

The Darkest Hour

by **Angela Buck**

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven. Matthew 18:10

The darkest hour is just before the dawn. It was 4.00 A.M. All the horrible things I had experienced the last few months pounded me like a heavy hammer. How the devil tormented me, "See, I told you," he said, "you are not called to preach".

Those words pierced my whole being and never was I more sure than now, that I was not called to preach, or do anything else for God.

As the bus pulled out of the depot for home, I closed my eyes, and tried to shut out Satan's tormenting words, but couldn't. "You'll never do anything for God. You're a deluded woman". I wanted to stop my ears as he flooded my mind with such thoughts.

Believing those awful words, I literally shook with cold chills. All the things that were said about me at my home church came back to haunt me too,

and I couldn't get any relief from the torment. Again, I thought how nice it would be to see an angel. Such thinking seemed foolish, but I was glad for any pleasant thoughts at this moment, no matter how ridiculous they seemed.

Suddenly the bus stopped in the middle of nowhere. It was still dark out as I looked through the window at the lonely stretch of highway. "That's odd," I thought. All the times I'd ridden on a bus before, it had never stopped except at designated places. Straining to see out the window, I could see a peculiar looking man standing there.

Then a strange and exciting feeling came over me as the bus driver opened the door and He climbed the steps. As He walked down the aisle toward me, God's Presence drew very near. Then He sat down directly across the from me and one seat ahead of me. I couldn't keep from staring at Him. His clothes were drab and worn but appeared to be immaculately clean and the Presence of God was so powerfully strong!

"Could this be an angel?" I thought, "It couldn't be." At that moment I felt as if something wonderful was about to happen. But the devil's presence was strong too.

"Some angel," I heard him say, "Just a halfwit that can't drive a car."

Then he, raised his hand and shaking his finger, seemingly toward the seat in front of him, Said sharply and with authority, "Satan, the Lord

rebuke thee."

Soon the bus stopped again in the middle of nowhere and he stood up as if to get off. Everyone else on the bus appeared to be either asleep or unaware of the whole thing. But, at that moment, I felt a hand at the base of my neck, forcing my head up and suddenly, I was looking into a face that shined brighter than the noon day sun. A face completely void of lines and wrinkles that so characterize the faces of men, as the result of burdens, worries and hardships of life here on earth.

It was impossible to tell His age. There was not even a sign of aging. For aging came into this world when Adam sinned and there is no sin in heaven. His face was all glory and joy, and as I fixed my eyes upon that face, that same joy seemed to penetrate into my very being like liquid fire, burning away all sadness and gloom.

Then, he smiled! Oh for just one glimpse of such a smile from heaven. Truly eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it even began to enter into our earthly hearts all that God has prepared for us in heaven.

No words can describe that smile for it came from the very throne room of glory. And the expression oh his face clearly said without any words, "Everything is going to be alright, I am going to bless you." Then he walked toward the front of the bus, and when the driver opened the door he seemed to fade away, and the bus started up again as

if the whole thing never happened. But when God says He's going to bless you, dear reader, He's going to bless you, and nothing this side of Heavens glory can stop it!

As daylight approached, and with the glory of that wonderful experience still lingering, my mind started to trace back over the years to the beginning, when Gods hand first touched me.

(1947, Eugene, Oregon two years old)

How can you understand someone except you've walked in their shoes? Can you understand a timid, scared two year old, hugging a dirty blanket and peering out from under an old bed into a cramped room? I could hear the crackling of smoking kindling in a wood stove only six feet from where I lay. Pieces of wood shavings mixed with dirt and dust covered the torn linoleum. My baby brother Ben, slept within arms length of me on a soiled blanket, his scrawny eleven month old body was deathly still.

Voices drifted from the small cluttered kitchen, then moved slowly toward me. A light flickered and I shuddered. Fearing everything, I quickly ducked back under the security of the bed.

"If that sh__ (referring to me) and that bast__ (referring to Ben) mess with my things again, I'll ..," Hiiee slammed her purse on the table and scowled. "I can't keep anything around those

brats," she said, glancing around to see if we were within slapping range.

Even though sound asleep Ben seemed to sense what was coming, and he suddenly awoke and crawled into the corner behind mothers bed.

Then another boy, who from all appearance was from a complete opposite scene, came out of Hiee's room wearing crispy new clothes from Sears and Roebuck. Though only a year and half older than me, he seemed much taller as he stood there clutching a shiny red truck. Glancing over at him, Hiee's expression quickly softened. The cruel hatred she had for Ben and me, wasn't there for my older half brother.

She despised my father and seemed to enjoy the fact that Gene's father was some man in an army uniform. Although she wasn't sure which one, she spun her own stories, making him out to be a hero and horribly degrading Ben and I.

Completely unaware of the cruel sufferings of his younger siblings, Gene continued to stand there, carefully examining his truck with a happy look on his face. He was distant and untouchable and I dare not get too close, lest I feel the cruel sting of Hiee's heavy hand come down on my head or back.

(1948, three years old)

It was late morning, and steady rain pattered against the dirty window sills as I watched mother

sitting at the table splashing another coat of bright red to her manicured hands. I was fascinated with her bleached hair that seemed to glitter so bright in spite of the dimly lit kitchen.

I was only three but something deep inside me silently cried, "Do you love me, mommy?"

But staring out the small window, outlined with dirt stained worn wood, mother's thoughts were far away from that cramped four room house that was so void of happiness and peace.

I too strained to see out, and it seemed a ray of light peeked out of the darkened sky and squeezed past the dusty window, beaming down on me. With child like hope I reached out my hand in vain to catch some of it.

Just then Ben, who was now two, began to cry. He wasn't yet old enough to know what the consequences would be, and without warning Hiiee reached over and slapped him. I winced at the sound of her hand on his head and tried to stay hid behind the stove. Instantly Ben began to scream loudly. I pleadingly glanced over at mother but she went right on with her finger nails, unaware of it all.

Shadows were beginning to form in the late afternoon and my stomach told me I was hungry, but daring not to utter a word, I kept quiet. A big, angry hand, often laying blows to my head and back had taught me never to plead with my mouth, but my eyes would silently plead as do the eyes of so many hurting children who live in a harsh, cold world

where people, preoccupied with their own burdens, will not hear.

The world was my enemy, and I believed it to be so, for I was told repeatedly that it was. I could hear the repetitions of Grandma Hiiee, "Your just no good, a good for nothing wretch." But the God who created me, no matter what anyone else thought of me, loved me as much as He loved the most beautiful child ever born.

Dirt and soot clogged my mouth and nose as I huddled under the bed as far against the wall as I could. I had to go to the bathroom but was too scared to come out. Looking up at broken springs in the bottom of the bed, I was fully aware that this was my only refuge. This, and withdrawing into my own mind. The latter becoming so much a part of me that for years to come, I would greatly struggle to overcome it.

Finally I couldn't hold it anymore and soon a chill shook my body as I lay on the cold floor in wet clothes. But no one would care as long as I stayed out of the way. A long time seemed to pass and, though hungry, damp and cold, I fell into a fitful sleep.

I was crying uncontrollably and the more I cried, the more Hiiee hit me. After hitting me again and again I fell to the floor. Stumbling over trash on the floor, she looked at Ben and swore, "D___ you." His little body shook with fear as she raised her hand

to hit him, and he scrambled as fast as he could to the corner behind the stove.

Her frustration mounted as she again turned toward me, and soon a blow to the back of my head numbed me. It appeared to be from a distance now that I watched her face, twisted and distorted come at me again. I could sense the hate, but how could I possibly understand it? Can a child understand when adults do not even understand why they hate?

Hearing a knock at the door, and fearing the visitor would hear my screams, Hiiee grabbed my neck with one hand and with the other covered my mouth and nose while mother stood at the door talking with a man. Time stood still at that moment! My chest felt like it was caving in and I could no longer breathe as mother continued talking with him. She didn't hate me, she just seemed to live in her own world.

"Please help me," my mind cried out as the room blackened and I became limp. Then suddenly, a strong unseen Hand took hold of the door, and quickly closed it, causing Hiiee to release her hold on my mouth. Air rapidly filled my lungs again. But, it would be weeks before I could move my jaw without much pain and even today, I am left with a reminder.

"Don't let them in," Grandma Hiiee shouted in a fearful voice as mother peeked out the door at two friendly looking ladies. "They're holy rollers. Once you let them in, you can never get rid of them. They

just go on and on about their religion and hell." "Oh, horses a__ anyway," she added, and then the door shut as if to shut out God.

Truly that day, even as the famous painting portrays Jesus knocking at a wooden door in loving hope that someone inside will open, the Savior stood knocking at our door. He wanted so much to come in and "set at liberty them that are bruised, and preach deliverance to the captives and to heal the broken in heart." But, His Spirit is gentle. He will not force His way into an unwilling heart.

"Come back," a soul cried in the distance, but it was too late, I could hear their feet on the gravel road as they slowly trod away and up to the main street never to return again.

"Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not." Matthew 23:37. These words Jesus so cried out, weeping with deep sorrow as He looked down upon Jerusalem from the mount of olives.

(1950, five years old)

I'll never forget the day Hiiee came home from my great gramma Mary's funeral. It seemed I had waited all winter for it to snow and that day big flakes fell on dirty sidewalks where children played, pounding each other with snowballs. I stood at the window, with my face pressed firmly against the glass, watching with envy.

"Hiiee will be home soon," mother said, putting on more lipstick and smacking her lips in the mirror. She was restless, desperately reaching in vain to fill the unhappy void, and was anxious to go again where bright lights and men were.

Trembling when I heard the key turn in the lock, I stumbled backwards, tripping over the wood box and bumping my arm on the hot stove. I winced in pain but kept quiet as I saw Hiee opening the door. Swearing and muttering under her breath she seemed to be the same old Hiee.

But, then I saw big haunting eyes, red and swollen, staring back at me. Warily she took a seat at the table, and slowly looked at mother.

"Do you think Grandma Mary went to heaven?" she then asked with teary eyes.

The longest silence followed. Finally, mother, with her voice quivering answered with a feeble, "Yes." Then, hesitating, as if a door to her heart opened for a brief moment, and closed again, she added, "Yes of course!" and abruptly got up and walked away.

Soon, all was forgotten. But, I could not forget. It was the first time I'd heard the word "heaven" and it rang deep in my soul. This house was all I'd ever known before. How could I possibly even imagine a place filled with unspeakable beauty that I'd never ever seen? Yet a child can often see when adults do not.

Closing my eyes I could clearly see a lush

green meadow filled with big yellow daffodils. The sun shone very bright but didn't hurt my eyes. Three full rainbows with their seven distinct colors shone over the landscape. For a brief moment I was neither hungry nor thirsty and felt overwhelmingly happy and peaceful, for I was someplace else, far away from this house of sorrow and sadness.

Then a gentle loving Voice said to me, "Some day I will take you to this place and you will never know sorrow again."

(1956, Eugene, Oregon eleven years old)

Sometimes, the tunnels God allows us to go through get very long and dark before we see any light at the end. It was my eleventh birthday and when the phone rang that morning, I just knew it was my daddy wanting to see me again.

"He wants to pick you up tonight," mother said indifferently, as she hung up the phone and continued to put rollers in her bleached yellow hair. Then stopping, she studied every detail in the mirror, checking to see if the curls were even. Later she left with her boyfriend, engrossed in her own plans.

Hiiee had already gone to work at the little cafe about a mile away and as usual I was alone again. Forcing myself to put on my best dress, though soiled but not as shabby as the others, I sat down on the couch and waited.

Except for the crackling of the wood stove,

the house was quiet. The sun was starting to go down and as shadows darkened objects, the much too familiar sense of deep loneliness and depression hovered over me like a heavy cloud, as if trying to swallow me up.

Finally, the sound of wheels grinding on the gravel road broke the silence and I could hear daddy's car come to a sudden halt in the driveway. Defeated, I yanked my coat from a nail in the wall, and slowly went out to meet him.

The thick smell of alcohol hit me in the face as I opened the car door. "How're you doing, kid?," he said with slurred speech.

Wiping his sweaty palms on his pants leg, he reached over and patted my hand. Cringing in disgust, I wanted to draw back but couldn't. "Oh come on," he whined, "I'm your daddy."

It was all too easy for me to withdraw into my own world and soon I was imagining that I was a beautiful princess riding a white horse in a land far away.

After driving for some time, drinking and talking wild, he stopped at a light and reached for me. "Stop it, daddy, I'm not your girlfriend," I said as I pushed him away.

But I wasn't surprised. It was the same old thing. Whenever he picked me up, and after drinking for a while, he would mistake me for his girlfriend. "No daddy," I said, inching closer to the door.

Suddenly he swerved to miss a parked car,

and cursed me, adding, "I'm a German and will kill you." Then after jabbering something unintelligible that was supposed to sound as if he was speaking German, he said, "I'm an Indian," and babbled more words. Finally ending with his favorite saying, he loudly proclaimed, "The big bird will never stop flying." I shook with fear, even though somewhat hardened to this repeated experience.

Finally spilling his cup of beer mixed with whiskey on his pants leg, he stomped on the brake, and the car jerked to a stop. "Get out!" he yelled.

I peered helplessly into the unfamiliar neighborhood as he cursed at me and yelled again, "Out!" Finally having no choice, I jumped out, and without glancing at me again, he sped off.

Shivering in the night air, and pulling my thin coat around me, I tried to shrug off the hurt and shame. As I watched headlights approach and then fade into the night, I knew he wouldn't be back.

The smell of hot cooked food drew my attention to the house behind me. Turning my head I could see through a big picture window, a family preparing to eat supper. Laughter riveted through the glass as they sat down to a long table spread with a full course meal. Wood blazed in a stone fireplace in the background, and for a long torturous moment I stared into the warmth of those flames. (Can you possibly make known such a scene to one who has never known it?) My mouth watered as I watched them eat, and a deep sense of loneliness came over

me as I stood there, alone in the dark.

"I don't belong in a family like that," I thought, "no one wants me."

No one wanted me. I was just a piece of dirty trash, to be trampled on by others, and especially by men. Reluctantly I turned my eyes away and trudged the long walk home, faintly remembering that I had turned eleven that day.

The following year did not go by quickly nor without sadness. Can you understand an eleven year old on her way to school trying desperately to hide beneath her torn, smelly clothes? Or understand the pain as her peers push past her, grabbing, pulling, mocking? Children can be very cruel.

But that year, the faithful Shepherd who loves us all the same, came knocking at our house again. "Would you like to come to church this Sunday?" the elderly neighbor lady asked mother as she stood at the door.

"No," mother replied, indifferent, as if her thoughts were some place else. But then pointing to me as I stood in the corner with my hands clenched behind my back and staring at the dirty ceiling, lost in my own imaginary world again, she said, "But she can go."

As Mrs. Hemmerly began to walk toward me, a gentle unseen Hand touched me and I was drawn back into reality. But the real world often hurts, and her clean neat appearance made me all too aware of

who I was. Glancing down at my own skirt, soiled and worn, I felt humiliated, and my face turned red as I tried to loosen my too tight sweater which clung to an over developed chest. Being all too aware that this hovel of a house was the only place where I fit in, I didn't want to go anywhere, ever!

But God ordained it, and with worn unsightly clothes, hair chopped off uneven and a big cold sore protruding from the corner of my mouth, I sat in a little church the following Sunday. I don't know what others in that church thought of me but for the second time, His Presence came near to me. I did not know Him, but He knew me, and every thing about me, yet He loved me still. And I was powerfully drawn to that wonderful love.

The Holy Spirit was secretly at work, and for the next few weeks I waited each Sunday in anticipation for Mrs. Hemerly. The drive to church seemed so short as she, with her face raptured in joy, told of the many wonderful things Jesus had done. Yet, each Sunday left me with a feeling of emptiness and despair. One day, she said sadly, "I can't take you home anymore, but you can go with them," pointing to some people in the church I didn't know at all.

I felt like an outsider as I rode in the back seat of a new station wagon with a strange family. The topic of their discussion was always where they would eat their Sunday dinner while my stomach growled with hunger. Then almost invariably their

little girl, with her pretty dress and soft curls would proudly display some coins hid beneath her frilly pockets and declare, "I'm gonna buy me an ice cream sunday with a cherry on top!" It hurt to look at her new dress and I would quickly look away.

The ride was long and torturous and I always pretended to be looking out the window at something else while trying to hide the awful hurt inside me. Finally they would say their hollow goodbyes, and leave me staring as they drove off.

A depression hovered over that cold, empty house on sundays more than any other day and followed me into every room. Mother was gone as usual and Grandma Hiiee was at the cafe. Gloom filled the kitchen as I studied the dirty dishes, piled in the sink, and the half empty cans left forgotten on the counters.

Looking for something to eat, I opened the refrigerator door, but bits of stale leftovers sickened me. Loneliness and insecurity mocked me as I sat down on a drab soiled couch and stared out the window at the gravel road that lead to our house.

But, one Sunday was different. Everyone was going to the altar. And though I understood very little I could feel Some ones gentle hand as He took hold of mine and led me to the front of the church where others were praying. As I was kneeling there, His light beamed down on me, and flooded me with joy unspeakable.

Oh glorious day it was! Darkness and gloom

fled away, as He came into my soul and I was overwhelmed with happiness. Then He saturated me with His great love, and a beautiful cloud surrounded me and angels with long shiny gowns were all around me, looking at me lovingly. The attention I received from them felt so good, being long depraved, and deep within, my spirit begged hard to stay there forever!

Suddenly, a man nudged me and I opened my eyes and looked around. Everyone had already left the altar. Half in a daze, with the glory of God still upon me, I slowly got up and was led back to my seat.

No day was more dark and dismal than that afternoon when they dropped me off. As I trudged toward that empty house there was a steady, dripping rain that soaked my worn out shoes, making my feet wet and uncomfortable. Nothing had changed. I had no reason to be happy while stepping over the garbage strewn across our muddy yard. But, for a reason I couldn't explain, I was bubbling over with happiness and joy unspeakable.

"Wake up," I screamed, shaking my baby brother. He wouldn't wake up so I ran to my older brother. "Wake up. We're dying, we're all dying."

"Get away," he said, "I'm not interested."

I had never heard the word leprosy before, nor did I know the spiritual meaning, but our bodies seemed to be half eaten away and covered with

terrible sores.

Frantically I ran to mother and pulled at her sleeve, trying to find her hand. But it wasn't there. I screamed again, "Wake up, mother wake up!"

"Go back to bed," she muttered, still asleep, "I don't care."

Panicking, I ran throughout the house crying, and screaming "Help me, we're all dying."

Then a Voice said, "If you can find the door, you can get out and be saved."

Banging on the walls, I tried desperately to find the door. But, there seemed to be no door. Once again, I ran to mother and pleaded with her to wake up. A Voice said again, "Find the door."

Sobbing and desperate, I flung myself at the walls again until finally a narrow door appeared. Quickly, I squeezed through and the door closed again, shutting my family in a house full of death.

I awoke. It was just a dream, or was it?

Sometimes it gets darker and darker before the light shines again. Mrs. Hemerly died and after three weeks nobody from the church came to pick me up anymore. Surrounded by everything but God, I soon forgot my wonderful experience.

My twelfth birthday had passed and three safety pins held my worn out bra together. Watching mother go out to eat with her boy friends and watching her come back with something nice made me aware that I too could get something nice if I

knew what to do.

One day not long after that I looked up into the slobbery face of a middle aged man. Harsh lines showed through my heavily painted face and being well developed, he had no idea I was only twelve.

I tried hard to push him away as he came at me, pressing his wet lips that smelled of alcohol and sweat, against my face. Angry that I was trying to hinder him and breathing hard, he overpowered me.

Filled with shame, and with what innocence I had left now gone, I reached for the bottle of vodka on the table and drank until it deadened all sense of feeling. When I awoke, he was gone and I was alone in the house. Fumbling in my purse for my comb and fighting back tears, I stumbled to a mirror.

"You are a wretched b____," I said to the face in the mirror that stared back at me, haunting me with a pain that only hard liquor could numb. And with the effects of the alcohol wearing off, I couldn't bear it, and somehow I had to get another drink.

"I'll do anything for a drink," I thought as I glanced around searching desperately for another bottle. But seeing there wasn't any, I left that house, but not the memory, and walking toward the main street, I held my head down in shame.

It was getting late but I knew I couldn't go home. The welfare office had already contacted mother twice concerning me. "If you don't make her go to school," they said, "We'll place her in a home

that will."

Frustrated, for fear of losing her ADC check, she slammed the phone down. Glancing at me with a threatening look she said, "Do you think I care?"

Often she would be gone somewhere with a boyfriend when I came home anyway. And the house would be locked up, forcing me to find shelter elsewhere. And so, as the sun began to set and businessmen, with hands tucked in their overcoats, hurried past me for home, I began to play out in my mind where I might spend the night.

(1960 Eugene, Oregon two years later)

Two years of street life, pleasing men just for a bottle and a place to sleep, will age and harden any young girl. And as I sat in a cheap tavern, my face told of a much older girl and I wasn't questioned about my age even though I was only fifteen. Soon it would be dark outside and I was anxious for a place to spend the night and, as always, another bottle to tide me over 'til morning.

Eyeing an older man I quickly moved over closer to him. Older men became an easy target as long as I was willing to satisfy their desires. He offered me a drink and I hastily spoke up, "Whiskey please." But while I tipped the glass to my mouth, he left without me.

It was close to midnight and the bartender dimmed the lights and began settling up the

numerous tabs for the day. "One last drink," I thought downing the last drop and reluctantly I went out into the dark street. With my hair messed and my clothes smelly, I stumbled over to a well dressed man in a suit. "Get away, you slut," he muttered.

I felt dirty. It hurt because deep inside I didn't want to be this way, but I was well accustomed to rejection, and as men used me, I would learn to use them too. With bitter hatred, I swore as I spit at him, cursing, "Maybe you will all die."

Staggering over to the edge of an alley I crawled into a corner by a trash can and curled up. The alcohol did its job well and feeling no pain I fell asleep.

(1961, Stockton, California sixteen years old)

Clutching a half empty pint of vodka, I stumbled on the sidewalk, while people glanced at me as they hurriedly went on. Faces, cold and indifferent, lost in their own world, they never really saw me.

And I was lost in my own world too! Hugging my bottle like a child would his teddy bear I couldn't face the real world with a sober mind, it was too harsh and cruel. Grown people seemed the same as children who mocked me as a child with their cruel words and laughter. "Does anyone care?," the unwanted souls of the street cry out. "No one," I silently echoed back.

Another year had passed, and my head pounded as I stood on a street corner. By now I was well acquainted with a hangover headache. It was late morning in Stockton, California, but the sun shone too harshly as a neatly dressed lady smiled and said, "Would you like to come in?"

"Me? With my filthy clothes and unkempt hair?" I replied.

Straining my eyes, I peered into the door of a tiny storefront church. Though half in a daze, I truly thirsted for something, and went inside. But, then a man in a nice new suit met me and sneered, "Put out that cigarette," his voice, strict and uncaring. "And, get rid of that bottle," he said coldly.

"A bruised reed shall He (Jesus) not break," Matthew 12:20. How carefully and with what loving forethought Jesus would speak to the woman taken in adultery, and to the Samaritan woman at the well who'd had five husbands, and many others who were bruised and bent. His choice words of comfort and hope would lift them up again. But man would handle the delicate and wounded strand too harshly and break it in two.

I felt like a piece of dirt, and because for a short moment I dared to open my heart a little, the rejection hurt deep. In my mind, I could hear the children mocking me again, and I quickly turned away. Stepping back out onto the sidewalk I gulped down a big swallow of whiskey, taking time to feel it burn as it went down, but it couldn't burn out the

pain, nothing could.

Long shadows were forming on the side walk and street lights were turning on when I dropped the empty bottle on the sidewalk. I didn't care where I slept, the alley, the sidewalk, or wherever, but I couldn't make it through the night without another bottle.

Fluffing up my hair and leaning up against the side of a building, I watched for a man. Any man, as long as he had enough money to buy me a bottle. Numb to feelings except what alcohol did for me, I felt no shame nor pleasure as I made the usual gestures to men who passed by me.

I would do anything for a bottle, and twenty minutes later, with a middle aged man, I went into a musty motel room. Immediately, the man dropped his pants and went in the bathroom. Seeing my opportunity I grabbed them and went for his wallet, and pulling out a twenty dollar bill, I quickly headed for the door.

As I turned the knob, he grabbed me from behind and began hitting and cursing me until I fell to the floor. Then he did what he wanted as I lay there helpless. Finally, he got dressed and left.

Shaking and bruised I managed to pull myself onto the bed. As I lay there, the world got bigger and bigger, and I became smaller and smaller until it seemed I was just a tiny dot, lost and forgotten in the universe. I tried to hide within myself by curling up into a ball, like a sow bug when it has been

disturbed, but it wouldn't work. Finally I fell into a fitful sleep.

When I awoke, it was still dark out and I reached up and turned on the light, but the darkness wouldn't go away. I needed a light much greater than a light bulb could give, yet I knew not where to find it. But, that Everlasting Light knew where I was and He loved me still.

When Jesus walked by, the people which sat in darkness saw a great light. Matthew 4:16.

But "much water had passed under the bridge", since that glorious Sunday when as an innocent and tender hearted eleven year old, Jesus flooded my soul with His great love.

(January 1964, Reno, Nev. eighteen years old)

A steel door slammed shut locking me in a padded cell again. All too aware that I would face the morning cold sober, I pounded on the door until my hands bled, but no one heard me. No one that is, but God. For even though the light that shone in my soul years before at that altar had long since gone out, He was even here in this cold dark cell.

When they led me the next day before a board of men and women, my mind would not function. "What is your name?" a voice asked.

Cold sober and shaking badly, voices blurred together and became like spiders climbing the walls, coming at me. Their legs grew more faces and they

were all hideously laughing at me. "Stop it!" I shouted, covering my ears, "Stop it!" But, they would not. Screaming, and begging them to stop, I fell into a heap on the floor.

Two days later sitting in the back seat of a state car with my hands cuffed behind me, I couldn't fully comprehend that I was on my way to the State Mental Hospital in Sparks, Nevada. The hospital was only twenty miles from where the Police had often picked me up as I staggered drunkenly on the streets of Reno. Yet it was an eternity for an eighteen year old who had reached the bottom and beyond. A horrible fear that this was the end of the line forever came over me. Yet Jesus had His wonderful hand upon me and nothing is beyond hope with Him.

It was the sixteenth of January, and Christmas decorations still hung in the streets. Outside the car window, fresh snow fell, partially covering dirty slush on the sidewalk. Passing by a store, a stuffed Santa Claus still sat in the window, as if mocking children whom he did not visit. It was a lingering reminder of a very happy time for some and a cruel and deeply sad time for others.

But Christmas had passed, and the dark month of January left many even more depressed. And spring could not come without finding some in a cold grave, their spirits too crushed to live as the long loneliness of winter, adding to their many disappointments of the holidays, took its toll on

their weak spirits.

(Oh God, come near and let your saving grace be known to them. Father of the fatherless, husband to the widows, put your loving arms around them and heal their hurts and stay their tears)

Corrie Ten Boome, after surviving a terrible concentration camp, said, "There is no prison so strong that God is not stronger and no hate so deep that God is not deeper still."

The driver of the car looked back at me with pity as we neared the opening to several long, rundown, faded white buildings that looked like death itself. But, what could she possibly know of my pain? After her days work was over, she would go home to a nice home and family surrounded by warmth and laughter. We were in two different worlds. And no one could be in my world but me.

No amount of words can tell of the overpowering feeling of finality and hopelessness as a heavy steel door clanged shut, leaving me alone in a small, dark cell. I sobbed hysterically, and cried over and over, "I'm not crazy, I'm not crazy."

Finally, after a long time, I could cry no more and submitting to the surrounding darkness as it reached out and engulfed me, I slumped to the floor in a lifeless stupor. I was drowning beneath deep waters and who would help me? Reality faded into the background as my mind drew inward and formed its own shell of protection from the horrors of reality.

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