

THE AUTHORS SHOW – Autobiography/Biography/Memoir

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CHAPTER 1 HARD TIME

Summer 1970

The handcuffs locked around my wrists. I had been tried, convicted, and sentenced.

I was twenty-one-years old, as I stood shackled and ready to be transported to the Camp Lejeune Regional Brig of the US Marine Corps in Jacksonville, North Carolina.

This military prison was where I wanted to be. My entire focus for the prior three years had been directed toward getting me to this point. This place was the only one where I could end a bad beginning.

Silently, I searched for that quiet center of my being that gave me the strength to get this far. My heart pounded. My swirling emotions calmed when I focused my attention on my hands. The handcuffs threw me; they were not part of my anticipated scenario. After all, I had been back on the base and in uniform for several weeks. In a weird way, I had become a curiosity, a minor celebrity. I had a temporary job. I went to chow. I socialized with fellow marines.

My sorrow was deep. Not for myself, but for others for whom I caused pain and suffering through my actions. I asked myself, “My God, why hadn’t I grown up sooner?” The answer was unknowable to me at that time. It was what it was. (Excerpt from FINDING HEAVEN IN THE DARK)

FINDING HEAVEN IN THE DARK is my memoir of my early years as a Black youth, of the post World War II baby boom generation. Fatherless, surrounded by secrets and lies, I struggled with quiet rage and a confused life view that eventually led to my self-destructive rebellion and desertion from the U.S. Marine Corps in 1967!

My odyssey towards self-discovery took place during the tumultuous 1960's in America, when the entire country was being redefined by a cultural revolution among its' youth, a civil rights

revolution for equal rights for Black Americans, and the growing national nightmare of The Vietnam War.

With only the compelling story of my search for identity as a young man and a Black American, I wouldn't have considered writing a memoir. The oft used phrase that "everyone has a story to tell" might be true, but not all stories are worth sharing. I thought my story was different because of my search for a meaning to life and answers to human nature's puzzles. Even with that being said I still resisted writing about my journey because of the embarrassing elements that I had to reveal about myself. I had willingly shared my early life difficulties with others over the years, but exposing myself to the public at large seemed frightening. I always did believe that my story could have tremendous value for the right person so I did begin the arduous process of putting pen to paper during a month long visit to Florida in the Winter of 2006.

The actual writing was cathartic as it flowed from my fertile memory. I wrote in a linear style that started with my early years. As a youth who loved reading and was a better than average speller I was pleased with my early efforts. Then I packed everything away until the same time the next year! Over the years, as an actual manuscript began to take shape, I sought professional guidance and attended a 3 hour writing course by a traveling author and her husband. Her most treasured advice to the class I felt was to avoid rereading the previous days writing. She encouraged us to write the entire story before going back to reread and make changes. Her other advice was to turn my memoir into a novel because it would be easier to market. I knew she was correct, but after some hesitation I was committed to writing a memoir.

In FINDING HEAVEN IN THE DARK I wrestle with the mystery of my unwed birth in 1949. The aftermath of the decision by my Mother and Grandmother to allow me to grow up without any knowledge of my birth circumstances or birth father effected my troubled teen years profoundly. After a rebellious enlistment in the Marine Corps I reverted to a self-defeating persona and tried to run away from all my early life failures and disappointments by deserting. My cross country hitchhiking trek as a 17 year old fugitive is the backdrop to part one of my story entitled DARK JOURNEY.

Part two is entitled BRIGHT PASSAGE and is meant to chronicle my eventual spiritual encounters with myself and the conflicting internal forces that had forced my life to a painful standstill. At a skid row rescue mission in Los Angeles I had run out of places to run. My searching attitude began to guide me into a path of self awareness after embracing traditional Christianity.

A Los Angeles Firebrand and spiritual talk show pioneer ROY MASTERS and his FOUNDATION OF HUMAN UNDERSTANDING totally changed my trajectory in life! Roy Masters taught a Judeo-Christian Meditation that he claimed taught patience, self-awareness, and a genuine connection with God. Be Still and Know was the intriguing concept that joined the Bible and the Meditation in Roy's book HOW YOUR MIND CAN KEEP YOU WELL. I bought it then and have never stopped loving or living the wonderful understanding it has brought into my life! That was the motivating factor behind turning my manuscript into a self-published memoir.

After several rewrites to shorten and strengthen my narrative I evaluated 3 print-on-demand publishing houses and I chose DOG EAR PUBLISHING of Indianapolis. From that point the journey has been incredible. Many difficulties had to be overcome as the copy editor would submit correction and suggestions to me via the internet. It just happened that my wife Susan and I were working at a campground on Silver Lake in western Michigan that entire Summer of 2016, and the WiFi service was weak and unpredictable. Other adventures and health issues made the final publication date and the eventual arrival of the first copies of the book a momentous occasion.

After a prayer of thanks I opened the box from Dog Ear publishing and gently held a copy of the book in my hands. Susan read the book cover to cover and praised it and me. She had shared the journey with me from a finished manuscript to a printed memoir with an eye catching cover, intriguing title, and a compelling story! Our joy was validated during the following months and the latest honor came with the book being a double winner of the President's Silver Medal Award given by the FLORIDA AUTHORS AND PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION on August 5th 2017!