low voice—a bass. He sang in the choir at church, and worked with the boys at Joy House, the house next to our church that the congregation bought. Kenny would rehearse with the boys during the week, and they would sing on Sundays.

Kenny was also a playboy. He didn't have to work much. Women would take care of him, and he would let them. He got really spoiled. He has many children; I haven't met all of them, some of them live in Eau Claire, Green Bay and Manitowoc. I did meet two of his girlfriends. He had a lot of clothes and jewelry, and 100 pairs of shoes. He wore shirts and pants—not suits (except for the two suits that he bought because I asked him)—that his wife Suzanne bought him. When Kenny got really sick with lung cancer, he missed Suzanne very much; she had died a few years earlier.

You never forget your children, the ones who have gone home. Kenny's wife Suzanne was a nurse like my daughter Barbara. They were so, so close. She never called me mother-in-law, only momma. I washed and folded her nurse uniform. We prayed together in the mornings, she brought me things and stayed with me when I had surgery. Suzanne had such a beautiful voice. She loved my son Ken so very, very much. I didn't want Suzanne to marry Kenny, and neither did her parents. I said, "Why don't you wait until he comes out of jail?" They did marry while he was incarcerated, and then Suzanne came to live with me until he came out. They stayed together until she passed. She worked all day as a trauma nurse in the emergency room, then would come home and cook for Kenny. Sometimes, he was not very nice to her.

The last time Suzanne went to her mother's house, she wanted to wear something of mine. She had on my beautiful African black dress, two-piece with gold trim and a matching hat. She looked so pretty. Her family didn't like what she wore, and laughed at her. When she came home, she cried like a baby in my arms. Our family told her how beautiful she looked.

The night Suzanne passed away, I spoke on the phone with her several times. The last time she called me, I didn't call her back because I knew I would call her the next morning for prayer. She went to bed, and Kenny stayed up late. At 3 a.m., Kenny tried to wake her up for work. He shook her, but she didn't move. When he touched her, her arm fell and he knew she was gone. He called 911 and then he called me. By the time I got there, the police had put up the tape, and they wouldn't let me in the house. They questioned Kenny about the death for several hours. When the coroner completed her work and determined the cause of death was natural, they let me in. I rubbed her hair and kissed her jaw. I really miss my baby. Suzanne was cremated and had a Memorial Service, not a funeral. I didn't have any say in that. Now Kenny and Suzanne are together.

Kenny moved in with me and, four years later, he became sick with cancer. Despite his faults, Kenny knew not to bring his troubles around my house. While he was staying with me, his friend, a young man, came to pick him up. This man drove up in a fancy car, playing loud music. I told this man to go away with his loud music, and Kenny called him. The man came back and apologized for the music, said he needed to take Kenny to the pharmacy for medicine and would come back. When they returned, the young man asked if he could sit on my porch. I said yes, if we could talk about the Lord. He did, and as we talked, both the man and Kenny began to cry. I saw the young man at Kenny's funeral, but didn't get a chance to talk to him. Kenny's funeral was crowded. There were lots of different people there, but no arguments. It was a big going home.

When Kenny was incarcerated, he read the bible all the time. He really knew the Lord. While Kenny lived at my house, I would have my bible group meet on Friday nights. He never joined us, just stayed in his room, but he heard everything. Afterwards, he would sometimes comment on what the group discussed. Kenny was interested in bible study, but just did not want to come downstairs.

The Holy Spirit was With Me

I'm not proud of the night Kenny died. I've got to pray about it, because it hurts. Kenny told me he could not breathe and he needed

to go outside to get some air. I thought he was smoking so I didn't go with him—he was killing himself.

I smoked for a year when I was young, everyone did it then. When I left my cigarettes at home, my sons John and Kenny would steal them. One day, Pastor gave me a ride home from church. As we drove, I crumpled my pack of cigarettes, threw it out the car window, and never smoked again. Kenny usually smoked on my porch, sometimes with my daughter Sandra. I would look through the peephole and see them, then open the door. Kenny would throw his cigarettes over the fence and Sandra would stuff them in the planter. I would say, "I can smell it, I know you've been smoking."

After Kenny went outside, the Holy Spirit told me the door was not locked. I went to the porch and said, "Boy, what are you doing out here?" Kenny was lying with his feet on the steps, his head back on the porch, and his eyes wide open, staring at a geranium that my daughter Barbara purchased that was waiting to be planted. He was gone. Just think, his eyes were open and he was gone home, just that quick. I didn't get a chance to hold his hand and tell him I love him. I don't know if I would have gone out. No, I'm going to quit saying that. Because it is not my fault, it was just his time to leave in the way he did.

Nobody has ever died in my house, and I've had three sick family members die. My mother was at St. Michael's, and I spent every night with her, she never stayed alone at night. Toward the end, I went home to wait for the hospice bed for her. The hospital called to tell me to come back. I knew she was gone. My son John had cancer and nearly died, then spent six years in remission. When he got really sick again, I turned my downstairs TV room into a bedroom for him. He was there for a year. He spent a week at the hospital before the end, and I was there with him. I was holding his hand when he took his last breath. I knew he was gone… the nurse didn't have to tell me. But not Kenny, he died alone on my porch.

God didn't want Kenny to pass upstairs in my house, didn't want me to go upstairs into Kenny's room to find him gone. He gave Kenny the strength to come downstairs, turn off the alarm and sit down. He just lay back, went to sleep looking at that beautiful red

geranium. I still haven't gone upstairs to his room. Sandra has gone upstairs and cleaned out his room.

Mary's writings about Kenny's last days and passing:

5-20-08

My son Kenny doesn't feel good today. He is in the hospital as I write this today. He is on the second floor, waiting for the doctor to check him out. His appointment is at 3 p.m. I know he will be alright, just needs to take better care of himself, smoking and everything, and he also needs to pray more, and listen.

Lord, the same day, my granddaughter went to surgery and my son went to the cancer ward. The Doctor was very concerned about his health and he will stay a little while. What else can happen? Only God knows.

7-06-08 Sunday 10:11 p.m. – Letter to Kenny:

I will be all right, Baby, God is watching over me, you know, I know the Lord, he hears my cry and he knows all my sorrow. But he says, "Be still my child, you don't have to worry about your baby any more, he is resting with me."

Sleep on Kenny, my baby boy. I love you but God loved you more. I know you are not hurting any more. But I miss you—your voice coming down the stairs saying, "It's me, mom." I never thought you would leave me so soon. But you had to go. I will forever talk about you. Because I know you will meet your brother John, Grandmother and your Dad, and a lot of other friends, Aunt Georgia, all welcome you now that you have done what we all have to do. You are with God now, baby, I pray.

8-20-08 – 7:48 a.m. – Prayer to God:

Good morning Lord. I know you love me because you have kept me for so many years. Watching over me and guiding my heart to walk in the right direction, my mouth to talk, my eyes to see, ears to hear. I thank you Lord, you made me and you know all about me.

I am so troubled Lord, my heart is so heavy. I am filled with sadness, Lord, thinking about Kenny. If only I had got to the door

behind him. I don't think I would cry so much. Help me Lord to stop blaming myself. I know it was his time to leave and go home to be with you, Lord. I miss him so very much. I should have hugged Kenny and listened to him instead of just staying upset, watching and telling him to get his own place. But I miss him so. Forgive me, Lord.

11-17-08 – 3 a.m.

Lord, it is 3 a.m. and I can't sleep at all, thinking about Kenny. When he left me alone that early morning, June 24, 2008, I can't forget what he told me, "Mom, I am going outside to get some air. I can't breathe." Maybe if I would have followed him I could have prayed and held his hand and told him it was okay.

Baby, you can rest now, you are gone to be with the Lord. I would have hugged him and kissed him and sang to him, telling him about the Lord Jesus Christ. And I know he loved to talk about his savior Jesus Christ. He was my last one to be born, my baby, my love. But God loved him more. He has gone home to rest for just a little while; God called him home to be with him.

We all miss Kenny; his sister Sandra and he were very close. And my girls Debra and Barbara love him so very much. But his baby sister would not tell everything he would do when they were young. The others would, but not Sandra, they were very close.

I know my son loved me very much. He knows I love to wear blue, so he would put on his blue suit and would go to church. He would say, "Mom, you look good in blue, your hair, too." I would smile and say, "You too, baby. See you at church."

11-27-08 – 10:47 p.m.

Lord, thank you for this Thanksgiving Day. Last year, my baby was here. I miss him so very much. Right now, I am listening to some songs on this tape, just thinking about my son. God gave him to me for just a little while and we went home to be with you, Lord, on June 24, 2008.

I know he is resting and we all have to go sometime or another.

Most of all, Lord, I thank you for all my children, and especially the grandchildren who were with me this Thanksgiving Day.

It was a long day, but a wonderful and spiritual time. Some of the little ones, I had only met one or two times but they remember me, saying "Hi Grandmom" when they walked in. I smiled and kissed them all, it was a beautiful day after all.

Kenny's son, I talk to him every day. His name is Little Kenny and he is a very smart young man.

Tillmon Louis "Tim" Garth

My oldest son, Tillmon Louis "Tim" Garth lives in Milwaukee, near Washington Park, and served his country in the Navy. Despite the arthritis in his knees, he still works at the Veteran's Administration Hospital, and is engaged to Vera, and will be married soon. He calls me several times a day.

10-19-08

Tuesday was my son Tillmon's birthday; he turned 56. I thank God for him. He came to my house to get a hug and I was glad to see him. We talked for awhile and he went back home. While he was here, his daughter called me, so he had a chance to say hello to her. I love my son very much, I enjoy talking with him. May God continue to bless him.

He is a good son. All the time, he says that he's hurting, that's not good. God wants us to thank him just for being here another day, and having a job, a home and family. He is getting married very soon to a very nice lady. She loves him very much and they have been together for twenty years or more. I can see myself that Tim and Vera will make a nice couple. Good luck and God bless.

Deborah

Deborah is my third child and a very beautiful young lady. She has been married to Bruce Schoates for over twenty years. She is the mother of four children, three boys and one girl, and has grandchildren. I am proud to have Deborah for my daughter. God bless the whole family.

Barbara

Barbara is my fourth child, and also very beautiful. She works very long hours as a nurse, and served in the Army for some time. She is the mother of one daughter, Keona Garth Dickens, and is also a grandmother for a second time. Her first grandchild, Kayla, is with the Lord. Her second grandchild is now here. Because the Lord is watching over her, I am sure her father, Marlon Dickens, and her mother, Keona Garth Dickens, will be very happy and blessed.

Michael

Michael is a nice young man, who lives in Green Bay, Wisconsin. He got hurt on the job and now has trouble moving. He calls me three times per week. He is a blessed young man.

Sandra

Sandra, my baby daughter, is very clean. She's always finding something to do; she's never still. There can be some dishes in the sink—Sandra will get the bleach, put some in the dishwater, and get started. The bathroom is always sterilized and disinfected. She loves what she does. I thank God for her, she is a blessing to me.

Sandra has fibromyalgia and other muscle problems, yet she is a soldier for the Lord. She participates in a lot of activities at the Church. Now she's an usher; she was Assistant Director for the Angel Choir, and a Praise Dancer.

To celebrate Christmas in 2007, Mary's daughter Sandra and granddaughter Jasmine joined her at the Dominican Center.

My Grandchildren

When I was younger, on Saturday nights, I would have twenty children sleep over. Most of them were my grandchildren, others members of the Angel Choir. I could hear them whispering about me, wondering what Grandma was doing. On Sundays, I would take them all to church.

Here are my grandchildren, with stories about some of them.

My son Timothy has four children. In addition to Timothy Jr., Tameka and Jennice who are described below, he also has a son named Marlin, who has two children of his own (my great-grandchildren).

Timothy Riley Garth was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He first took an interest in music at the age of three. I saw that he had a gift for music, particularly singing, and decided to put him into the children's choir at church. As the children's choir director, Timothy gives me credit for playing an integral role in nurturing and developing his talent through the years. By the time Timothy

was 18 years old, he had already studied music quite extensively in Vocal/Choral Jazz and Classical genres. He even began teaching himself to play piano. He had also learned several languages, among them Spanish, French, Italian and Latin, with working knowledge of Hebrew and German.

In 2000, Timothy began touring Europe with musical director, friend and colleague Gregory Kelly (songwriter and musician for Hezekiah Walker), with the European gospel group, "The Black Singers." Timothy was the assistant musical director for three years in this group. In 2004, Timothy joined the European touring group, "The Very Best of Black Gospel," and is currently touring under this company. In 2005, Timothy wanted to take a hiatus from New York and to learn more European culture, so he moved to Germany. There, he founded the Leviticus Gospel Choir in Hamburg, with the help of friend and gospel innovator, Brigitte Haack.

Timothy's experience, intellect and musical ability has allowed him to travel abroad as well as share stages with Gospel greats such as Hezekiah Walker, Kirk Franklin, Mary Mary, Shirley Caesar, Donnie McClurkin, Yolanda Adams, Kim Burrell, John P. Kee, Donald Lawrence, soul artists such as Michael Bolton, Lou Rawls, and Freddie Jackson, as well as television appearances with actor/comedian Martin Short, David Letterman, Bobby Jones Gospel, Thomas Gottschalk's Grosse Bibel Test (Germany), Der Deutscher Filmpreis with actor/comedian "Bully" (Germany) and countless others. Timothy is currently living in Hamburg, Germany, teaching and giving workshops throughout Germany and other countries in Europe.

In November 2008, Timothy came back to Milwaukee for two weeks, and spent six days with me. During this time, he frequently videotaped me, even when I was wearing my housecoat, just because he misses me. The tapes will keep him company when he's in Germany. He also sang at church, it was quite the time!

Timothy's sister Tameka had surgery in May 2008. Her father was working, and her mother was sick that day. I caught the bus at 6:30 a.m. from my home all the way out to Froedtert Hospital, on the edge of Milwaukee County, to be with Tameka that day. Tameka has a daughter, Nakiyah Riley, and is engaged to Stephen Tunner.

5-20-08: Lord, I thank you for this day. You gave me the strength to come to the hospital to be with my Granddaughter Tameka. She is going to have surgery on her heart. She went down about 20 minutes to 12 p.m. and she hasn't come back yet. It is 1:25 p.m. Her brother Tim has called from Germany twice already and I hope and pray she is alright. I know she is. God has been so good to her and I know he is not going to leave her now. So I am waiting for her to come through the door any minute now, thank the Lord. Praise his name. I also thank you Lord for waking me up and letting me come out here on the bus around 6:30 this morning. The bus was on time, I was here around 7:15 a.m.

Lord, I am sitting here, it is 2 p.m. I don't know yet what is going on. I am sure when the operation is over they will let me know. The Nurse and Doctors know I am here in her room, waiting. Her friend is here, but he went to sleep and didn't ask me to wake him up, so he was late for his job. "About thirty minutes," he said, snoring like crazy. Well, I don't know how anyone can sleep or think when he is snoring, but he is a very nice young man when he is awake… smart and very intelligent. Who knows, they may get married some day. He goes to church and plays the piano, and says he is a Christian. I pray he doesn't lose his job.

2:50 p.m. Tameka is coming up and she is okay, thank you Lord. I know she would be alright because you are in charge. Oh yes Lord, Amen.

4:35 p.m. Tameka got back from surgery around 3:45 p.m. She was in a lot of pain and she was crying. The doctor came in and gave her some pain medicine. He told me that everything turned out just fine. I was glad to hear him say that. But I already knew it would be fine. I pray she would sleep for awhile and rest. That's what she needs. She is sleeping now, thank God.

When she got back to the room, the first words that came out of her mouth were "Hello Granny Pooh." I smiled and so did she. My granddaughter is very well today, thank God.

Timothy and Tameka's step sister, Jennice Barnhill, currently attends Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC). She gets good grades, even though she works so much. Like many of her aunts, uncles and

cousins, she has a beautiful voice. She visits twice a week, and is close to her cousin Jasmine.

When Jennice was younger, she lived with me for three or four years. Those were troubled times for Jennice, she didn't come from a stable home and I had some strict rules. After Jennice left my house for foster care, I still visited her. The foster mother also had rules and structure that was difficult for Jennice to handle. Fortunately, despite some troubles in her youth, Jennice is on a good path. I am very proud of her.

Deborah has four children, Darnell "Donnie," who has three children, Derell "Binky," Darnetta "De De," who has three children, and Traimell, who also has three children.

Barbara has one daughter, Keona, who is a very special young lady. She is married to a nice man, Marlon Dickens. They recently had a second baby, a beautiful girl named Marlo Latrece Dickens. Keona was hospitalized for the last few months of her pregnancy to make sure she would get the bed rest she needs. Keona always takes care of others and has a hard time saying no when she needs to care for herself. The baby was born a month early, and will be in the hospital for a few more weeks until she reaches her due date. Thank the Lord that she is healthy.

A few years ago, Keona had a precious little girl, Kayla, who was stillborn. She went home to be with the Angels in Heaven. Even though she was premature and not fully developed, it was clear she had beautiful features. She was so pretty. At the hospital, I held baby Kayla, walked with and spoke to her. We had a small family funeral for her.

After some time, I asked the Lord to let me see Kayla one more time, and he did. One night, I went to sleep on my couch, but I was not sleeping, my eyes were just closed. Baby Kayla came to me. She was smiling, with her beautiful face held between her hands and her elbows resting on the couch. She looked just like her momma. God showed her to me so I could see how sweet she is, up in heaven with him. I kept my eyes closed as long as possible so her face would not go away. The minute I opened my eyes, she was gone. But I know where she is and some day we will meet again. I don't know when or where, but I do know that when God calls me home, I will be there.

My late son John had two children, John Jr. and Tracy. Tracy has a daughter, Valencia, who is a nice young lady, and John Jr. has children.

My son Michael has five children:

Michael, or "Little Mike" has 12 children. I cannot name them all but I will try—Malani, Ekera, little Mike, Isaiah, Ashante, Stormy and the others.

Michele is very good. She helps me so much in the yard, shoveling snow, anything I need. If I ask her to do it, she will do it. If she sees that it needs to be done, she does it. She is here to help. She gives me so much love that means a lot to me. She has a son, 17 year old Desmond.

Donte's mother is Ann, and they live in Green Bay.

Rinita's mother is Robin, and she lives in Arizona.

Melissa is Michael's youngest daughter and has her own children, Dajahia and Donte Jr. (DJ).

These are Kenny's children:

Quincy, my grandson, has his own son named Quincy and a daughter named Diamond. He is married to Kesha, and they have two daughters.

Kenyata now has a daughter named Quinece.

Kenny has two sons named Kenny, Kenny II and Kenny III. He also has a daughter named Kendra, and another daughter Nicole, who has two children of her own.

Sandra has two children, Jeleeo and Jasmine. Jeleeo "GeeGee" as I call him, was born on April 5, 1981 unto Sandra and Ronnie Earl Hicks, Gee Gee's father. Ronnie and Sandra met each other through Sandra's cousins Ray and Ruth, who were brother and sister (both are now deceased), and both had grown up with Ronnie.

Ronnie and Sandra became engaged in late 1980, and were expecting their first child together, GeeGee. Meanwhile, Ronnie's mother (Beatrice Lever) did not know about her son's fiancée or

her grandchild. This hurt both Sandra and me because we wanted Ronnie's family, especially his mother, to be involved in Gee Gee's life. I still, to this day, don't understand why he didn't tell his mother about my daughter and her pregnancy with his child.

Beatrice met Sandra during the final months of the pregnancy, after she had confronted her son about not telling her about Sandra and her grandchild. Sandra soon developed a relationship with Beatrice and her husband Willie, as well as with the rest of the Hicks family. Willie would pick up Sandra for Sunday dinners and he and Beatrice would shower Sandra with gifts for her and the baby. Though Beatrice and Sandra became close, she was still upset about Ronnie's dishonesty with her; she would then ask Sandra not to marry her son. I also asked Sandra the same thing, but due to the promises that Ronnie had made, Sandra married him anyway.

I met Beatrice at the baby shower my daughters gave Sandra at my house. "Bea" (as I started calling her after we met) and her best friend Darlene met me at my front door. She stared in disbelief when she saw Sandra and me stand together; she looked at Sandra and said, "Sand, that's not your mother?" "Girl, yes I am her mother," I said. "But you are lighter than her, she is Dark!" she explained. I knew Bea meant no harm. She was a sweet lady that always had a smile on her face. We all laughed and hugged each other. From that day one, we became like sisters—laughing, crying, fussing and just enjoying each other. We would always burst into laughter about the first time we met.

Sandra stayed with me while Ronnie was in San Diego, California, training for the Navy. He came back and forth, home to Milwaukee once GeeGee was born, he was always excited to see his son.

Ronnie was a big man, and GeeGee was always cuffed in his arm like a football, he would show off the baby to everyone. Ronnie had a habit of chewing on GeeGee's cheeks. He would bring the baby downstairs to me after playing with him, and his cheeks would be as red as fire! I would always yell at him, "Stop chewing on this boy's cheeks!" Ronnie wouldn't do anything but grin at me; once he held him again, he would do the same thing!

Sandra told me one night that she was moving to San Jose, California

with Ronnie. Ronnie had found a place and was sending for Sandra and GeeGee, so I gave her my blessing to go, but I knew that I was going to miss GeeGee, who was only four months old at the time. Sandra and I kept in touch a lot for the short amount of time (one year) she stayed in San Jose. I knew that things weren't going well between her and her husband, but I had put her up in the hands of the Lord, like I do with all of my children. God will lead them to make their own decisions. And he did.

Sandra moved back home to Milwaukee and found an apartment for GeeGee and her; she even went back to work at her old job at West Bend Insurance, where her sister Deborah worked. I kept GeeGee while Sandra worked. Deborah's husband Bruce would pick them up after work and take them home. Sometimes, GeeGee would spend the night, so Sandra wouldn't have to rush in the mornings to get GeeGee and her ready.

Ronnie kept very little contact with his family, including his mother, once they separated. Sandra's main concern was for GeeGee's welfare, and whether his father would be involved in his life. When Ronnie did contact Sandra, he told her that he was being relocated to Florida, and wanted GeeGee and her to move with him. This time, Sandra responded no. Ronnie's next contacts would come via letters that he wrote periodically, some of which weren't pleasant to read. Ronnie had become frustrated with Sandra and his mother because they were trying to find him. The letters eventually stopped coming from Ronnie, and there was no communication. Sandra and Bea still continued their search for Ronnie; they wrote letters to referred sources and contacted the Naval Base where he was stationed, with no response. This process continued for years and, finally, they had to let it go. Ronne became, and today still is, a mystery. One day, Sandra and I saw Ronnie's brother George and he asked us if we ever spoke with Ronnie. Sandra replied no, then George explained that, most likely due to his position with the Navy, he couldn't contact his family and we couldn't contact him either. Sandra looked at him like he was crazy; she was not trying to hear it, and neither was I.

Sandra and GeeGee have both moved on with their lives, and I thank God for keeping and sustaining them through the hard times they faced. When I look at GeeGee today, Ronnie does not know the blessing that he left behind.

We enrolled GeeGee in Head Start around the age of four at Urban Day School. He would cry when Sandra dropped him off in the mornings. My goddaughter Rosie (Tammy's sister), who worked there, would take him until he was quiet. Once he calmed down, Rosie would take him to the classroom, and he would play with the other kids like nothing ever happened. I would pick him up after school and, at times, the teacher would tell me if he misbehaved. GeeGee loved to talk when he was a child, so he had a habit of talking out of turn or not taking a nap when asked.

GeeGee began stuttering around six or seven years old. His grandmother Bea stuttered, as well as his father and other members of his father's family. Sandra would get upset with a lot of the teachers because they thought he was doing it for attention, and gave him a hard time about it. One of GeeGee's teachers sent him to the school psychiatrist, and from there, he was sent to the speech therapist. GeeGee, in fact, did have a stuttering problem. A few teachers were confronted about their ignorance, and then learned how to help GeeGee with his speech. They would later become very protective of GeeGee when other children teased him.

Like Moses in the bible, who had a stuttering problem, God used GeeGee and his gifts within the church. GeeGee could sing. I tell him all the time, "If I had your voice, they would have to put me out of the church." He does nothing but laugh at me. GeeGee, along with my other grandchildren, were all raised in the Angel Choir. As he became older, GeeGee started to become a soloist, singing leads all the time. The other kids would be mad, but I didn't care, he had a beautiful voice. GeeGee would lead a song called Through Christ I Can Do All Things. He would stand in front of the choir, holding the microphone with his signature grin, and when his part came, he would sing his little heart out. The congregation would smile and nod their heads. When the Angel Choir went to different churches, people would always ask if GeeGee was going to sing. People loved to hear him sing.

The choir was invited to Philadelphia Missionary Baptist Church every year for their choir's anniversary. His grandmother Bea's niece, Meg, was a member of the church; she would always schedule GeeGee on the program to sing a solo. GeeGee went into the youth choir when he was 13 years old. Mrs. Walls was the Pianist and

Stephanie Dowell was the Choir Director. GeeGee continued to utilize his voice and sing solos, like he did in the Angel Choir. A song called We Are the Salt of the Earth became one of his signature songs to lead. This song became a classic around the church, and soon it was picked up by the church's Senior Choir. One Sunday, Mrs. Baldwin, the Senior Choir's Director/Pianist, asked GeeGee to sing the song with the Senior Choir. Mrs. Baldwin has always loved GeeGee's voice and she loved working with him.

GeeGee was also a member of the Usher Board. He watched his Grandmother Bea and me usher for years, and he wanted to join. My sister in Christ, Loretta "Lil Sissy" trained GeeGee, along with the other youth, and soon we started a Youth Usher Board. Bea was the President, and GeeGee would later become the Vice President.

The church was aware that GeeGee stuttered, but GeeGee still participated in a lot of activities within the church that had to do with speaking. GeeGee read Easter and Christmas speeches, recited Bible verses during vacation bible school, and was once the pulpit assistant. He would read like a public speaker, and people would be amazed when he was finished.

The church held a summer program called the Christian Academy, attended by a lot of the children within the neighborhood and in the congregation. The Christian Academy opened every morning with a prayer for the children, and then they would go to their classes. The children were taught subjects such as Math and English, Bible Studies and Music. Other activities included Arts and Crafts, and Drama Workshops. They went on a lot of field trips, to the zoo, museums, and different parks around Milwaukee. On the last day of the Summer Program, the children would throw a Talent Show, which always drew crowds. GeeGee, like my other grandchildren Timmy and Keona, had worked at the Christian Academy. GeeGee became a volunteer at the age of 12, and when he turned 13, he became a paid worker.

Theresa Jackson, a member of the church at the time, was the supervisor. She would later become my adopted daughter and like a sister to Sandra. Theresa and GeeGee became very close during the program. She helped GeeGee in a lot of areas related to his work ethic. She wanted GeeGee to advance his Leadership skills.

Due to the close relationship between the two of them, the other workers complained to the assistant supervisor that he was being showed "favoritism." The coworkers started to give GeeGee a hard time and talked about him behind his back. One day, GeeGee was pulled to the side by an authoritative figure within the church and was told "to stay out of the Director's face or he would be fired, people are talking." GeeGee was extremely hurt and did not want to go back to work, but we encouraged him to do so.

The next summer, the elders of the church interviewed the youth worker candidates for the Christian Academy; this was the first time the elders conducted interviews. GeeGee completed his interview and left feeling confident; he felt in his heart that he would have the job again that summer. Mrs. Jackson called that evening and said that the Elders turned him down for the position. GeeGee's eyes filled with tears, and he walked out of the room. I told him God will take care of everything. I would later find out that the ones who smiled in GeeGee face every Sunday were the ones who rejected him for the position. I was very upset, yet I did forgive them, and I told GeeGee to do the same. Mrs. Jackson thought Sandra and I were upset with her, but we were not. GeeGee loved her, and still does. She is no longer a member of Christ Church, but she is still part of our family.

GeeGee showed little interest in Christ Church that summer, but I told him, as I did with all my grandchildren, "You are a member here until you are 18." He listened to what I told him, and continued to sing in the choir and work on the Usher Board. His heart was not in it anymore. God did take care of GeeGee. Toward the end of summer, he started working for Walgreens, where he remained an employee through his senior year of high school.

GeeGee went to the Milwaukee High School of the Arts, the same school that my grandson Timmy attended. GeeGee was a vocal major. His mother and I would go to the choir performances and the play Trial by Jury, in which GeeGee portrayed a juror.

GeeGee had a lot of academic problems; math was his worst subject. His mother frequently spoke with his math teachers throughout high school. GeeGee would always stay after school for tutoring and additional help. GeeGee had trouble with his peers in school, as he

had throughout his childhood. They teased him for stuttering and called him "gay." He has always been a different child, and people have, and may still today, take him the wrong way. People are very ignorant in this world and I wouldn't want anyone to hurt GeeGee or any of my grandchildren. Sandra and I had to go to the school a few times when GeeGee had altercations with the other students. I went with Sandra for support and to help mind her temper. I didn't want Sandra to argue with the other parents. We couldn't, and still cannot, be there to fight GeeGee's battles for him. I tell him all the time, "Baby, they talked about Jesus Christ."

GeeGee didn't know what to do after high school. A lot of kids were going to four year colleges, and he knew that was not for him. His mother wanted GeeGee to continue his education, so enrolled him in a local community college for Hospitality/Hotel Management.

In 2002, the night before Easter, I received a phone call from Bea's daughter Rose to tell me that Bea had died. Bea had been struggling with Alzheimer's disease for a few years. In the beginning, after the diagnosis, Sandra or GeeGee would pick Bea up on Saturday nights to spend the evening in preparation for church on Sunday morning. After dinner on Sunday, GeeGee would take her home. As her condition worsened, Bea's other daughter, Sheila, moved in with her. GeeGee still stopped over periodically to check on his Grandmother; we would always let Sheila know when GeeGee was coming over. When GeeGee would see his grandmother, she always knew who he was, even though her memory was fading. Sheila would later become the Power of Attorney over Bea's estate. Sandra was originally the Power of Attorney, however, Bea's sons found out about the arrangement and talked Sheila in to having Sandra's name removed. Bea was not close to her children. Before she was sick, they never came to see her. Sandra was like a daughter to Bea; she took her to the store, doctors appointments and other places. Bea's children lied about Sandra to people, but anyone who knew Sandra and how she loved Bea would not believe their lies.

GeeGee was asleep on the couch when Rose called. The night before, he had worked the 3rd shift at Baymont Inn and Suites. When he came into the kitchen, where I was sitting a couple of hours after the call, I told him I was resting. He said, "I know, I heard the conversation in my sleep." He didn't cry or anything,

because he knew the relationship he had with his grandmother and the times they shared.

Sheila and Rose kept in touch with me that week while making Bea's funeral arrangements. They knew Bea and I were like sisters, so they wanted my input for the funeral. It was sad, because there were a lot of things they didn't know about their own mother.

Bea's funeral was held at the church, which was crowded with people, including those who hadn't seen Bea in years, or even when she was sick. That made me very sad. GeeGee wrote a letter to his grandmother inside of the obituary, it was very moving. During the reading of the obituary, Sandra was very upset, along with everyone else, because she was not listed as "daughter-in-law." It was very embarrassing, because Sandra was still married to Ronnie, though he was not involved in her life. Sandra had previously had a falling out with Sheila due to Bea, but that was no excuse to leave her out of the obituary. We prayed with Sandra before the service, because she wanted to confront Sheila, but it was not the time or place for it. At the funeral, my friend Geneva Long sang Give Me Flowers While I Live by James Cleveland. Bea loved the song. When a choir sang it at a church we visited, I remember her breaking into tears as we listened to it. GeeGee held up very well that day; we were so proud of him. He knew his grandmother fought a good fight and finally went home to be with the Lord.

A year after Bea died, we noticed a behavioral change in GeeGee. I knew his grandmother's death had a lot to do with it. GeeGee went into a state of depression—sleeping a lot, withdrawn and anxious. He still continued to go to work every night, and call me (as he still does today), but I knew something was wrong with my grandson. One night, GeeGee called his mother crying, saying "I need to talk to someone, I'm tired." Sandra had known something was wrong with GeeGee. They talked for a few minutes, then Sandra called me and we prayed for GeeGee. The next morning, GeeGee came home and Sandra took him to the hospital. GeeGee was ashamed to see a therapist, but I assured him that there was nothing wrong to seek help—that's why God put doctors here on earth. GeeGee then had counseling for a couple of months, and we started to notice an improvement. Rev. Dukes, our Pastor at the time who GeeGee loved dearly, also ministered and prayed with him.

GeeGee didn't particularly care for Christ Church once Rev. Dukes left; he would attend occasionally, but he didn't like the change within the church. I always told him, "God has been good to you, you need to be in somebody's church." He started to visit Greater New Birth Church, where my nephew Bishop R.J. Burt is the pastor. GeeGee loved the music and his preaching, but he knew the church was not for him. He went a few more times, then stopped. Bishop would call and ask me, "How is Jeleeo? I haven't seen him in awhile." I told him that GeeGee was alright, please keep him in your prayers.

GeeGee went through a period of time where he questioned his faith and beliefs. A lot of things were happening that he didn't understand. I always told him, "You have to know Jesus for yourself, quit listening to everybody." I knew that he had his own relationship with God, but people will trip you up a lot of times and tell you that you aren't "saved" and this and that. Only God knew his heart.

GeeGee visited Divine Word Lutheran Church, which he had been to a few times before. While at first he didn't care for that church, for some reason, he always came back. The people at Divine Word were, to GeeGee, the closest example of what Jesus meant. It was a "come as you are" church, non-judgmental and welcoming with open arms for anyone who walked through the doors. GeeGee didn't feel that at Christ Church or any other churches he visited. Rev. Sue Gaeta was the Pastor at Divine Word Lutheran Church. She was a young woman who was very passionate about the ministry, and reaching out to others. One Sunday after service, Rev. Gaeta stopped GeeGee to introduce herself; she had seen him there previously, but hadn't had a chance to talk with him. The two would then arrange a date for lunch. During their meal, GeeGee told Pastor Gaeta about himself and where he was in his life. Pastor Gaeta listened to him, and he was able to be honest about his spirituality and other issues that bothered him. She was also honest with him about her struggles, and what God did for her. After this meeting, GeeGee knew that he wanted to be a part of this church.

GeeGee was baptized at Divine Word Lutheran Church in 2005. The service was beautiful. GeeGee stood at the baptismal font, rededicating his life back to Christ. The Elders of the church stood around him as Pastor Gaeta sprinkled water on his head. Sandra cried next to me; as I looked around the church, people had tears

in their eyes and smiles on their faces. After welcoming GeeGee into their church, Pastor Gaeta preached a sermon about John the Baptist. After the service, we went into the fellowship hall for a lasagna dinner that GeeGee and Deborah, who was a member of the church, had cooked. GeeGee also had a cake made for the reception.

GeeGee's faith had renewed, and he was ready to work for the Lord again. He also started to sing again, leading the Psalms during worship, singing with the choir, and also with one of the choir member's band for Easter service. I never heard GeeGee sing at Divine Word, but Deborah always told me that the church loved to hear him sing. GeeGee would also serve Communion, and was a pulpit assistant to the Pastor. GeeGee later realized his calling to become an elder, which had previously been discerned to him during a leadership class. GeeGee always felt called to lead, Pastor Gaeta prayed with him about it. Soon the Elders asked him to join the Elder Board, and GeeGee accepted. Divine Word was very active within the community, especially Milwaukee Inner City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH). GeeGee and Pastor Gaeta went to the board meetings and he, along with the other Elders, would accompany Pastor Gaeta to Minnesota for the MICAH leadership conference in 2006. GeeGee was also a voting member and representative for Divine Word at the Lutheran State Senate Assembly that was held every year at the Country Springs Hotel in Waukesha, Wisconsin.

MICAH also became involved with the Frank Jude beating case. Every Sunday for one month, they traveled in groups around Milwaukee to sing and pray in front of police stations. Frank Jude's aunt, Delores Jude-Porter, and other Jude family members, would also accompany the group.

After being with Divine Word for a couple of years, GeeGee felt that God was moving him in another direction. As a young African American male, GeeGee was yearning for the Black church experience again. Divine Word was a predominantly white congregation, with the exception of a few African American members, and that affected GeeGee. In the beginning of his participation, it didn't bother him as much. As he grew in Christ, he was hungry for the worship experience, and Divine Word didn't have it for him. GeeGee desperately wanted to be a part of the Black

church again, but he tired of the "country clubs" within them, and he didn't want to be a part of that. That was the reason why he originally left and went to a church like Divine Word.

Also, due to being part of the Stewardship Committees at Divine Word, GeeGee felt overwhelmed and thought it best for him to resign. Plus, he still had his regular job, and activities within the church began to conflict with his work schedule. GeeGee submitted a letter of resignation to the Pastor and the church, which assured them that the church did nothing wrong. He simply felt that it was time to move on.

GeeGee didn't hurry to look for another church, he knew God would send him where he needed to be. One day, talking with a friend over lunch, GeeGee learned of a new church that had recently opened on Sherman Blvd., Grace United Church of Christ. Rev. Wanda Washington, assistant Pastor to the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, Jr. at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, came to Milwaukee to start the sister church. GeeGee's friend said that he was going to visit that Sunday and invited GeeGee along. GeeGee said he would visit someday.

GeeGee's friend called him back the following week to tell him about the church. He had joined. GeeGee was happy for him and anxious to see the church for himself, after hearing such great things about it. GeeGee was nervous when he walked in the lobby of the church that Sunday. The ushers stood at the doors of the sanctuary with their arms folded. The service had started and they were singing the Lord's Prayer. It was not the version he had heard growing up at Christ Church. The drums, organ, and tambourines could be heard as the congregation sang the Lord's Prayer. Everyone was holding hands around the sanctuary. Some people were caught up in the Spirit, waving hands and crying. The Holy Spirit comes within the church during praise and worship. People stand up, clapping and shouting. The Pastor tells people during praise and worship, "Those of you sitting down, God woke you up this morning, got you clothed and in your right mind, so you should have a reason to stand!" "Pastor don't play," members whisper to one another.

GeeGee loves his Pastor. She's a down-to-earth woman who doesn't take any mess, and she will state that from the pulpit. When the

Spirit hits the Pastor during a sermon, at times she takes off her earring and heels and walks up and down the aisle of the church. She gets caught up in the Word of God and the Holy Spirit takes over.

GeeGee joined the church the week after Barack Obama (a member of Trinity United Church, the sister church in Chicago) was elected President. The bulletins had his picture on the front with the words "YES WE CAN." GeeGee gave me a copy, and I still have it.

GeeGee has worked at the Best Western Hotel in Brookfield for seven years as a 3rd shift hotel supervisor. He also works part time on the weekends at the Ambassador Hotel in downtown Milwaukee. He has resided in West Allis for two years now. His mother and I were sad when he moved out on his own, but we respected his decision. He is a grown man and needs his space. GeeGee has always been a private person.

I tell everyone about GeeGee. He always tells me, "Don't brag about me, Grandma," in his sarcastic, funny voice. He's a good kid and our young people need to be told when they do something good with themselves. GeeGee has spoiled me, like all of my grandchildren. He will come by my house after work to take me to school. I know he will be tired, but he always tells me, "I'm fine, Grandma."

When GeeGee arrives at my house in the mornings to take me to school, he always has a bag of goodies with the things I like. It's bags from Walmart with Twizzlers, candy, juice boxes and my favorite, Jimmy Dean sausage. I always yell at him, "Boy, you need to save your money!" He laughs at me, then goes back out to his car to get more stuff.

A holiday would not be complete without GeeGee's macaroni and cheese, it is a must-have. I always tell Sandra or Barbara to hide some for me, because there wouldn't be any more left if I didn't ask. GeeGee picked up the recipe from his grandmother Bea. He had watched her as she made it over the years. GeeGee adds his own special touch, and each time he makes it, it gets better. GeeGee spends a lot of time reading. His favorite stores are Barnes and Noble bookstore, and Starbucks, where he drinks his Mocha Frappucinos. He has been going there since he was a teenager. Every time his

mother and I would call him on the weekend or on one of his days off, he would always whisper, and still does, "I'm in the bookstore, call you back later."

GeeGee plans on going back to school soon. He has been in the Hospitality industry for years and wants to venture out and try something new. He wants to study Massage Therapy or the funeral home industry. GeeGee wants to go into the seminary within the next couple of years, and hopefully write a book to tell the rest of his story, someday.

Sandra's daughter Jasmine, Gee Gee's sister, can be difficult sometimes, but every day, I pray that the Lord will show her favor. She loves computers, and she's finishing her education so she can be an ultrasound technician, which is important to her. She just had a baby girl, my great-granddaughter, Zemira. I hope and pray that everything goes well with her life and that she meets the goals that she has set for herself.

In addition, to my children and grandchildren, I have two Godchildren, Tammy and Brian. I am blessed to have all these precious people in my lives.

Today's Children

It is very hard for me right now. So many things are happening in this world today. I mean children are dying every day, in every way, by mother and father. With kin who keep them for the money but starve them, not feed or dress them, no love. What is the world coming to?

I pray for the children, especially when the mother is gone on home to be with the Lord.

I am not saying the children listen to everything their family tells them to do. What I am saying is treat your children the way you should, and when they get grown and you are old, they will never depart. They will remember what you tell them.

My Nephew and Niece

I have a nephew Ricky, now Bishop Burt, at Greater New Birth church over on Center Street, and a niece, his sister Karrie. I am their only living Aunt on their mother's side. Bishop Burt is a wonderful man of God; he found the Lord at an early age. He grew up in a Christian family, under the leadership of the late Bishop Reed at Jordon Baptist Church. At the early age of 10, Bishop Burt loved to play guitar. The family was in love with music.

Bishop Burt is a man of God and lives by the rules of the Lord. He and his brothers had a choir; his brother plays the organ. When my son Kenny passed, they all came to the funeral to sing a song and support me.

I love my nephew and his wife, the First Lady Patricia Burt. She can sing very well. I know that Bishop Burt is busy, so I don't like to bother him; I call his sister Karrie instead. Since Kenny passed, Bishop calls to see if I need anything and I tell him, "Only prayer." I've been sick recently; I needed to have a test on my stomach. The doctors inserted a scope down my throat to see what is wrong. Bishop Burt prayed for me, and the procedure went smoothly.

Karrie, who always thinks of me, is very special. Her husband and children, two boys and a girl, are awesome. I am so proud of these two. They run a successful business, yet they always have time for me.

Other Family to Me

My Goddaughter, Tammy

Long before Tammy was born, I was a close friend of her mother, Willymae who was my neighbor. We were like sisters. We belonged to the same church and everything. Every week four of us would have Bible class at my house with Miss Doan as our teacher. Willymae had eleven children and Tammy was number 10, born in 1974.

Tammy…how I love that girl! I was proud to be her Godmother. She was the joy of that family. She was so pretty. When she was about seven, she started singing in my Angel Choir. She was a good helper and she did everything I told her to do.

She was still very young when she got pregnant with her first child, Tamelle. She moved out of her family home to a house across the street. Her mother took care of the baby. The next year, she was pregnant again with her second child, Audrianna and moved back home. Then, the following year, she had Doony. Her mother continued to care for the children while Tammy lived her life.

One day, she decided that she wanted to go and get her tubes tied. I told her not to do that, but she went anyway. The first appointment was on a Monday, but then she realized that my daughter-in-law's memorial was that day and she didn't go. Also, her blood sugar was high that day. So she went the next day to a clinic, even though her blood sugar was four hundred. Ignoring that fact, her doctor put her to sleep anyway. She went into a coma and her heart stopped. She was in the hospital for a long time. They thought she was going to die. God was not ready for this sweet little girl, so she was on life support for some time. I never will figure out what happened that day. All I know is that she was very sick. Some doctors just don't care. No way in hell would I have let her have surgery if I had gone with her. After she was on life support, the doctor that put her to sleep would come to her room every day and stand at the foot of her bed and pray with his hands together. The doctors said she was not going to make it. God proved them wrong. After about two months in a coma, Tammy regained consciousness. She was very weak and didn't recognize too many people. She couldn't even remember what had happened.

Tammy survived and has some good days and some bad days. She had to keep that tracheotomy in her neck for about a year and go through more operations. By the grace of God she is doing better now. I just pray for her. She has three children who need her so much. This is the beginning of Tammy's story, not the end.

God still has work for her to do you know. I love the Lord. He is my savior and my God. Everywhere I go he is there with me and also with Tammy.

My Goddaughter had to learn how to walk and talk all over again, even how to eat and write. We prayed for Tammy every day and night for the Lord to keep her safe in his arms. From her diabetes, she developed a lot of problems with her eyesight. She had to undergo several eye surgeries to restore her vision. Now Tammy has kidney failure and she's on the dialysis machine three times a week.

This is Tammy's second chance at life. It's a miracle through God's grace and mercy that she is still here on earth. My Goddaughter is a living testimony of God's love. The race is not over, since now she needs a new kidney.

My daughter, Sandra, has been there through the thick and thin, regardless of some overwhelming situations she was enduring. I've been there, also, giving all the support and love I can give. Actually, the whole family has supported her.

December 2008; 5:15 a.m.

This Friday morning, Tammy went to sleep and didn't wake up. She was tired; now she is sleeping, no more sickness, no pain, no more crying and no more making friends with anyone. Her job is done here on earth. I pray for the children now, that they can get someplace to stay. They can't stay there alone, even though they were very sassy to their mom.

She told me how tired she was when I spoke with her last night. I told her I loved her very much and she said, "I always love you too, momma." That was the last thing I will remember her saying to me. I will always miss Tammy. I will remember the last time I saw her, at church before Christmas dinner. She looked just like an angel. I said to myself, "she is beautiful today," and I told her the Lord God is good to you, and she said, "I know."

Tammy was a very active member of Christ Church. She was an usher and she sang in the Angel Choir for many years. Later, she would become an assistant director of the Angel Choir. Tammy sang in the youth choir under the guidance of Sr. Walls. Anything you would ask Tammy to do, to help someone, she would do without HESITATION. Even when she was sick, she would continue to help at Church.

Tammy asked me to make her a ground beef casserole. I was going to surprise her with it on Sunday, have her and the kids come over after Church. Never put off today for tomorrow because you do not know what tomorrow is going to bring. Only God knows when we are going to leave this world.

Tammy, I love you so very much; this is what we wanted to say at the funeral. We know what you did in the world, and so did God. See you one day baby, God bless you.

Late January 2009:

It is very hard for me to sit here tonight. I have so many memories of my son and God-daughter. I know that I have to let go and let God take care of everything. It is so hard. With the Lord's help, I will be okay.

About Barbara Spears—A Close Friendship

Barbara came into my life many years ago when she moved into town and became a very close friend of my daughter, Barbara. When we met, we immediately liked each other and she asked if I could be her grandma. She called me "momma" ever after that.

Barbara was divorced and the mother of a little girl, who died early in her life, and of a son who was born here in Milwaukee. She was the kind of person who loved life and wanted the best of everything. She bought fine clothes and owned her own nice brick house in Washington Park. She was very beautiful and a talented woman. She soon joined us on Sundays when we went to worship at Christ Presbyterian Church. That's when I became more than her "grandma" to her; I became her Godmother.

Barbara was fortunate enough to find a good job at Delco Company in Oak Creek. She worked there for many years and eventually became a foreman. In addition to that she was in the army for a long time.

Life was not always easy for Barbara. One day she met a man at work whom she thought was the love of her life. She dreamed of the day when she would be married to him and they would have a wonderful life together. Gradually, we noticed that she was changing. She

began drinking and her attitude about things changed. She even stopped going to church on Sundays. The relationship continued for some time and then plans were made for their marriage. She got herself a beautiful wedding dress and invited her friends for the big occasion. It was at the church that she found out that the man she loved was backing out of the marriage. How sad for her, and yet, it might have been God's caring for her.

Another suffering for Barbara was her long-term bout with cancer. As she progressed with the disease she found driving more difficult, so she decided to move to Oak Creek to be closer to her work. This was easier in one way, but now her suffering came to her as a result of racism in Oak Creek. I'll never forget the night she called me and told me she had been stalked night and day by a man who lived about four blocks away. I was so worried about her, but all I could do was pray for her. He would get in her face and call her a "nigger," spit on her, and tell her that he was going to get her out of town any way that he could. He said that she didn't belong here. She called the police, but they wouldn't do anything to stop him. They were racist, also. What is this world coming to? I prayed that she and her son would be all right.

In early 2007, Barbara found out that her company was going to be sold and that she could lose her job in January, after working with Delco for so many years. She was hoping for just another year when she planned to retire. As it turned out, however, our dear Barbara became more ill with the cancer and passed away before the year was up. At the same time that this was happening, her dad and mother, who were divorced, became very ill. The doctors said that they couldn't do anything for her father. He moved back up here from Florida to die.

Even though I felt so broken up with the loss of someone so dear to me who had only 51 years of life, I was relieved because she was so sick that she couldn't do anything for herself. I knew she was ready because she prayed all the time and she had made her peace with the Lord.

I loved Barbara like my own daughter and worried a lot about her welfare. She was often in my prayers and I wanted so much to be

able to help her more than I could. At least I was able to stand by her as she told me her sad stories.

I am grateful that she has been a part of my life.

My Friend Miss J

I met Miss J at church when she began worshipping at Christ Presbyterian. She is like a daughter to me; her own mother lives in Florida. She helped me with the Angel Choir. Miss J has two sons in college, one in Texas and the other at UW-Milwaukee, and a husband, Rich, who is a good man. Both Rich and Miss J call me Momma.

One hot day, I told Rich that my air conditioner had broken. Within two hours, Rich and Miss J came over with a brand new, big air conditioner. Rich set it up and didn't accept a dime in payment from me.

The NAACP recently presented Miss J with an award. They invited my family and me as their guests for the dinner as they have in the past. When Miss J won the award, they asked her family to stand. My daughter Sandra, and grandchildren Jasmine and Timothy, were with me and we all stood. They also asked Timothy to sing, since they had heard of his talent, however, he politely declined so as not to interrupt or upstage anyone else on the program.

Veronica "Ronnie"

Veronica, Ronnie, is the mother of my grandchildren Timothy and Tameka. She's my daughter; I just didn't birth her into the world. She was there when I was sick; she was there when Kenny passed. She's so precious; she calls me several times a week. If she would ever do something I don't like, even though she never would, I would get on her, just like I do with my own kids. She has been married to a nice man, Melvin, for over twenty years. They have a granddaughter named Ashley Carter. Says Veronica, "I have been blessed to have two mothers. God always knows what's best for us. I thank the Lord for my mother. I love her so much. I can't thank the Lord enough for my mother."

My Neighborhood

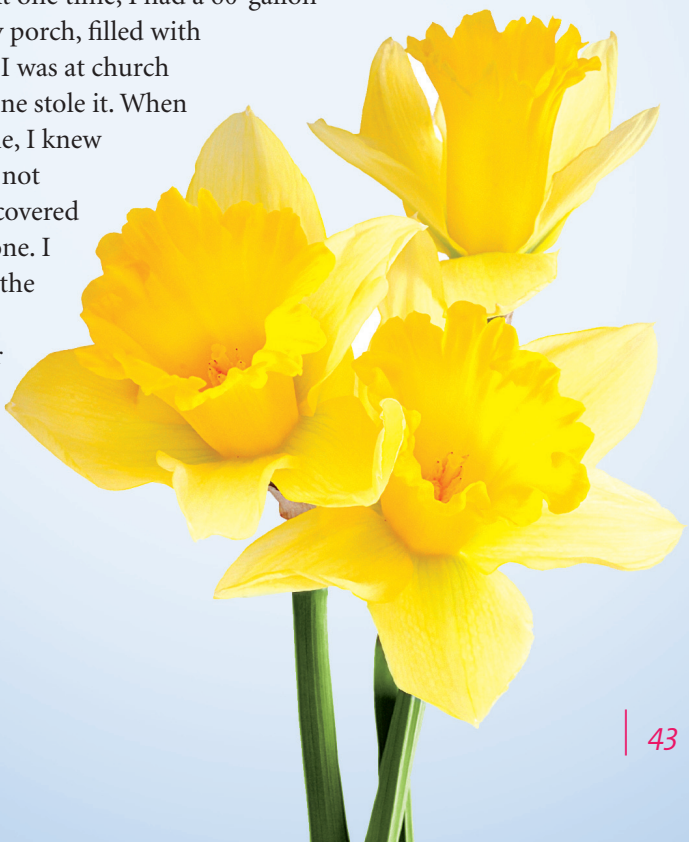
My Cross

I started planting flowers in my garden when I first moved into my house many years ago. I made a beautiful cross of flowers in my yard, and it remained for 15 years. One day, a gang member came over and asked me to dig it up, saying the cross represented another gang. I said no, I was very strong. I said, "I trust that you won't come and mess with me. I'm not a gang member. I've designed my yard the way I want it." And nothing ever happened.

Some of those "kids" still live in the neighborhood and watch over me. I would go to Stein's on the bus for garden supplies, and the young men would help me carry my flowers home from the bus stop.

Fish Tank

My house, on 30th & Vine Street, has never been broken into. At one time, I had a 60-gallon fish tank on my porch, filled with flowers. While I was at church one day, someone stole it. When I returned home, I knew something was not right, and I discovered the tank was gone. I looked all over the neighborhood for it, but never found it.



What Does Love Look Like?

Joy through loving and caring
What does love look like?

It has the hands to help others.
It has the feet to carry the poor and needy.
It has the ears to hear sighs and sorrows.
That is what love looks like.

Now it has a heart to feel the need for prayer
Everywhere, every day and every way,
That's what my Bible says.

Thank God for reminding me that
There is no joy for myself if I am always by myself.
Help me spread happiness by spreading love
Everywhere I go and to everyone I know.

Author—Mary Garth

This book is the author's own story based on personal memories and represents her understanding of life experiences. It is written in the author's own words with the help of a life story coach and is intended to instruct, enrich and inspire. Professional Dimensions and the story coaches assume no responsibility for the contents of the story or the accuracy of the facts and events discussed therein.