

FORGIVE

*One man's story of being molested
and God's redemption*



JAMES DIVINE

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PREFACE

My hope is that this book will lead you on a path to forgiveness, both for your own soul through Jesus Christ and forgiveness for what may have happened to you. Although being molested and having an abusive father were major events in my life, they don't define who I am; they were simply things that happened to me. My identity comes from my relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

You may notice that this book is not always chronological. I have tried to group major events in my life under the same chapter heading, so you will sometimes notice the timeline jumps around a little. Some of us are more wired this way. Even as I look back on my life, I tend to group things similarly to my chapter headings.

May this book be a blessing to you on this journey we call life.

James Divine

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Thanks to my mom, for being faithful to the Lord despite the hardships she went through. Thanks to my loving wife, who stuck with me even when I didn't always act like how a Christian should. Special thanks to my four beautiful kids. You taught me what it was like to know God as "Daddy." Thanks to my sister Lillian Divine; we went through a lot together. You are not only sister, but friend too. Special thanks to the following people, who mentored me or showed me great kindness: My Kindergarten teachers, my Sunday School teacher in Italy, Mr. Chandler, Mr. and Mrs. Huling, Mr. and Mrs. Fair, my elementary music teacher at Titus school, Mr. Derrio, Dr. Steve Ambrose, Dave and Sharon Burdine, Dr. Bob Cook, Paul Ferrin, Pastor Jim Hagan, Dr. Ed Cannava, Ken Ovrebo, Dr. James South, Dr. Keith Talley, Dr. Robert Chambers, Dr. Dennis Widen, Dr. Jeff Ames, Dr. Kirk Wilcox, My favorite Aunt Rosy Crawford (Farina), my in-laws Skip and Marilyn Eliason (Mom and Dad to me), Uncle George and Aunt Mary Yingling, Grandma Thomas (who adopted me and my sister as grandkids when she found out we had no living grandparents), John and Chris Yingling, Jim Auberg, Mike Palmer and many more who I can't even begin to name who helped me become the musician and man I am today! God bless you all.

CHAPTER 1 JAMES DIVINE ARRIVES

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

- Psalm 139:13-14 New International Version (NIV)

“Intellectual growth should commence at birth and cease only at death.”

-Albert Einstein



This is me, 9-10 months old, 1967

On September 27, 1966, I entered the world. Like most babies, I didn't know how to play saxophone, or know much of anything really except how to eat, sleep, cry and poop.

I was born to Robert James Divine and Rita Anna Maria (Farina) Divine in Amityville, Long Island. Despite what you may think, I am not the Amityville Horror. My father had a mixed ancestry of some English, German, French and others, your typical mutt. My mother is from Naples, Italy. She was about 21 when she married. It was an arranged marriage. He was interested in her, but she only went along because her mom told her to.

Mom grew up in a very poor home in Italy. She didn't have an opportunity for schooling. She was the oldest girl and had to stay home to help wash, clean and cook. My father was nearly twenty years her senior. He already had children that were almost grown by the time I was born. His first wife had committed suicide, probably due to the abuse from him (more on that later). There was Karen, Arlene (now deceased), Robert Jr. (aka Bobby and also deceased) and Stephen. Recently my sister Lillian found Karen through facebook and has started corresponding with her..

I was born into this unusual environment. I had little or no love from my father, at least none that I can remember. Fortunately, I had a doting, loving Italian mother who loved the Lord with all her heart.

CHAPTER 2 EARLIEST MEMORIES

“I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father's protection.”

-Sigmund Freud



This is a picture of my grandfather, my mom's father. He passed away before I had a chance to meet him. My mom speaks very highly of him.

Most children don't remember much from their earliest years. My oldest son Josh surprised me by telling me something he remembers when he was under three years old. I had been gone for three months for Army training. When I returned, we all went out to Taco Bell to celebrate. He remembers that.

Most of my early memories are good. I played outside a lot. I peed on the trees in our backyard despite my mom's insistence not to. Hey, little boys play, and they don't think about peeing until they have to go REALLY bad, and the trees were so convenient. At least I didn't pee in the heating vent like at least one of my sons did.

I remember watching Bob Barker on *The Price is Right* (and then watching him three decades later...it hasn't seemed right since he retired). I had a best friend next door named Manny. I got my first bike.

There was a neighborhood convenience store that my friends and I walked to often. The proprietor was a very friendly man. If we sang a song for him, he would give us each a piece of small, football-shaped chocolate. It seems like such a small thing, but he is one of the many people in life who were a positive influence just by his kindness and character.

I remember being fearful of my father. I sometimes witnessed the abuse he delivered to my mom and I was afraid of him. As far as I remember, he never laid a hand on me. I can only remember two interactions with him. I asked him how the turn signal turned off in the car. He had my sister and me convinced that he was magic. On another occasion, we went fishing with my older brother. It was cold and my feet hurt terribly, but I was too afraid to tell my father. I tried fishing later in life but

just never grew to love it like many men I know. I know there must have been other interactions, but these are the only two I remember.

My mom tells the story of my father sitting me on his lap and asking me if I loved him. I answered "No, because you hurt Mommy." My father said Santa Claus wouldn't bring me anything and I answered that I was fine with that. Then he sat my sister on his lap and said the same thing. She answered the same as me until he told her Santa wouldn't bring her anything, and then sis said, "I love you, Daddy."

I always thought she should have been an actress.



Lillian (aka Mimmy) and Jimmy 1969



Front, L to R: Little Boy Big One, Little Girl Big One

Middle: Jimmy, Mimmy

Back: Stephen, Rita (Mom); Around 1971

Notice how Rita looks like an older sibling rather than a Mom



Mimmy, Jimmy, Karen, Grandma, Stephen: March 1969

CHAPTER 3 ABUSIVE FATHER

“If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible.”

- Leviticus 5:1 New International Version (NIV)



My father, date unknown, probably late 1960s,

As a child I experienced something no child should have to experience...I witnessed my father being physically abusive to my mom.

On numerous occasions I saw my father beating my mom. On many other occasions, I laid in bed wide-awake listening to her screams and his verbal and physical abuse. I was afraid of my father. It has been shown that children often perceive God to be the way their fathers are. Until I became a father myself, I often thought of God as being harsh and judgmental.

It was terrible how society dealt with spousal abuse at that time (late 1960s, early 1970s). The police frequently showed up at our house. However, they informed my mom there was nothing they could do since he was her husband. My mom once trudged through the snow to her priest after receiving a beating. She was bloodied, bruised, and traveling through the snow in her nightclothes. The priest slammed the door in her face. The fact that she maintained her faith throughout this time is amazing to me.

Several times my father kicked us out of the house. My mother would stay with friends for a short time, but we always ended up back with my father. I think he would show up at the home of the family we were staying with, sometimes threaten them and my mom, and beg her to come back. The families were too wimpy to deal with the situation and asked my mom to leave.

Unfortunately, a bad situation like this often contributes to future problems. I started learning to choke down my feelings, anger and hurt and store them inside my heart. Although this seems like a good solution – and really a kid doesn't know any better – in the long term all those things have to come back up.

The bright spot for me was when I started Kindergarten.

The first day was pretty scary, as it is for almost all children starting school. I recall two of the most wonderful, compassionate teachers in the world who made me feel at home right away. I looked forward to school! We even had a snack time with cookies and milk every day. What could be better than that?

Kindergarten teachers have a very important job. There is a special place in heaven for the two lovely ladies who were my teachers. I wish I could remember their names.

I started Kindergarten in 1971. There were still pockets of discrimination despite the Supreme Courts' *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. I had a black friend who lived near me. I asked my mom why he didn't go to the same Kindergarten as me, and she said it was because there were evil people in the world who discriminated against black people. I simply could not fathom anyone doing that. My other friend Manny seemed black to me (I'm not sure what his nationality was, but he was very dark brown). I asked mom why he was able to go to my school. I am thankful that I had a mom who taught me that discrimination is wrong.

I finished most of Kindergarten. In May of 1972, my father kicked us out again. We went to Italy permanently (or at least for a couple of years). We left everything behind, all our toys and clothes, and flew to Naples, Italy where mom is from.

James Divine



James, Kindergarten, 1972



Mimmy and Jimmy circa 1972
The trees I used to pee on are close by

CHAPTER 4 LIFE IN ITALY

“I come from an Italian family. One of the greatest and most profound expressions we would ever use in conversations or arguments was a slamming door. The slamming door was our punctuation mark.”

-Mario Batali



Tourist picture in Naples, Lillian, Mom, me circa 1972

Most of my memories of Italy are good. As a five year old, you don't realize everything that is happening and how hard the adults have it. As a single mom, my mother had a tough time. We lived in at least 5 different places during the two years we were there. For a five-year-old boy it was an adventure. For a single mom, it was depressing. Most of the places we lived were with family or friends.

Recently I talked to my aunt who is 11 years older than me and described some of the places we had lived. She was amazed that I could remember them. I remember a house in the country that you had to drive up a hill on a very narrow road. As people drove this curvy road, they kept tapping on their horn in hopes of not crashing into a car coming the other way.

Another place had a beautiful balcony that was gigantic (in the eyes of a small kid anyway). One place was a small – 1 or 2 room – farmhouse that was built many years ago. We would walk to it and had to enter a gate and access a field where there were sheep. Cool stuff for a kid.

Indoor plumbing had been brought to this house after it was built, probably many years after. Possibly to save money, water was only brought to the kitchen area. The toilet was right next to the stove! The only thing that separated you from others in the room was a shower curtain. Ahh, smell that dinner cooking. It smells delicious...wait, not so delicious now!

At one point we lived with someone who had an apartment on the top floor of a building. There was a huge balcony that surrounded the apartment all the way around. Mom had her own place briefly. We could not afford electricity, so we used candles. It was an adventure.

On another occasion, she had been kicked out of the apartment we were staying in. Mom often did odd jobs, cleaning people's houses, babysitting, etc. She didn't have any education and those were the jobs she had experience in. A military couple, Bill and Nancy Zink, took us in. I felt we were in the lap of luxury at their place.

I had my own room in a three-bedroom apartment. There was a balcony off the living room and the master bedroom. Construction was going on out back. I could play in the foundations that were already there. The construction workers, when they were on break, would often share their lunch or snack with me. Bill and Nancy had no kids of their own and treated my sister and me as their own kids. More on them later...

All my aunts and uncles treated me kindly from what I remember. A couple of my uncles were a little gruff, but nothing that scared me as a kid. Uncle Salvatore helped instill a love of music in me at an early age. He played the guitar at family gatherings. I had Italian and American friends (Naples has a large US Navy base). I learned to speak Italian without even trying. I got to eat lots of good food and there was plenty of it (Neapolitans eat pasta pretty much daily; I love pasta).

Mom had several boyfriends and many men interested in her. After all, she was a gorgeous Italian woman in her 20s, and she had two cute kids. One of her boyfriends, Manuel, had a motorcycle. All four of us fit on this motorcycle. Mimmy sat near the handlebars, Manuel, me, and then Mom hanging on the back. This was in the days before laws about this sort of thing.

I learned another important lesson about prejudice. Mom

taught me this lesson through her actions rather than through words and I am grateful for the lesson. She had a guy friend over for dinner. He made a prejudicial comment about black people. My mom kicked him out in an instant. He was trying to apologize and make amends. She told him in no uncertain words to get out and never come back.

Overall life in Italy was fun and an adventure for me. There was one terrible secret that impacted me for the rest of my life.



Wedding 1974
James, Zia Gianna, Lillian, Zio Pietro, Rita

CHAPTER 5 TERRIBLE SECRETS

“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.”

- Matthew 18:6 (NIV)



A shopping “mall” in Naples, Italy

Life in Italy was mostly good, but there was one terrible secret that I didn't share with anyone until I was sixteen...I was molested when I was six years old.

So many things combine in our lives to make us the person we are. I don't know why I didn't share this painful memory until I was sixteen. I attribute it to the shame one feels when something like this happens. I attribute it to the trust I had in this man - I looked up to him and craved his attention - when he told me each time it was the last time. I attribute it to the work of Satan in this world of ours. I attribute it to the fear I had for my father and my lack of relationship with him.

I can remember the first time and the last time I was molested clearly. How many times there were in-between I am not sure, but there were many spread out over several years.

George Pfeiffer was the husband of my mom's friend. He often watched my sister and me and his three kids while my mom and his wife went shopping. One time while he was babysitting, an argument broke out amongst us kids. I don't remember exactly what it was about. I felt close to George. He was one of the few men in my life at the time who seemed to care for me. George said I was the guilty one and that he needed to talk to me in the bathroom.

He and I went in the bathroom. I was crying and said I had done nothing wrong. All the other kids were outside the door proclaiming my innocence and being nosey, as kids are known to do. However, George had locked the bathroom door.

George embraced me and told me to stop crying. He said he knew I was innocent and not to worry. He then took my pants

off and molested me. I can't even describe the physical pain, but that isn't the worst of it. Physical pain heals and goes away. The emotional pain is still there today, over forty years later as I write this.

I felt torn between the love and admiration I felt for George and the wrong act I knew he was committing. I felt shame, as if I were the one who did something wrong. I felt betrayed. None of what was happening made sense in my six-year old mind, and none of it makes sense to me today.

George talked to me and confessed that he was a sick man. He apologized and asked me to forgive him, and I did. He cleaned me up and we went back to the living room. The other kids were all asking if I was ok. George answered for me and said I had been upset because of the false accusation but everything was fine now. All of us kids continued to play as if nothing happened. The sun went down as normal, Mom came to pick us up, we went back to our place but the seed of this horrible deed was planted in my spirit. That seed was to grow and reap many undesirable traits, including hatred towards George in the future and addiction to pornography later in life, but more on those later. For the time being I was a six-year old boy with a secret, but life went on.

The next day I had some pain and stomach cramps. A small boy received a severe wound to his spirit. This type of wound, if not healed, can be terminal. The abuse was to happen many more times in Italy, usually at George's apartment, but I can't recall them in the detail I can of the first time.

The last time I was molested was after we had moved back to Virginia. George had come to my family's church one Sunday morning and invited me to spend the afternoon with him. I

declined, but he was insistent and whispered in my ear not to worry, nothing was going to happen. Well it did happen, and that eight-year old boy who was full of trust learned not to trust people. It took me almost forty years to get over that lack of trust.

Dear reader...maybe you have been through something similar. There is hope that comes into the story in a later chapter. I hope you will continue to read.



James on the steps of the building where Sunday School was held in Italy

CHAPTER 6 MOVE TO VIRGINIA

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

- James 1:27 New International Version (NIV)



Lillian and James at Busch Gardens Amusement Park

After nearly two years of living in Italy, we moved to Norfolk, Virginia so my sister and I could continue our schooling. We did not attend school while we lived in Italy. If you were American you could not attend the Italian schools. Mom couldn't afford tuition for the private American school. Mom knew she needed to get us back to the United States. I think Mom picked Norfolk because she knew so many Navy people from Naples, and many of them lived there, including the Zinks.

We moved into a one-bedroom apartment with virtually no furniture; I remember a bed that the three of us shared (mom, Mimmy my sister, and I). I also remember a table. We had a TV set too. I remember watching *Kung Fu*, the show from the 1970s. My sister and I would also turn on the TV to a low volume on Saturday mornings to watch cartoons. The TV was located in our bedroom. Life was still good. After all, mom was a great cook and she knew how to really stretch the food dollar.

My sister and I went to Oceanair elementary school. It was March and I should have been finishing up second grade, but since I had missed so much school, they put me in first grade. I remember crying because it seemed like the teacher was speaking Greek when she explained the lessons, but she was kind and compassionate and worked with me. Pretty soon I understood everything and passed 1st grade. I thrived in school and loved the learning environment; I still do!

Oceanair was just a short two block walk away. My sister and I made many new friends there. Mom was on welfare and also cleaned people's houses on the side. She has always been a hard worker and a big proponent of education. She herself was not able to have much schooling growing up, maybe a year's worth if even that much.

We didn't stay in the one bedroom apartment for long; pretty soon we moved into a two-bedroom apartment in the same complex. Mom made the decision to move in with a man named Manuel. It is easy to look at someone's decision and judge him or her. However, many of us make choices thinking we have no choice. Later, we look back and realize we had many more options. Her choice to do this was wrong, but in Christ there is forgiveness. We all do wrong things and need His forgiveness.

Manuel was in the Navy. He and my mom had dated in Italy and we lived with him for a short time there, too. All four of us would ride his motorcycle AT THE SAME TIME, with no helmets even. We didn't do any wheelies or anything like that. One thing I remember with Manuel is that when we went food shopping with him, he was very impulsive and would buy Mimmy and me whatever we wanted. He also teased us when we prayed our typical prayer...God is good, God is great, and we thank Him for our food, Amen... Manuel said since he bought the food, we should be saying, "Manuel is good..."

As is bound to happen when two people are living together, Mom became pregnant by Manuel. Manuel – even though he was in his mid-40s at the time – did not take the responsibility he should have as a man. He accused my mom of sleeping with someone else. He soon left and was transferred elsewhere, but seemed to always regret not staying with my mom.

We weren't on welfare very long. About this time, we found out my father had passed away and mom was eligible for social security benefits. That still left us as a fairly poor family, especially since mom really never made more than minimum wage.

We went to a free clinic for our healthcare. I remember this

vividly. There was a waiting area with a small set of bleachers. All the kids waiting to be seen were seated on these bleachers. When it was your turn to be seen, you had to undress to your underwear in one room, and then go down this hallway that had an opening to the bleachers area to get to the actual exam room. The bleachers faced this open area. Every kid ran across this open area because we knew everyone was watching us in our skivvies. All the kids in the bleachers would laugh. I would like to think that whoever set this up was just an idiot who wasn't thinking. If it was on purpose, shame on them.

Mom was advised that since she was a single mom without much money, she should give her baby up for adoption. Bill and Nancy Zink had not been able to have children of their own. The Zinks adopted her baby, a little boy she named Mark and they named Billy. We often visited the Zinks and stayed overnight with them in their home in Norfolk even before mom became pregnant.

Nancy was a large woman. My sister and I were told that she was also pregnant and was due at the same time as mom, and we believed it! When Billy was first born, we spent many hours at the Zink home rejoicing with them and generally hanging out and having a good time. The Zinks were good to me, in Italy and in Norfolk.

Mom had remorse over giving up her baby. Her understanding was that she could have him back if she changed her mind. Even today, mom tends to sign things and not read what she has signed. (Side note, my wife and I adopted Austin, our fourth child, when he was an infant. It was a year before the adoption became finalized. Even though we had an open adoption and his birth family has been involved in his life from

the start, we would have been devastated if his mom had changed her mind and wanted him back). Mom wanted little Billy back. The Zinks did not want to give him up. What followed was a terrible, long court case, which resulted in mom losing. This obviously left a lot of hard feelings that remain to this day. Bill and Nancy have both passed away already.

I understand both mom's viewpoint and the Zink's viewpoint in this matter. Mom never really got over this loss. At the time, it was kept hidden from my sister and me. However, mom had many nights when she was literally wailing in our living room. Friends were there to comfort her, but she could not be comforted in her grief. Of course during this time, our visits with the Zinks had stopped, but I don't think we knew why.

I remember where I was when mom told me that Billy was my little brother. We were on a walk to the beach and she told my sister to go ahead a little while mom and I hung back some. Mom told me the entire story of what had happened.



James 5th Grade Picture

CHAPTER 7 THE MELLOW YEARS

“ Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.”

- James 3:1 New International Version (NIV)



With my sister, approximately 1979.
Although we fought a lot, we would be willing to
fight to the death for each other



Me on a fourth grade trip to Washington D.C.

Grades 2 through 5 were pretty mellow and stable years for me with the exception of the final times of abuse that took place and a couple of events that seem comical now in retrospect.

I adored my 2nd grade teacher, Mrs. Everett! Her care and concern for me went way beyond what would be expected from a teacher. She took me under her wing and helped me tremendously in school. By the end of 2nd grade, I was all caught up. Mrs. Everett saw the potential in me and gave me privileges and responsibilities in keeping with that potential. She kept my sister and me at her house for part of the summer when mom had to go for surgery. Her house seemed huge to me (remember, I was used to living with people and being in small apartments). Her backyard seemed like a park. The ONLY bad thing about Mrs. Everett is she made us drink a glass of tomato juice daily.

The school we went to was [Oceanair Elementary School](#) in Norfolk, Virginia. It was just across the street and through some woods, right in our neighborhood. The library was open all summer and the librarian patiently answered all my questions. Once I asked her, "Do Fish Drink Water?" She didn't know, so she referred me to a weekly newspaper feature that you could send questions to. They would pick the best question and that student would receive a set of encyclopedias. This was before Wikipedia and before the Internet; those encyclopedias were worth nearly a thousand dollars. I sent in my question and won!

We lived about a mile walk from the beach and spent most summer days there. One day, my sister and I ventured out too far. The water seemed to be pulling us out and before we knew it, it was over our heads. I didn't know how to swim at the time. I kept leaping off the bottom and yelling for help. It was a

beach with a lifeguard, so I was rescued. I found my sister and asked her how she got to shore. An adult had helped her, but **she didn't mention me to them.** I still like to rub this in her face on occasion. Even though now I am a good swimmer, I refuse to go any deeper than my chest in ocean water. My wife, Susan, likes to make fun of me because of that.

Around this time I also joined a Cub Scout pack. The lady who was my leader was wonderful, caring, compassionate and she made learning fun. My hat goes off to all people who pour time and energy into kids' lives. Alas, she was a military wife and eventually moved. I stayed in scouting until I was 18 and became an eagle scout. Lots of good values are instilled by that organization.

In third grade, I began to be bussed to downtown Norfolk for school. The school is no longer in existence, but it was called "Titus School" and we had our own song (sung to the tune of the Beatles' *Yesterday*) and tons of school spirit and pride. Looking back on it now, I realize the principal was very innovative and progressive. We saw her around campus everyday. She knew our names and about our lives.

I also had a wonderful music teacher who gave us written and aural tests with sound samples. I scored high on those tests. This is where my love of music began to grow and mature. It's a shame that I can't remember that teacher's name. The bus ride seemed long as a kid, but when I have gone back as an adult, it was really just about 5 miles.

My fourth grade teacher was another amazing person. Her name was Ms. Gandy and she was African-American. She had high expectations for us intellectually and morally. She was fair

with everyone. The fourth grade at Titus was overcrowded, so 4-5 of my classmates and I were part of an experiment; we were in Ms. Gandy's fifth grade class even though we were fourth graders. We did fifth grade work with the other fifth graders.

When Ms. Gandy had to leave the class, she left a monitor in charge to tell her who had been talking. Ms. Gandy put her trust in us. If she came back and the report was that you had been talking, but you looked her in the eye and said you had not been and that the monitor was mistaken, you wouldn't receive the smack on your hand from her yardstick. Do you know that despite knowing we would be smacked, nobody ever lied to her? We respected her. She cared for us. That year we took a field trip to Washington D.C. I fell in love with our nation's capital. The buildings are beautiful. The ideals we stand for are great when applied fully. Some of the people in those buildings...not so great.

I thought that the other fourth grade classmates and I would get to skip right over fifth grade, but we didn't, and my real fifth grade teacher was not so nice, at least not in my 11 year old head. She seemed to hate students. Even as a young boy, I often wondered why she was teaching. I only had her for about three months, but it seemed much longer.

There are two things I remember about her: If you asked, "Can I go to the bathroom?" she would answer in a nasally voice, "Yes you can, but you may not." I also remember that I could do long division faster than she could (I was really quite proud of that).

Mom was always striving to improve her station in life. Three months into 5th grade we moved a few miles away to a bigger

apartment with a bigger pool, and I started going to [Bayside Elementary School](#), which is where I started in band.

Church

We also started going to Ocean View Baptist Church. The church had a thriving bus ministry. They came by each Sunday to pick up my sister and me. We Told Mom how great the church was and how much fun we were having. It wasn't long before she started coming with us.

The church really knew how to reach out to people. This was during the hippy and anti-Vietnam days. There were some colorful characters who came to church, some of them in cut-off shorts and sandals (we were located near the beach). The church welcomed all people. Many of them came to know Christ as their Savior. When they did, the change started in their spirits and came outward.

My third grade Sunday-School teachers were Mr. and Mrs. Prophet. They loved children and shared the truths of the Bible with us. I adored them! In fourth grade, Mr. Saunders was my teacher. He encouraged us to learn the Scriptures. Bible drill was an integral part of what we did each week. Mr. Saunders often handed out awards of a six-pack of candy bars. The first time I earned a six-pack of Reese's Peanut Butter Cups I was so proud.

Mike and Sandy Fair taught Kid's Church. They also touched my life in many ways. Their home was open to me. I used to ride my bike to the Fair's house in the summer. Mrs. Fair never once turned me away, despite needing to get things done. I often stayed for several hours. When Mr. Fair came home, I

would just hang out. He never chased me away either. I still love and adore these two terrific people. Later, they became youth group leaders, so I was under their influence for close to ten years of my life.

I have always felt like I had a relationship with Christ. When I was eight, I decided to formalize that relationship by going forward to be baptized. Pastor Harrison was our pastor. He came and talked to me one evening about what that decision meant. Several weeks later I was baptized.

Pastor Harrison had a moral failure. That is always a sad event in any church. However, we are all susceptible to a failure. The church drove him away. No counseling, no support, no forgiveness. The church began to forget their roots and the grace that had helped them reach out to so many people. They became very judgmental. From "Come As You Are" and learn about Jesus, who can change you into a better person, they regressed to "Change first and we might accept you." The interesting thing to note is that many of the leaders and elders who had judged Pastor Harrison succumbed to the same moral failure a few years later. This pattern is often repeated in the church.

Christians, we need to forgive.



Mom in the kitchen, which has always been her favorite place.

CHAPTER 8 STARTING BAND

Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.

- Maya Angelou



A musical group at Busch Gardens.
Playing at Busch Gardens used to be my dream job.

It amazes me that I have spent my entire adult life doing what I love in the field of music, yet in sixth grade I almost didn't join band! In sixth grade, the choices were to go to choir, drama, art, and band or to stay in the room and read. I loved reading and still do, so I decided to stay in the room. After about a week of this, it grew rather boring. My band friends talked about how much fun band was, so I decided to give it a try.

I went to band and met the director, Mr. Derrio. I'm not sure if that's the correct spelling for his name. He looked at me – looked at my mouth and said, "You look like a clarinet player." Even as a professional musician and having taught band for many years, I am not sure if he could really tell, if all he had left for rent were clarinets, or he needed clarinet players.

Playing the clarinet was something I had a natural talent for. I can't say for sure if I practiced everyday, but I did practice regularly. It was something I had a passion for, something I looked forward to, something that helped my self-esteem. You see, not having a dad around made me somewhat of a mama's boy. I wasn't very skilled at sports. I didn't know much about outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, camping and shooting. I can look back now and realize that I was more gifted emotionally than the average person. Most people in the arts are gifted in the same way. This gifting makes us more sensitive and caring. It also causes us to be hurt by people more often. The result for me was a lot of bullying and teasing in school.

Mr. Derrio had a huge impact in making music important to me. It's hard to pinpoint exactly how he did so. He was kind and patient and excited about music. He almost always had a funny comment or joke about the music. He never raised his

voice or yelled.

Band was the highlight of my day. About April of that year, Mr. Derrio had a heart attack and was gone from school for quite awhile. We had a substitute who had retired long ago. I'm sure he did his best, but he just did not have the energy to keep up with a group of 6th graders, and we pushed the limits daily in his class. Mr. Derrio came to visit one day and was wearing sunglasses to hide his tears. Almost all men were like that in the 70s; you did not cry as a man. I don't know how many times I was told by the men in my life to quit crying and act like a man. It wasn't until I was about thirty that I felt comfortable expressing my emotions.

Two other people who also had a great impact on me were Jerry and Yvonne Huling. Mr. Huling was the choir director at our church, [Ocean View Baptist Church](#) in Norfolk, Virginia. Mr. Huling had choirs set up from age 3 to adult. He insisted – no demanded – excellence in our singing. I thought all churches of that size had choirs that were developed like that. It wasn't until I was older that I realized that was highly unusual. Mr. Huling felt it was important that if we were performing for God, we should be at our best. I'm thankful that he instilled this desire for excellence in me.

I had only one gripe with Mr. Huling. My mom is perpetually late. Her birthday is March 10, but I think she was supposed to be born March 9. She was my transportation to choir practice. I always arrived ten minutes late, due to mom. Whenever someone was late, Mr. Huling would stop conducting, look at the guilty party, and then make some sarcastic comment. He did this because the desire to serve his Lord with excellence was in his DNA.

Mrs. Huling, besides keeping the choir director in line, loved everybody! She is a kind and compassionate woman who treats everyone with love, dignity and respect. Once you have been in her house, you are family.

CHAPTER 9
MIDDLE SCHOOL IS A DIFFICULT TIME

“Do not be misled: Bad company corrupts good character.”

- 1 Corinthians 15:33 New International Version (NIV)



James' 6th Grade Class, Bayside Elementary

I have come to the conclusion that middle school is difficult for everybody. Your body is changing, your mind is developing, and you begin to question what you were taught growing up. I have met a couple of people who didn't seem to be bothered by their middle school years. They typically seem to be people who had a great set of parents and were unusually confident in themselves at an early age.

My middle school years were some of the most difficult in my life. I started acting out in some ways and getting in trouble at school. I started being more interested in girls. I started lying to others – something I had never really done. I even became a bully for a short time, but more on that later.

In sixth grade, I was still attending Bayside elementary school. I had a teacher who seemed ancient to me. She had some funny habits. For example, she always lectured us on the importance of saying, "What did you say," if we couldn't hear someone, but if she couldn't hear us, she answered with, "Huh." If we answered that way, we would receive another lecture. During snack time, she would go around to all the students and grab a handful of their snack without asking. We also had some unusual lunch ladies. We liked to play tricks on them by telling them our milk was spoiled, because when we did that, they would take a sip FROM OUR STRAW and tell us the milk was fine.

I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. We would sometimes go around egging houses and cars. I am not proud of that time in my life. I began using curse words, skipping church to go to the arcade and giving my teachers a hard time. Thankfully they had patience and were consistent with setting boundaries and consequences. I have huge respect for middle

school teachers.

In seventh grade I was bussed to a school in downtown Norfolk called Jaycox Junior High. It was a rough school. We had three security guards who stood tall and were buff. They kept the school pretty safe. I remained in band, but decided to switch to the greatest instrument ever invented...the saxophone. I excelled on that too and really loved my band teacher, though I can't recall his name. He was also a saxophonist and played beautifully.

He taught me an important lesson in trust. He told us if we were on a band trip and forgot our lunch money, we didn't need to worry because he would loan it to us. He also stated he wasn't too worried if we didn't pay him back because he said it was worth a couple of bucks of loss on his part to find out we weren't trustworthy. My band director once lost his temper when the drummers were acting up. He tossed his baton at them. It hit the bass drum, then bounced back and hit him.

For most of my early elementary years and through about 7th grade, I was often bullied by other boys. Mom felt it was wrong to ever fight. She would quote Jesus admonition to turn the other cheek. Later I realized that verse describes a time when someone insults you. Even Jesus overturned the moneychanger's tables, and sometimes boys have to defend themselves.

One day, a bully who was always tormenting me did so again. In a rage, I grabbed the front of his shirt, slammed him against the wall and demanded that he leave me alone. It worked! I realized I was bigger than most of the other boys. This bully told everyone that I beat him up and he left me alone. Very rarely was I bullied after that.

I became a bully myself for a very short time. I never beat anyone up, but I sure enjoyed throwing power around and instilling fear in others. It only took me a few months to realize how wrong these actions were; they were not consistent with my desire to follow the example of Jesus Christ so I quit being a bully. My 180-degree turnaround in this left me with a funny story.

One boy I bullied – who looked a lot like what a 7th grade Bill Gates might have looked like – saw me and started to run away as usual. I was running after him yelling, “Wait, I want to be your friend.” He must have thought I was crazy. He did finally stop. When he did, I apologized for bullying him, became his friend and started defending him against other bullies. You can’t make things like this up!

The kids I hung out with started smoking pot when their parents weren’t around. Although I never smoked it, I was often around when they did. I knew that was somewhere I didn’t want or need to be, so when they would plan their parties, I told them I had to check with my mom. I never did check with her, but I told them that she would not allow me to go. God in His grace and mercy was watching out for me. We moved a few miles away to a better apartment and different school. I found a new circle of friends who were not into pot. Life started on an upward trend again for me.

CHAPTER 10 AZALEA GARDENS JUNIOR HIGH AND 8TH GRADE

As a teenager I was so insecure. I was the type of guy that never fitted in because he never dared to choose. I was convinced I had absolutely no talent at all. For nothing. And that thought took away all my ambition too.

- Johnny Depp



Jim Crockett (1958—2003)
He became my step-dad around this time.

The new friends I had at Azalea Gardens Junior High were much better influences on me. They cared about school, were raised in moral families and generally stayed out of trouble (I don't think middle school boys can stay completely out of trouble). I can't remember this band director's name either, but he was a positive influence on my life. I do remember that the school had an old Martin alto sax that I was able to use and that we did some marching. At that time, the Norfolk public schools were sponsoring some sort of scholarship for lessons. In eighth grade I was able to start taking lessons with James Hester of Norfolk State University.

Mr. Hester gave me a very solid foundation in playing the saxophone. We started in a book called "Foundations to Saxophone Playing" that I still use with saxophone students. It is now in the public domain. You can download it at www.jazzysaxman.com at the "Free" link. Mr. Hester's first instrument was oboe, but he could play a mean sax. He had me learn all my major and minor scales by memory. I hated that! However, that was one of the best things he did for me in my music career. I know some professionals who don't have all their scales memorized.

Mr. White – one of the gym teachers – was also influential in my life. I think it was because he had high standards for us, but he also realized we were middle school boys. At church I began working with Vince Marshall, who was in charge of one of the buses for our church's ministry. Once a month on a Saturday, we would go knock on doors on our route to invite people to church and let them know a bus came by every Sunday. Many people sent their kids with us. Mr. Marshall had the biggest busload of kids. We were often late in getting everyone to

Sunday School on time because some of the kids were just waking up when we would arrive and we waited for them.

Some of the people in the church frowned at us, but we didn't worry about those people.

Mr. Chandler – who was an older gentleman at our church – and I do mean gentleman in the traditional sense of the word – also took me under his wing. He was the church librarian and also served as a trustee. I checked out many books from the library, including one called, “For Boys Only.” It was a sex education book that gave a lot of information about what my body was going through. It presented the information from a Christian perspective. I wanted to know more, so I also read “For Girls Only.” I was too embarrassed to check this book out from the library, so I read it clandestinely when Mr. Chandler wasn't looking. I was amazed how many boys in middle school were misinformed about girl issues.

Even though I experienced abuse earlier in my life, once I was older and had a chance to think on it, I realized how fortunate I was; many men influenced my life in a positive way. They often went out of their way to become a part of my life. If I had not had that experience, it may have been easy for me to become bitter over what happened to me.



Mom married James D. Crockett March 31, 1981
L to R: Mrs. Huling, Jim Crockett, Rita, Mr. Huling

My mom and dad weren't allowed to marry in the church because mom was divorced. My birth father had passed away. When we returned to Virginia, my sister and I begged mom for a dad. She married someone who was a womanizer. They divorced shortly after. Mr. and Mrs. Huling opened their home to the ceremony.

Dad was ok, but he was young and didn't know how to be a father. He came from several generations of men who were the same way. Unfortunately, mom and dad's marriage was not going well. In his last days, he was living with his girlfriend even though he and mom were still married.

I really longed for a good father/son relationship with dad. It was meant to be. We mostly fought and yelled when I was a teenager. When I was about 30, I decided to man up. I started giving him hugs and telling him I loved him. He would usually say "Thanks."

CHAPTER 11 HIGH SCHOOL

The greatest day in your life and mine is when we take total responsibility for our attitudes. That's the day we truly grow up.

- John C. Maxwell



Susan and me fall of 1984

In ninth grade, I began to attend [Lake Taylor High School](#) in Norfolk, Virginia. Mr. Fitzgerald was my band teacher. Marching band was a lot of fun. I don't know what to call the style of marching we did, but it was very dance based. I remember doing a Michael Jackson song in which at one point, we laid on our backs, set our instruments down, put on white gloves and did some kind of hand movement in the air.

I didn't realize until later that Lake Taylor was somewhat of a rough school. We did not have a home field, so even our home games were at other fields. I remember one game with our rival, Granby High School. We always marched from the bus to the field and marched back to the bus in parade formation. Mr. Fitzgerald placed the larger male students with big instruments on the outside of the formation. He instructed us to feel free to use our instruments if students from the other schools tried to mess with us. Usually boys from the opposing school were trying to touch our girls inappropriately. I used my tenor sax defensively on several occasions. I only went to Lake Taylor for one year, then we moved to Virginia Beach where I attended [Frank W. Cox High School](#).

Cox was a much better school for me. It was my band teacher's first year at the school. There had been some transition before him, so the program was not great that first year – I think we had 30-35 students in band – but [Steve Ambrose](#) brought us to excellence quickly. We had over 100 students by my senior year. He has been a life-long friend and mentor. After I graduated from high school, he taught several more years then became Fine Arts Director for Virginia Beach Schools. He's now retired but performing regularly.

I have a confession to make...I loved marching band but hated

that outdoors we never could sound as good as indoors. I remember having tons of fun going to different competitions. If you're a band director, consider this next statement... I don't remember how we did at any of the competitions but I do remember having a great time with my friends!

In eleventh grade, we opened a new school building. New buildings are great, but aren't always thought out. This building was air-conditioned! For all you young people, many schools were not air-conditioned 20, 30, 40 years ago; and we had to walk two blocks uphill both ways to catch the bus, which usually leaked diesel exhaust...and we loved it.

Mr. Ambrose was an outstanding teacher. He gave fully of himself and was available after and before school for those who wanted help. Like me, he had a successful performing career before getting into teaching. I made the same false assumption that many teens do. "Those who can, do...those who can't, teach." I despise that statement. I made a smart remark to Mr. Ambrose asking if he got into teaching because he couldn't make it as a performer. He responded to my remark with a question: "What makes you think I didn't choose teaching?" I have had several opportunities to provide the same response to students. I believe teaching is harder, takes more time and is often less rewarding financially than performing. The great teachers choose to teach because they love to build the next generation. They want to pass their passion of music to others.

Back to the air-conditioning; many rooms of the school were interior rooms with no windows. That's great when the air is working properly, but when the building was new, it often wasn't working. A windowless interior room with no air gets very hot in Virginia the month of June! My chemistry class was

one of those interior rooms.

Chemistry class helped me make my decision to become involved in music. Up until tenth grade, I thought I wanted to be a doctor so I could help people. I found out I wasn't very interested in or very good at chemistry, but I was great and gifted in music. I did have an interesting chemistry **teacher** – Mr. Fisher - but I was not passionate about the subject.

A locked box covered the thermostats for the building – this was before the days when central office could control the temperature. Mr. Fisher was always hot, so he kept a Bunsen burner going under the thermostat, which kept our room nice and cool. He also let us make peanut brittle in class one day – using beakers, Bunsen burners, and the correct chemical names of all the ingredients.

My junior year, a freshman arrived in the band who also played saxophone. His name was Jeff and he was really gifted musically. We shared the same faith and both of us were fatherless; his father had died not too long before we met. Jeff and I became fast friends. He later became the best man at my wedding. Both of us ended up in music education as our life-long careers. Jeff is now Dr. Jeff Ames at Belmont University. Our respective moms became like second moms to us. Jeff and I often performed as a duet at school functions and at his home.

Jeff and I would sometimes cut up in band, but not in the usual way. We hated counting rests, so we would improvise the other parts during our rests. We were not perfect improvisers and would miss notes along the way. Mr. Ambrose would stop the band and say, "Trumpets, someone missed a note at letter D." Jeff and I would be doing all we could not to giggle because we

Forgive

were the ones who missed the note. Sorry Mr. Ambrose!
(Trumpets, no apologies to you...consider this revenge for
blowing out our eardrums in marching and jazz bands).

CHAPTER 12 FAITH AND FORGIVENESS

“Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 Contemporary English Version (CEV)



I was fortunate to have been raised knowing all about God and the forgiveness offered through Jesus Christ. I feel like I have known Jesus since I was a little boy. I went forward and made a commitment to Christ when I was eight and was baptized at that time.

The Christian walk is a process. Sometimes things happen quickly, but often we have to grow into and out of things as we are being made in the likeness of Christ. Sometimes we have to learn things the hard way. The best way is to learn from the mistakes of others so we can avoid some of the difficulty.

My mom is a shining example of someone who reads her bible daily. She taught my sister and me to do the same. It's our daily food and I encourage everyone to do it. You wouldn't think about skipping a meal, would you? Why skip your spiritual food?

As I read, I would come across passages that required either action on my part or a change in thinking. When that happens, we are supposed to do those things or take those actions. We are told to do the word (the bible) and not just hear what it tells us. If we don't do what the Bible is telling us, we're told it's like someone looking at himself or herself in a mirror and then forgetting what they look like.

There's a verse in Matthew 6:14 that says, "If you forgive those who have sinned against you, then God will forgive you, but if you don't forgive those who sin against you, God won't forgive you." Every time I came to that verse, I knew I needed to forgive the man who molested me. I forgave my sister, my mom, others who occasionally mistreated me, but no way was I going to forgive the molestation!

When I was sixteen, I realized that the unforgiveness was only hurting me. It was as if I was carrying a load of fifty pounds everywhere I went. When we don't "do the word", we don't grow in our walk with Christ. I had hit a plateau. Through much grief and pain, I finally turned the whole experience over to God and made the decision to forgive the man. What a relief! The fifty-pound weight was gone. I began to grow again in the Lord. The healing process – which is still going on – started on that day too. Before that there had been little healing.

Forgiveness doesn't mean letting someone get away with his or her crime. I told my mom about what had happened. If she hadn't been through a lot of abuse herself, she probably would have brought that information to the police, but she didn't. If you have been the victim of a crime, forgive AND press charges. Also seek help from a mental health professional if you have experienced sexual abuse. I didn't until many years later. I think my healing would have progressed faster if I had.

You may have been the victim of a crime similar to mine. Forgive and be forgiven. You may have had a spouse abandon you, leaving you to raise your kids as a single parent. Forgive and be forgiven. Maybe a parent abandoned you as a child. Forgive and be forgiven. It will be the start of the healing process in your life. You will grow in your relationship with God. The joy of life will return to you.

Don't put it off! I have met many bitter and angry older people who didn't put this into practice. Even if you are 100 years old, it's not too late. After sharing my story in public, I have had people of all ages share with me that they had been through something similar and were now taking the step towards forgiveness. **Forgive and be forgiven.**

CHAPTER 13 I MARRY MY HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART

“He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.”

- Proverbs 18:22 New International Version (NIV)



I married the love of my life December 13, 1986.
I still can't believe she said yes.
I got the better end of that deal.



Our wedding party; from left to right...
Janie Oddo, Stephanie Dodson, Lillian Divine
Susan (Eliason) Divine, James Divine
Dr. Jeff Ames, Steve Hobeck, Bill Orsetti
Front Row: Julieanne Pauline, Robert Adams

When we were dating, Susan went to a party where Chuck Norris was making an appearance. At that time, Chuck Norris was at the height of his movie career. I guess he thought most young ladies would love to be kissed by him. Susan was rather shy, but he kissed her anyway. That qualifies me to make this claim...Susan kissed Chuck Norris and me, and SHE CHOSE ME!

Love is hard work! Those who don't think so are either not married or may have had unsuccessful marriages. Anything in life worth having is worth putting hard work into. Why are we so afraid of that word "work"? We think it means something bad. My teaching job is hard work, but I love it. My marriage is hard work, but there is no one I would rather spend time with than my lovely wife. Here's our love story, but allow me to go waaaaaay back...

The things that happened to me, the distant father who was abusive to my mom, the molestation, the teasing and ridicule I faced as a middle school student, caused me to have really low self-esteem. One of the ways this manifested itself was in my desire to always have a girlfriend. I realize that part of this can be attributed to having an out going personality.

My first girlfriend was in second grade. Her name was Beverly Ostrea. Our relationship consisted of running away from each other on the school playground; not a very good way to develop a relationship. Like most boys, I ran away from girls until about sixth grade when I thought to myself, "Self, why are you running away from these gorgeous creatures? Run towards them." As soon as we boys figured that out, the girls ran away from us!

I pretty much had a girlfriend just about every year I was in school. The low self-esteem part of the relationships manifested itself during my teen years, when most of us already have low-esteem. I was slightly overweight. Many of my girlfriends were fickle. They were looking for excitement. They were looking for drama. They often accused me of being boring. It's easy to look back and say this as an older person, but I think young people are better off having a lot of friends rather than dating in the traditional sense.

Thank God I'm Boring: When the girl I was dating would break up with me, I always wanted to know why. The answer was usually "You're boring." Do you know that this bothered me all the way to my early 40s? Then I figured it out...Boring meant I was absent the drama that surrounded some other guys. These guys seemed to lead girls around by a string, toying with their emotions and feelings and not seeming to care if they caused pain (it was all about how they felt). It does make life interesting. At age 40, I decided that I liked boring. By those early girlfriend definitions, boring meant I have remained faithful to my wife, boring meant that early in my career I often stuck with jobs I didn't like because it was the best thing for my family, boring meant I stick to my commitments and can be depended on. Many of those exciting boys from high school have left broken families in their wake of pursuing what they want.

Now that I'm older and more mature, I in no way think of myself as boring, but going by those silly high school girls' definition, THANK GOD I'M BORING!

Every time a girl would break up with me, I was devastated. I often begged her to please stay with me. I would ask her what I did wrong. (By the way, this is the wrong thing to do in a relationship if someone wants to leave). Looking back now, I'm glad those relationships didn't work out. There's an old country song that describes my thoughts exactly in this regard titled, "Thank God for unanswered prayer."

A friend of mine named Amy – after hearing about another breakup and my *Woe is Me* complaints challenged me with this statement, "Why do you feel you always need to be dating someone?" Sometimes what you say to someone can have a profound effect on him or her, even when you thought your comment was inconsequential. Her comment made me think deeply. I decided I didn't really need to date anyone. I decided that I might go out occasionally to get to know a girl a little

better, but I was done with long-term relationships for the time being. It was shortly after that I found Susan!

During my junior year in high school, our band took a trip to Disney. We had lots of time to explore the theme parks while we were there. I hung out with a group of about 10-12 students. One of them was a cute flag girl named Susan Eliason. She seemed nice. I got to know her a little bit from a distance. Fast forward to that summer.

Dave Bray, who was a good friend of mine, was supposed to go with me to a movie. He called me up a couple of hours before we were to leave to tell me he was on restriction and might be on it for life, so he would not be able to go to the movies with me. Our conversation went something like this:

Me (in mock anger): Great Dave! What am I supposed to do now? I can't go to a movie by myself?

Dave: Why don't you ask that girl Susan who you told me you thought was cute?

Me: I can't call her and say, "Hi. I don't know if you know who I am, but we hung out with the same group at Disney? Do you want to go to a movie? I'll pick you up in about an hour and a half."

Dave: What have you got to lose?

Me: OK. I'll give it a try.

* Susan and I recently had lunch with Dave; he is now living in Orlando

I called Susan and she said, "Yes". We went to see *Out of Africa*. The funny thing is that we were not impressed at all with the movie. It won several awards. We watched the movie a couple of years ago and really liked it. Maybe it just wasn't a good first

date movie.

Susan and I found out we had a lot of things in common. We enjoyed running, had close ties to our families and loved the Lord deeply. We both strived to do well in school and both worked part-time jobs. We loved spending time together and fell more deeply in love. A year and a half after we started dating, I asked her to marry me. It's hard to ask for a girl's hand in marriage, but there is something even harder than that. I asked her dad for his permission!

He said yes (I think he gave me a 10-12 year timeline). She said, "Yes!" A year after that we were married. Many people told us we were too young (I was 20 and she was 19). I know they had good intentions, but their reasoning was not valid. Some people told us we needed to wait until we had a house, had furniture to put into it, and had lots of money saved in the bank. If we had taken their advice we would have married just 4-5 years ago.

On December 13, 1986 I married the love of my life. There is no one else I would rather spend my life with. I believe every marriage will have some trouble. You are taking two people and making them one. They have different personalities and were raised in homes with different expectations. Throw in the trials of life and something is going to happen.

We had two occasions when our marriage was in slight trouble. The first time was when I received orders to Japan. We were apart for a little over four months. I became bitter towards the Army and maybe even depressed over that separation. When Susan finally came to Japan, my bitterness displayed itself as a critical and negative spirit towards Susan and life in general.

We worked through that. I was able to leave my negativity behind and forgive the Army and move forward.

About ten years after that, we had a year where life was really difficult. I was self-employed, but was also working part-time delivering pizzas to make ends meet. Susan was in school full time working on her degree in dental hygiene. As the man of the house, I should have taken a more active role in figuring out that we weren't spending much time together, but I really didn't know better. I didn't understand about the work that marriage takes. We were tag-team parenting. One of us was always home with the kids during that time, but we hardly spent time together.

Quality and quantity time together are two important building blocks in the work that a marriage needs. We had neither of those for that year. The fighting actually started when our schedule finally settled down. You see, now we had the time to talk about the issues that had developed over that year. Issues have a way of growing into monsters if they are pushed out of the way for long periods of time.

We worked through that too with the help of some counseling. We also instituted a weekly date night, which we place great importance on. I challenge you to change your thinking. Think of marriage as work and your marriage will become better. Make your marriage the most important thing in your life, after your relationship with God.

One final thought...save sex for marriage. We did and are glad for it. All the research shows that couples that do that have happier lives and are more likely to stay together.

CHAPTER 14
KIDS HELPED ME REALIZE WHY WE CALL GOD
“ABBA” (DADDY)

The love of family and the admiration of friends is much more important than wealth and privilege.

- Charles Kuralt



The kids in 2004, ages 16, 13, 9 and 6

It was great to be married. Now I was looking forward to having kids! Susan and I decided to leave the timing of our first child up to God. Guess what? God loves kids too – and most of the time if you leave it up to Him, one is coming soon. About four months into our marriage was when she was conceived, and there's a funny story to the news of her creation (it wasn't funny at the time).

I was in the Army when Susan and I were married, so the Army covered all of our health care. Those that have been part of that system know it has flaws, and most of us don't want to see health care nationalized. It seems whenever the government takes over something, the quality goes down. That is a subject for another book.

We suspected Susan was pregnant when we were assigned to one military base. She went in for a pregnancy test and they called to tell her it was negative. A month or two later we were at a different base. Susan again suspected she was pregnant – she was feeling sick – and went in for a pregnancy test. Due to some miscommunication, we thought the results were negative. Because Susan was feeling sick, we were worried that she had some type of illness. Finally we took another test and found out we would be parents.

When I would read the passages in the Bible about God being our Father, I didn't really fully understand it. After all, my father was evil. I was scared of him. He didn't seem to love me. He beat my mom. Kids sometimes put the traits of their earthly father onto their heavenly Father. I knew God loved me, but to be honest, I thought the moment I messed up, He was ready to blast me with a thunderbolt. It was fear, but the fear was not tempered with grace and love.



Christine, one week old, with Daddy
Christine is the one on the left.



Christine, three and a half months old,
with Mommy. It seems like babies
sleep all the time.



Christine always had a zest for life

Christine

When Christine Michelle Divine was born on January 26, 1988, I fell in love with this little helpless baby. I was there when Susan was pushing. I coached her in the breathing she should be doing as we learned in Lamaze classes. I listened as she told me to just shut up (I guess she forgot the things we had learned in class). I got to cut the cord, the first step in Christine's independence in the world.

Christine was crying and screaming when the nurses were handling her. They handed her to me and I spoke softly to her. She immediately got quiet and looked me in the eyes. I began to understand the love God has for us as a father. We are helpless and have nothing to offer. God speaks to us quietly and we stare into the face of He who made us. God's love is unconditional, just like my love for that little girl. God is always there for me, always loves me, and always wants the best for me.

Christine was strong-willed from the start. Even in the womb, if her hand was pressing out and you touched it, she would push you away. We read all of Dr. Dobson's child-rearing books when she reached the toddler years. We had tons of fun with her too. Early in our marriage, there was not much money, so we took many trips to the park and explored all over Virginia. That was when gas was less than a dollar a gallon, so we would pack a lunch and drive to the mountains, the beach or Washington D.C. My favorite thing was to take her to the park when I got home from work.

Today Christine is married to a wonderful Army officer named Brian. They will have many opportunities to travel the world. Susan and I love to spend time with both of them.



Easter 1991, Josh, James, Christine, Susan



Christine and Susan 4 months pregnant. We had a shirt made pointing to Susan's growing tummy. It said, "Made in Japan."

Forgive



Brian and Christine 2010 Wedding

Joshua

Joshua Michael Divine – our second born – was a love child. I received orders to move to Japan. Susan and I were excited at first, until we found out that I would have to go on ahead without her. We did not know when Susan would be joining me. I left Virginia in October 1989 for Camp Zama, Japan. It was a depressing time for me. My attitude plummeted. I kept myself busy, took on a part-time job, but it was still difficult. And Susan was stuck back in Virginia basically being a single mom. I know that other service people go through much longer family separations, but that doesn't make it any easier.

On Christmas Day of that year, I think I was actually going through a depression. I was off of work, both my Army job and my part time job, and decided to do what I normally did; go for a long walk. Well, everything on the base and everything off base was closed, and it was raining cats and dogs. I was walking in the rain and crying. I wish I knew then the things I know now, and I wish someone would have taken me under their wing and invited me to their home. If you know someone away from their family – especially during a holiday – invite them to your home.

In February Susan was finally able to come to Japan. We had a great reunion! Since we were temporarily living with someone, after that first day in Japan, there was no privacy. We know Josh was conceived that first night. The day after Thanksgiving of 1990, Josh arrived in the world.

Josh was much more active than Christine, but in the womb he scared us a couple of times. Like most males, as long as he was warm and well fed, he was content. He would often go several

days without moving. We would poke and prod him to make sure he was still alive. When he was one, he needed hernia repair surgery. The doctor told us to make sure he was relatively inactive. Right! He tried to push himself up, then would collapse from the pain, and then do it again! He's into Ironman Triathlons and is planning on being a lawyer.

Josh is married to our beautiful daughter-in-law Elizabeth. They gave us our first grandchild.



Susan and Josh, Cozumel, 2004



Our beautiful grand-daughter Arabella
being kissed by Josh and Elizabeth

David

David was our miracle baby. Susan was extremely sick during her pregnancy. We knew this would be her last pregnancy. The doctors always insist on doing their tests. Susan was advised to abort the baby because we were told there would be numerous problems. That is something we would never consider because we both know that it is a baby in a mother's womb from conception, a creation of God.

We prayed for health for our baby and prayed for a miracle from God. David was born January 10, 1995 completely healthy in every way. He does have one little scar on his chest. We like to believe that's where God performed surgery on him.

David has always been our content child. He rarely complained or fussed as a baby. We upgraded from a wind-up swing to a battery operated one when he was born. We had to be careful, because if you placed him in the swing, it was easy to forget about him. (David, mom and I are going out to dinner; we'll be back in a few hours...just kidding).

David was one of my band students for his four years of high school. As of this writing, he is planning on going to college and becoming an engineer.



David 7 and a half weeks, Joshua 4



David Graduation 2013



Austin has always been the funny one.

Austin

Austin Alexander Divine joined us October 24, 1997. We learned what it means to be adopted into the family of God. Austin is adopted. Susan was able to help at his birth. Our love for him is the same as for our biological children. Austin's birth mom's name is Laura. We have been a part of that entire family since he was born, opting for an open adoption. Because of that Austin has the privilege of having three grandmothers.

We never hid anything from him. He often goes to spend a few days with his biological family and has had contact with Laura since he was born. When he was about five, we wondered how

much he knew, so we asked, “Austin, do you know who Laura is?” He kind of shrugged and said, “Yeah, she’s my other mom.” Although an open adoption is not for everyone, I am glad we chose that route. My mom gave up a younger brother of mine for adoption when he was a baby. She regrets that decision and it has cost her a lifetime of grief.

We almost lost Austin when he was about seven months old to a disease called Kawasaki syndrome. They don’t know what causes it. It makes your blood extremely thick. It is treated with very high doses of aspirin. Praise God he came out of that fully recovered. Austin started high school and is very talented in art.



CHAPTER 15
ARMY BAND, FORT LEE, VIRGINIA

“Military justice is to justice what military music is to music.”

- Groucho Marx



My father-in-law Skip Eliason brought Susan nearly twelve hours away to see me during family weekend at basic training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. I didn't fully appreciate what he did until I was older and had a daughter who was dating.
October 1985

When you join the Army Band, they first send you to a course at Little Creek Naval Amphibious Base at a school called the United States Army Element School of Music, or The School of Music (SOM) for short (or as we sometimes affectionately called it *The Pool of Mucus*). It is a decent school. You spend six months studying theory, harmony, jazz, marching, and you play in several ensembles each day. The afternoons were spent doing physical training, military training and practicing. Since I was newly married, I studied hard and advanced out after four months, two months early.

You are always warned about pda – or public display of affection – in the Army. I remember always being a little outside the box. At graduation from the SOM, when the spouses came up to take pictures with us and congratulate us, I put my arms around Susan and gave her a hug and kiss. Rather than confronting me on “pda”, one of the officers present told me, “Way to take charge, soldier!”

From the SOM we went to Fort Lee, Virginia, where we rented our first apartment. It was nice to get settled in as a couple. It was also nice to just be two hours away from home. We found a church – Colonial Heights Assembly of God – now called [Life Church](#). We made many friends there who were in the same life phase that we were in, newly married and having children. We grew in our marriage, grew in our faith, and also started working with the youth group with Pastor Mike Buckley. We were only twenty and nineteen years old, so it may have been too soon for us to work with youth. You have to get beyond caring what they think of you to be effective with them.

The band at Fort Lee was known as the 392nd Army Band. Most of the time working there was great. We had group practices all

day and usually had several hours a day to practice individually. We performed at several graduations each week – Fort Lee was home to the Army Quartermaster School – and probably performed in 20+ parades each year. This was in addition to 40+ sit down formal concerts a year. I began to hone the gift God had given me. I took lessons from Dr. James Holden at Virginia State University. The band often traveled 4-5 hours away, performed, and then traveled back home in the same day. These made for some long days, sometimes leaving at four in the morning and returning at ten pm.

Richard Sadler was my first band commander. He had worked his way up through the ranks as an enlisted soldier, and then became the first black warrant officer in the band program I believe. The Army seemed to be his family. He was one of the first warrant officers to be awarded the rank of CW5. When he retired, he had put almost forty years of service in the Army band. He had some unusual rehearsal techniques. For example, we would rehearse by starting at one rehearsal letter from the end. If “S” were the last rehearsal letter, we would rehearse from S to the end, then R to the end, then Q to the end, etc. You can see how this would become tedious for the band members.

We frequently played for the post retirement ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, the band would sing the old chorus:

Old Soldiers never die, never die, never die. Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.

It was cheesy but different and fun. Like most Army bands, we also played at change of command ceremonies. I remember playing for a change of command for the base general. Because it was such an important commitment, they actually made us rehearse the day before. Remember, this is in Virginia, in the

summer, with temperatures in the 80s/90s and humidity upwards of 90%.

The ceremony was planned for 8:00 am the next morning. After the rehearsal, I happened to be strategically near where the Sergeant Major (the highest enlisted guy on base) and some of the First Sergeants of the units involved were standing. The Colonel in charge of the ceremony told the Sergeant Major that since this was such an important ceremony, instead of the 15 minutes early the troops were usually expected to be in place, he wanted 30 minutes, so have everyone standing in place at 7:30 am. The Sergeant Major told the 1st Sergeants he wanted to see everyone in place by 7:15 am. This info still had several more layers of bureaucracy to go through. By the time it was over, we were all standing there ready for the ceremony at 6:45 am for an 8:00 start!

Mr. David Sanek followed Mr. Sadler. He demanded and received great musical quality from us. He had been a clarinet player in one of the Army select bands in the Washington D.C. area. Fortunately, he had a different style of rehearsing. Mr. Sanek knew how to stand up for the band. Many people outside of our organization tried to control our schedule. Because we worked odd hours, we were awarded "comp time" to make up for that. That means we might work Saturday and Sunday performing, then receive Monday off. The band would receive requests to play on a scheduled day off. Mr. Sanek stood up for us, even though it meant he received some flack. He wasn't trying to turn away gigs, but sometimes the gigs were silly. We once played at a tree planting ceremony. How many organizations get a 40-piece band when they are planting a tree?

Before Mr. Sanek arrived, discipline in the band was a little lax. Most road trips on the way home were drinking contests in the back of the bus. Even though several of us didn't participate, we had to listen to and watch all these people getting drunk on the trip. On one trip, a brand new soldier, who had probably never been away from home, was encouraged to continue to guzzle alcohol. He ended up throwing up severely. He probably should have been brought to the hospital. Someone stayed with him all night in the rehearsal hall to watch over him. I hope he never drank again. I regret that I didn't have the guts to do something more than just be a silent observer. Being bold and courageous is something you get better at with practice. I soon had an opportunity to practice.

There was a Colonel who was in charge of the band. In his speeches to the troops, he often used the Lord's name in vain. This is not unusual in the Army. Hearing that always breaks my heart because of the importance of my faith to me. I actually wrote him a letter saying that I did not appreciate him slandering the Lord. Although I never heard back from him, I hope he took the advice to heart.

We spent from 1986-1989 at Fort Lee, Virginia. It was close enough to Susan's grandmother Nana that she would come and have lunch with us every month. When we left for Japan, we had hopes of returning there someday, but it wasn't meant to be. In 1992, we stopped in for a visit on our way to Colorado. Many of the same people I had worked with were still in the band. As I looked at nametags, I was a bit confused because it seemed I was seeing different last names than the ones I had remembered. It turned out that 2-3 couples had divorced and were married to different people in the band.

This was one of many times in my life that I thanked God for

unanswered prayer. I could not imagine going to work in a group of 40 people where several people were divorced from someone in the group and married to another person in the same group.

I learned many things at Fort Lee and was becoming a better improviser. I started playing tenor sax regularly in the jazz band. Jazz had not been a strong area for me before that.

CHAPTER 16
ARMY BAND, JAPAN

“I loved Japan. I used to read a lot about it when I was a child. And I always wanted to go. And it was delightful. I absolutely loved it. What a smashing place.”

- Billy Connolly



Our home in Camp Zama, Japan

Japan was a great experience. It is such a different country from the United States. I feel like I learned more by living in another country than I did in college classes. You already read about the four months that Susan and I had to spend apart while we were waiting on housing. We got tired of waiting. I found a friend who had a spare bedroom in his Japanese apartment. He allowed Susan, Christine and me to live there with him for several months while we waited for housing to become available. His name was Steve and he was a true gentleman and friend.

At that time, most Japanese apartments did not have central heat. You woke up in the morning and stoked the kerosene heater to warm everything up. The three of us would go to bed with several pajamas/long johns, etc. I wore a knit cap to bed. Christine had on two blanket sleepers. Plus we had several thick blankets on. The inside of the bedroom window was coated in ice in the morning, but hey, it was an adventure.

We finally moved on base and adopted a cat named Silver. Life settled into a routine with taking care of Christine and anticipating the arrival of Josh. It was hard to find a church that we liked. We went to several chapel services on base, but they seemed to be lifeless to us. We went to a gospel service on base. The people there were very judgmental and not very kind. We found Zama Baptist church, but it was the same thing there. I don't know why I felt we had to go to a Sunday morning service, especially since we had found a Sunday evening service we liked.

A missionary and his wife held a Sunday evening service right outside the base. The congregation consisted of a combination of Americans and Japanese. We found true worship and

fellowship there and were a part of that group the entire time we were in Japan. We had a chance to get to know many Japanese people and were welcomed into their homes.

The service was held in English with a translation into Japanese. The man who did the translating had a grown daughter named "Manna." He said it was because she was bread from heaven. Every time I get to the story in the Bible about God sending manna to the Israelites, I chuckle. The Bible says they called it "manna", which means "what is it?" I imagine a father looking down at his newborn daughter and saying, "What is it."

Over the years I have learned many leadership lessons by observing both good and bad leaders. My commander in Japan was a decent guy. He treated everyone fairly. He had one major flaw; he was an alcoholic. He was never drunk on the job, but the joke in the band was that at quitting time, just point him in the direction of the club and let him go. I think that is a sad existence.

I was able to see more of Japan than most Japanese people do. We traveled all over the Tokyo metro area with several concerts every weekend. In addition, we usually traveled out of town for 3-5 days a month with concerts and a parade in our host city. There was occasionally time for sight-seeing, but there were many days we left the base at 3:00 am, traveled all day, got to our hotel about two in the afternoon, then loaded the bus for an evening performance. We were well received everywhere we went. My picture is in hundreds of Japanese family albums. It was cool to be sort of an "ambassador" of the United States.

We often flew to Hiroshima and performed there. The museum

dedicated to those who lost their lives in the atomic bomb explosion is very sad to visit. The history is a little twisted as the plaques and memorials sometimes make the assumption that everyone in Japan was just minding their business when the US sent these bombs.

Every January we went to Sapporo, Hokkaido, which is the northernmost island in Japan, and played for the snow festival. The performances were held on ice stages with the temperatures below freezing. Valves would freeze and ice would cake up on saxophone keys, but it was fun. We also traveled to Okinawa, usually to play for the Army Birthday Ball in June. The weather was warmer there. We had a chance to fly to Okinawa during Christmas one year for a family vacation and stayed at an air force resort on the island.

While in Japan, we took fun day trips at least once a month and had fun with two small kids on these outings. Some favorites were a water park near Tokyo, tangerine or mican picking, and weekends spent at the New Sanno hotel in Tokyo with outings to the zoo, sightseeing in Tokyo, and lots of good food. We also spent a week in Seoul, Korea and had a chance to visit Hong Kong. I took a trip to China to deliver bibles. It was a defining moment for me. We also flew to Italy, where my mom is from. She and my step-dad were assigned there with the Navy at the same time I was assigned to Japan.

Susan climbed Mt. Fuji. I got into bike riding. It was often faster than commuting by car. Although Tokyo was only about 30-40 miles away, it often took 2-4 hours by car, less than two by train. Many people travel mostly by train. Train travel was not very conducive to small children as you got packed in pretty tightly. We both had several opportunities to teach

conversational English to the locals. Christine had a chance to do some modeling for magazines. It was a fun time for her and for Susan.

We were able to save a lot of money in Japan. We thought about staying longer than three years. Right about the time we had to decide, there was a somewhat major earthquake. It wasn't one where buildings were falling, but the house shook for several minutes and some things fell off the wall. We decided that night that three years was enough and began the process to move back to the United States.

We had wanted to go back to Virginia. Colorado was the closest we could get, unless we went to Fort Bragg, which was not a desirable option to us. We chose Colorado, thinking it would be a maximum of three years. We have been here over twenty at the time of this writing.

I had the chance to work with and learn from some really outstanding musicians in Japan.



Getting ready to perform on an ice stage in Sapporo, Japan.
Fellow saxophonists Kevin Flowers and Tony Presnell.



We had many chances to travel in Japan.
This was a sightseeing trip to Seoul, Korea 1990.
James and Christine

Forgive



Family trip to Tokyo Tower, summer 1990.

CHAPTER 17
4TH INFANTRY DIVISION BAND, FORT CARSON,
COLORADO

“The mountains are calling and I must go.”

- John Muir



Summit of Pikes Peak 1993
L to R: Josh, Mimi, Christine, G-Daddy

In 1992, we came to Colorado. We weren't sure what to think of it at first. Apartment occupancy rates were at 98% and apartment prices were rising. The apartments we looked at were in the \$600-\$750 range. When we found out we could buy a house for \$625, we purchased our first house in the Copperfield subdivision.

While waiting for the house to be completed, we lived in an apartment on the corner of Fountain and Chelton. It was a rough neighborhood. We often heard gunshots and on several occasions had someone banging on our door late at night. During the day the area seemed fine. It is still a rough neighborhood. We usually just stayed inside at night.

Christine began going to Venetucci elementary school in the Widefield district. At that time, Security (the town we lived in) had a small town feel. There were many teachers in her school who had been there twenty years or more. The sidewalks would get rolled about at about 8 pm each night; only Hardees, Qwik Inn and Walgreens were open later. Life was simple and fun with two young kids.

I knew that I wanted to get out of the Army. It had been a great opportunity and I learned a lot about music and myself. I had always been somewhat of an entrepreneur and thought I wanted to be self-employed, so we started a personalized book business. To build that, we would often go to craft shows and flea markets on Saturdays to sell our books. That wasn't meant to be and didn't work out.

There was a pervasive attitude in the Fort Carson band that "it's good enough for government work," an attitude that did not sit well with me. Out of the four Army bands I was a part of,

this was the one of lowest quality. (Side note, a few years ago I heard the band and was really impressed with the quality...I am referring to the early 1990s and what we had at the time).

I had a chance to see firsthand the waste there is in any government work. I recall times at Fort Carson when we would have 4-6 weeks at a stretch of showing up at work with no rehearsals and no commitments; we sat there all day “shooting the breeze.” I did some work on college and wish I had done more of that.

In the band, you often had an additional duty such as supply, transportation, or administration. I began working in the Operations department, which handled the details of all of our gigs. One of my earliest responsibilities was typing up acceptance and denial letters to organizations that requested our band. After seeing us deny so many requests when we had these times of not doing anything for weeks at a time, I inquired of my commander why we were turning these down. The answer I received was that if we said “yes”, then they would expect us to be able to do that gig every year. I guess my boss did not like me stirring the waters because for a couple of months after that, much of my typed correspondence was sent back with notes as to how I typed it wrong. There is an Army regulation for correspondence and it specifies how many spaces after periods, after commas and those things. This was in the day before word processing and I had to type these – and retype them – by hand.

My immediate supervisor taught me a lot about leadership – specifically how not to act as a leader. Once we were on a field training exercise – yes the band did these too, we were tasked with security for the communications center – and my squad had been on guard duty and now we were all sleeping. He

woke me up to tell me one of the ropes on our GP medium (a large Army tent) was loose and could I get one of my soldiers to fix it. I told him that since I was awake now, I would just do it myself. It literally took ten seconds. It had taken him more time to come and wake me up than it did to complete the task. None of us were slacking off; we had been on midnight duty.

On another occasion, I asked him if I could take more responsibility in the Operations Section, maybe work on the details of one of our gigs rather than just typing our correspondence. He said that was a great idea and gave me a gig to work on. I had many questions for him, since I had never done that or had any training in that area. He told me not to worry; it's best to learn by jumping in and doing it. So far so good and I could agree with all of that. However, as soon as I made my first mistake, he wrote a negative counseling for me that would go in my "file."

He was someone who liked to write negative counseling statements. He wrote several a month. Everything in the Army has a special form, including counseling statements. The Army form can be used for both positive and negative counseling. For a time, when this supervisor would write a negative counseling for someone, I would write that same soldier a positive counseling for something he/she did and make sure that was placed in their file too. Today, I try to maintain a 9 positive to 1 negative ratio in my interactions with my students.

We had the opportunity to perform in many small towns throughout southern Colorado. In the summer, we often had to take part in up to three Change of Command ceremonies a day. These were tough because you had to stand at attention in the summer heat and listen to the same boring speeches (I bet

there's an Army form for that, too).

In anticipation of getting out of the Army, I made my first recording and began scheduling gigs for after my May 1996 departure . Ironically, after wanting so desperately to be assigned to the band in Heidelberg, Germany for almost my entire ten-year career, I received orders to go to Heidelberg. This was a tempting offer and Susan and I debated the pluses and minuses of that. Since I only had a few months left on my Army contract, I had to either reenlist or sign what's called a "Declination of Continued Service" statement, which basically means that by not accepting the orders and not reenlisting, you realize that you can't change your mind later. Ultimately I chose to get out of the Army and began my self-employment years.



CHAPTER 18
101ST ARMY BAND

“The man that hath no music in himself, Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils.”

- William Shakespeare



I started my career in a Reserve band, the 80th Division Training Band in Richmond, Virginia. It was a decent band with THE BEST leader I ever had, SSG Mohamed Muhajid (we called him Sergeant Mo). I ended my career in a National Guard Band. For those of you who don't know, being in the reserves or National Guard is like being in the Army part-time. You have a normal job and train for the Army, usually one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer. The basic difference between the reserves and the National Guard is that the governor of your state has authority and control over you as a National Guard member.

After leaving the Army in 1996, I joined the 101st Colorado National Guard Band. By far it was the best Army band I was involved in. This is ironic because in the National Guard, you only meet one weekend a month and two weeks in the summer, so technically we had less time to practice than the full time bands did.

The 101st did not have a spot for a sax player, but they invited me to join them as a clarinetist. I agreed and began to practice clarinet after not having played it since sixth grade. It was a challenge. One of the first pieces we performed was Armenian Dances, a very challenging song by Alfred Reed. I eventually got better on clarinet and was able to hold my own.

We traveled throughout the state of Colorado each summer on our two-week tour. Two highlights were spending a week at the Adams State College campus when Dr. Reid was there and spending a week as the rehearsal band at the CU-Boulder Conducting Symposium. I learned a lot about conducting by watching one of the best, Dr. Alan McMurray, recently retired.

I played saxophone in the jazz band and Dixieland band. Dixieland is a blast. Our leader was Lance Christensen, who has a ton of sheet music and great banjo, trumpet and singing chops (at least singing in a Dixieland band, which is different than singing in other groups). From 2000-2005 I had the opportunity to perform with the band at the [Sacramento Jazz Jubilee](#), a great event for jazz aficionados. You put together thousands of people who love jazz, great outdoor venues, great musicians who show up to play and find a professional sound guy ready to assist them and you can't go wrong. I recommend you go if you haven't already.

That's also where I met Dr. Ed Cannava, who was there with his Dixie Dawgs from Arapahoe High School, where Ed taught for many years before retiring. Ed has been a mentor to me as I have developed as a teacher. He continues to teach a high school level Dixie band even in retirement.

The best thing about being in the 101st was the great people I had a chance to make music with. They were dedicated to their craft and many have become life-long friends. A few years ago, the 101st had a reunion concert where retired members were invited to come and perform with the band. One young soldier commented that all of us retired guys seemed to be smiling (I retired from the group in 2006). We replied that it was a great opportunity to get reacquainted with some old friends, make some great music with outstanding musicians, and we didn't have to load the truck after the concert. That's about as close to heaven on earth as you can get.

CHAPTER 19
COLLEGE

“My mother said I must always be intolerant of ignorance but understanding of illiteracy. That some people, unable to go to school, were more educated and more intelligent than college professors.”

- Maya Angelou

You may wonder why I put my college years after what seems like a major portion of my life? College was not something I went to right after high school; it has been a life-long process for me.

When I was in the Army band at Fort Lee, I discovered the post's Education Center. You could go there to be advised on your future as well as take CLEP tests for free .CLEP tests are a sort of college equivalency exam that – if passed – some colleges will give you credit for those classes. Promotions in the Army were based on a point system. You earned points for your physical fitness (PT) test scores, points for Army schooling, points for your interview, points for awards, and points for college classes. The good news was that the Army would count passed CLEP tests the same as college credits. Besides my PT test, this was the fastest way for me to earn points.

I started taking as many tests as I had some knowledge in and passed most of them. I ended up with 50-60 credits/points. An interesting government waste side note...I would often show up to the education center if we had an early lunch (ten or ten thirty). In the Army, you had to sign in to every office you visited. I was often the only one who had signed in (the office opened at eight). When I would arrive, there were three counselors with their offices open. They were usually reading the paper. I filed that information in the back of my mind.

Once when I arrived to take a CLEP test, the counselor asked me why I was taking so many tests. I told him that for now I wanted to get as many promotion points as I could, and that later I would enroll in college and hope to get credit for all those tests. He stated that was not the purpose of the CLEP

tests and that I was “wasting” government money by doing so. I was young and not always tactful at delivering the truth, so I mentioned that wasn’t it wasteful to hire three counselors who often sat there for several hours with no clients to help. He pointed out that there were bookshelves of materials behind him that needed to be digested. I pointed out that the only digesting I saw was of the daily newspaper. I continued to take CLEP tests.

Since I pointed out an education center that was wasteful, I want to point out one that was wonderful and not wasteful. When I was stationed in Japan, the education center was always filled with people. One lady in particular – who was the wife of one of the band members – was always challenging you with statements like, “Why are you only taking two classes; I noticed you took a semester off, why; When are you expecting to finish your degree?” She and the others in that education office did what the ones at Fort Lee should have done. I can’t remember her name, but she had grown up in Poland and really valued education.

I eventually did sign-up for college and while in the Army started working on an associate’s degree in accounting. I cannot see myself as an accountant. Although I did fine and passed all my tests with an A or B, I don’t think I ever fully understood accounting. It does not fit my personality or gifts. I chose it because I thought it would be a good way to make money. That is usually a poor way to choose your life’s work, or even to pick your major.

After earning an accounting degree, I found a program through St. Joseph’s College of Maine where I could continue my studies while still working full time. This time I went for a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration. That is a great degree with

many purposes. I have been able to use that knowledge during my self-employment years and also in teaching, especially marketing. The degree was through St. Joseph's distance education department. At the time, course work was mailed in and exams were taken with an approved proctor.

Because of all the CLEP exams I had taken and my associates in accounting, I only needed about 15 credits for my bachelor's degree. However, St. Joseph's required that you take at least 39 credits from them, so I had the chance to take a lot of elective classes. I chose mostly education classes. I knew since I was 19 that I wanted to be a teacher. In 1998 I was offered a part-time teaching job. The requirement was that you had to have a bachelor's degree. I was still six credits short, but they agreed to hire me as long as I finished those six credits. In May of 1999 I was awarded a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration.

I love learning and knew that I wanted to continue. Since St. Joseph's was working so well for me, I continued in their Master's degree program in Educational Leadership. I figured this would open up opportunities for me if I wanted to go into administration. I took two extremely boring classes and had nine more to go. As I looked at those nine classes, I realized they all looked boring to me. A lot of being a principal involves understanding all the laws and regulations that go along with it; not my strength area and not interesting to me.

At about the same time, I started looking into teaching in a public school. The private school where I taught band did not require a teaching license. The job there went from part time to full time. As I looked into public school teaching, I realized that the public schools didn't care about my experience in music or

my Army training in music. “The License” was all-important there. When I would inquire of area colleges as to how I could earn my teaching license, the answer was always “take two years off of teaching and come to our school.” That was not an option for me.

I finally found an alternative teaching license option for people who already had a bachelor’s degree and wanted their teaching license. It was a pretty rigorous process. You work as a teacher for a year as you complete your studies. I was already working as a teacher, so I stayed at my same school, but many of my classmates started working at mostly rural schools where they filled a need at the school and earned their teaching license at the same time. In July 2005, I earned my provisional license to teach K-12 music in the state of Colorado from Western State College (now Western State Colorado University).

As part of that program, we had weekly assignments that were things we actually implemented and reported on in the classroom. It was a great experience, but also very challenging. At the time, our family home had a living room that served as the TV room, my private lessons room and our computer room. My wife Susan would take the kids to McDonalds on Wednesday nights when they had 29-cent hamburgers so I could study. One time she came home earlier than expected. As soon as they returned home, everything left my brain and I sat there crying. Poor Susan didn’t know how to comfort me. I couldn’t explain why I was crying except that it was a stressful year.

After gaining the job at Falcon High School, I knew I still needed to further my education. The better you get at something, the more you realize how bad you are. I enrolled in Colorado State University-Pueblo’s Master’s in Education with

a concentration in Music program. It didn't really fit my needs. Only about one third of it was music related. I felt I needed to fill that gap with some formal music training, especially since I had no degree in music at all, even though I have been employed since 1985 in the music field.

There are many great summer programs out there, but the cost of many is pretty steep. I finally found a three-summer master's degree program at Southwestern Oklahoma State University (www.swosu.edu) in Weatherford, Oklahoma that was affordable and of great quality. The program ran for eight weeks each summer, with classes on Monday and Wednesday, so I commuted each week Sunday afternoon and returned home Wednesday night. I tripled my knowledge during my time there under the tutelage of Dr. Widen, Dr. Talley, Dr. South and Dr. Chambers. In July of 2012, I earned my M.M. in Music Education.

What's my next step? Since I would like to teach at the college level someday, I am applying for Boston University's Doctor of Musical Arts program. I am a life-long learner! In addition to the formal education I've listed in this chapter, I attend 3-4 conferences a year. I plan on attending the Midwest Band & Orchestra clinic, Dan Miller's Innovate Conference and Kent Julian's Speak It Forward Conference.

For about eight years I have been enrolled in Automobile University. What is that, you ask? Every day on my commute to work, rather than listening to the depressing news, I feed information into my mind from various podcasts. I do listen to the news for about ten minutes twice a week. I encourage you to enroll in A.U. too.

CHAPTER 20 THE SELF-EMPLOYED YEARS

“If you're an entrepreneur and you think that the president makes a difference to your business, you should stay at your current job.”

- Guy Kawasaki



My first two CDs

I left the Army in 1996 and embarked on a career as a self-employed musician. It was an exciting time filled with lots of learning and reliance upon God. I realized I probably wasn't meant to be completely self-employed, but I have no regrets about this time.

In many ways, my self-employed time started when I was about six years old. I remember sitting in front of the Base Exchange in Naples and selling my old comic books. The tooth fairy would give me 25 cents for my tooth. I would usually buy a comic book and a candy bar and still have five cents change. When I got tired of the comics, I would sell them. When I was about eight, I would take out trash in the apartment complexes near where I lived. Most people payed me a quarter. I also babysat and did yard work. I was never without at least a couple of dollars in my pocket. I started teaching my first private lessons on the saxophone at age 17. I was the cheapest AND I would meet you wherever you wanted the lessons.

About six months before I left the Army, I recorded my first cassette (no eight tracks for me). Like most musicians, I rushed through this project. We all think the same way...if I can just get my music "out there", then people will want to buy it. I see it in young musicians all the time and I try to give them advice that I didn't have. In the first six months of my cassette being out, I sold a whopping three copies. I think I could have spent just a little more time getting it right.

I decided my niche would be churches. I started contacting churches to schedule a ministry date. It was difficult at first. Pastors wanted to know where you have been (nowhere at the time) and who would provide a reference for you (ditto). Two pastors I owe a lot to - they were willing to take a chance on

someone new and open the doors to their church, first for several songs, then for an entire service – were pastors Bob Cook (originally pastoring in Boulder, then district superintendent for the Assemblies of God Rocky Mountain council, then president of Assembly of God colleges, now pastoring again in Colorado) and Jim Hagan, pastor of Friendship Assembly of God in Colorado Springs.

I often felt disillusioned, rejected and disheartened. It was during those times I learned to rely on God. In any field where you are self-employed, there's a lot of rejection. For example, here's the process I used for scheduling churches. Call 20 churches to get the name of the person responsible for scheduling music; send them all a letter of introduction. Follow-up a week or so later with a call asking if they would like a CD. About ten of them want the CD; send the CD. Call back in a week or two and ask if they want to schedule a ministry date. One of those ten would schedule right away; one or two others would schedule after following up some more, sometimes even a year or two later. You can see that you get one yes for 19 nos.

I would go to the churches for a love offering. This means the church would take up a collection and give it to me at the conclusion of the service. Since I was new at this and since many of the churches were quite small, the love offerings were often rather small. My mistake was that I needed to depend on that money. Looking back I should have taken at least a part time job doing something else. I eventually did start working part-time delivering pizzas.

God was faithful despite my ignorance. At the time, we had a mortgage payment of \$650. That was our only bill, besides the usual things like food and utilities. Our mortgage payment

coupons came in a book that was issued once a year. Because that was the most money we needed to come up, and it seemed like one could always come up with \$20 for groceries, as soon as I had \$650 accumulated, I would send in a payment. At our worst financially, we were actually six months ahead on our mortgage. We never went hungry.

Sometimes God sends difficulty our way so that we can find what He really has for us. Dave moved in across the street from us. He was a principal at a local private school, The Colorado Springs School. He knew I was a musician. When a part-time band teacher position opened up, I jumped at the chance to do it. It was just two classes and was something I could do and continue my self-employment too.

The interesting thing is that I thought I would never teach band. Many of my Army Band buddies were former band teachers and they always talked about the difficulties they had. I realize that they were never meant to be band teachers. If the position at CSS had been full time, I wouldn't have taken it. I found that I loved to teach! I continued in music ministry and teaching part time. The teaching job grew from two classes my first year, to three classes my second year, and then looked like it would grow into a full-time job. I had a decision to make. I chose the teaching and cut way back on music ministry.

I am still partially self-employed, playing and speaking 40-50 times a year at churches, schools and community events. For now the balance between a full time job of teaching and part-time self-employment seems to be working. I have someone who has partnered with me. John T. works full time at a local ministry and helps me schedule dates at churches. To schedule a date, contact John, john@jazzysaxman.com.

CHAPTER 21 I FOUND MY TRUE CALLING, TEACHING

“I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and that there are as few as there are any other great artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.”

- John Steinbeck



MY FIRST FOURTH GRADE BAND

Don't get me wrong, I love performing music, and for some people, that's their calling. I knew since I was nineteen years old that I would end up in teaching. All the years in the Army band and as a self-employed musician were preparing me for my time as a teacher. It's a calling, and if you get into it for the money or for a job, that's the wrong reason.

I loved my first teaching job at The Colorado Springs School. The teachers there were excited to teach. Most of them had significant experience in a field related to their teaching. Very few had a teaching license, which is no guarantee that you will be a good teacher anyway. Hela Robran was my mentor teacher. When she called to remind me about teacher orientation and to say she was excited about working with me, it made my day. I was looking forward to my first day on the job.

CSS had an unusual fiscal year that results in teachers getting their first paychecks at the end of July, about 4-6 weeks before you even begin teaching there. I had two unusual things happen to me before I started working there. 1) When I was filling out my employment paperwork, the previous band teacher came in to ask why she had not received her July pay. It was at that moment that she was informed she would not be returning. That was poor leadership practice on the part of my first boss. 2) My first paycheck bounced, making me wonder what I was getting into. It turned out that the school shifted all the funds for payroll into a separate account each month. For some reason it was a couple of cents short. Since I was the last one to cash my check, the account was short and was denied.

I loved working with kids, seeing the excitement in the fourth graders faces every time they learned a new note. Fourth grade

band had about 18 kids. I also had a middle school band with 18 kids. That was my entire teaching load my first year. Remember, I was still performing full time.

Like most new teachers, I knew nothing about classroom discipline. Middle school students will eat you alive if you let them. The first time anybody even stepped into my room was mid-December. Although I had been a musician my entire life, at that point I had no teacher training or training in music pedagogy, although I had been teaching lessons since I was 17. When an administrator came in to evaluate me, he did have a lot of good advice that I was able to incorporate. I wish I had that advice in September.

The students and I all made it through that first year. I became a student of classroom discipline. I started reading and implementing everything I could about the subject. The two best books I found were “Positive Classroom Discipline” and “The First Days of School” which is by Harry Wong.

My second year, a fifth grade band was added. However, my middle school band dropped to 11 students. I think it is sometimes normal for a group to drop in size when there is new leadership. This happens in churches too. It helps if one has a mentor to let you know that’s normal. I did not have a mentor in the music education field at that time.

As a person with a high emotional IQ – most of us in the arts are wired that way – I tended to deliver my discipline in an emotionally charged way. Through observing one of my coworkers – a teacher named Amos White who also coached at the school – I learned to take the emotion out. He would deliver a detention to a student for some infraction, then immediately go and play a game of basketball with the student. He was a

favorite among the students despite delivering a lot of consequences.

Another teacher who influenced me a lot was Barb White. She taught fourth grade. She coached and mentored me in many ways, plus she placed great value on the importance of a music education. Despite band being voluntary, we eventually encouraged kids so much that all the fourth graders except one or two would sign up for band. My third year, I had about 30 in fourth grade band, 26 in fifth grade band, and was back up to about twenty in middle school band. I also started teaching a music appreciation class to high school students. By the next year, almost all of the fourth and fifth graders took band and middle school was up to 35+ students, where it remained. We eventually also had a small high school band.

As much as people try to deny that there are politics involved in a private school, it is present. The school depended on fundraising and donations for their expenses, especially capital outlays. If one parent donated \$1,000 and another donated a million, the latter would often receive special treatment, especially as it related to discipline for their children. On the other hand, in public schools we often are too nice to students and their parents. If kids don't want to be there, we should let them go.

In a private school, when someone wasn't meeting the standard set by the school, there was a meeting with the parents, the student and administration. A contract was often drawn up about what the expectations should be. Extra help and resources were offered and a deadline was set. Most of the time, students rose to the expectations. Sometimes we had to let a student go. That is something we should be allowed to do

in the public schools too.

As the bands continued to grow, I realized that The Colorado Springs School did not value music education as much as I did. We came to a time where we had to part. In my seven years there, not a single student wanted to pursue a career related to music. Those students who did have a strong passion for music usually left CSS for the local public school system – Cheyenne Mountain, which has a very strong music program.

I appreciate the opportunity I had at CSS from 1998-2005 to hone the craft of teaching, learn more about myself and earn a paycheck doing something I loved. I hope my comments about CSS are not taken as something bad. It's a school where I would send my own kids. Many students who have failed elsewhere have thrived there. They do a great job of creating a community where learning can happen. A description a colleague made of CSS fits the environment there perfectly. **At other schools, students go to be taught. At CSS, students go to learn.**

No work place is perfect. Sometimes we move on because we need to grow. I used to be bothered by the moving on process, especially when I lost a boss I truly respected. I have come to see that the people who move on usually go and do huge things in their new environment. In 2005, it was time for me to move on.

CHAPTER 22
FALCON HIGH SCHOOL

“There are two kinds of teachers: the kind that fill you with so much quail shot that you can't move, and the kind that just gives you a little prod behind and you jump to the skies.”

- Robert Frost



I let CSS know in February that I planned on leaving at the end of the 2004-2005 school year. Everyone said I was crazy for letting them know before I had a job lined up. I felt that – since I knew I was leaving – I wanted to give them as much time as possible to find a new band teacher. CSS did well. Brent Moorhead has been teaching there since 2005. He has taken the band to new heights.

My job search began shortly after informing CSS that I would be leaving. I was working full time, working on my teacher certification and job-hunting all at the same time. All in all, I applied to about 25-30 schools, had six interviews and three job offers. I turned down two job offers; they just didn't seem like the right spot for me. One was in Fort Meyers, Florida; the second was in Wray, Colorado. After turning down the second offer, there was silence for several weeks; no interviews, no schools seemed interested. For a short time, it seemed like I had made a mistake turning those offers down.

On a day of intense feeling of desperation – and after checking the D-49 website several times a week for several months with no postings – I decided to check again and noticed the posting for Falcon HS. I applied and received an interview soon after. About three weeks later I was offered the job and accepted.

I came to Falcon with a plan of a three-year commitment. The Falcon band program was not that great when I first arrived. I was the 7th or 8th teacher in as many years. When you have turnover like that, it is very hard to get a program developed. Many of my colleagues thought I was committing career suicide by accepting the position at Falcon. It had become known as a revolving door in the music education field.

The first two years at Falcon HS were really difficult. The first year, I had two bands – one with 22 students and one with 26 students. I also had an orchestra, a guitar class (I had never played guitar before), a jazz band and also taught a freshman seminar class. There was very little discipline within the band. As I began to set limits and expectations, I lost students who didn't seem to care (that was ok) but I also lost some of the best students who just didn't have the patience to see the program grow (those things take time). Once again, this is a normal process in many teams and organizations. This time I had some great mentors to help me through the process, specifically Ed Cannava (retired from Arapahoe HS) and Ken Ovrebo (retired from Canon City).

The bands and orchestra grew each year. By my 2nd year, we had three band groups. The quality and size were going up. I still wasn't sure whether I would stay after three years, but I had made a commitment in my mind and was honoring that. The third year is when I saw a huge jump. We also moved into a nice new building that year with a great auditorium. Things improved so much that I decided I might stay. I have just completed my eighth year at Falcon. I now have a total of about 110 students in three bands, an orchestra, a guitar class that usually has upwards of 60 students, and a marching band.

Teaching at Falcon has been a huge opportunity for me to grow as a teacher. I have also learned many leadership lessons by observing both good and bad leaders. The fall of 2013 – as I started my 9th year at Falcon – I was on my 5th principal. I know there will be many more opportunities to grow and learn in the future.

ESOPHAGUS 1 DISCOGRAPHY

Over The Rainbow 2013; digital mini-album; Over The Rainbow, Amazing Grace, Oh Happy Day, Blessed Assurance, Flowing Water at Sunset

Give Me Jesus 2012; digital single

Saxophone Recital DVD 2012

As The Deer Pants/There is None Like You 2012; Digital single

What A Wonderful World 2011

*Here Come The RoughRiders; 2006; 101st Army Band
RoughRiders Dixieland Band*

Kumbaya; 2002; released digitally 2010

Jammin; 2001; 101st Army Band RoughRiders Dixieland Band

Aspire!; 2000; 101st Army Band

A Saxy Christmas; 2000

Holy Saxophone; 1996 (some songs included on What A Wonderful World)

Fourth Infantry Division Band; 1996

Tribute; 1995 (Army Band)

*Make His Praises Glorious; First Assembly of God, Va. Beach, VA;
1986*

ESOPHAGUS 2 THE MIC IS ALWAYS ON

As a teacher, I often hear some of my fellow teachers say something along the lines of, "What I do in my own time is my own business." I take issue with that statement. Those who are in the public eye - teachers, business leaders, pastors, and politicians - have a **greater** responsibility to set the example. Just like a public speaker, we need to live as if the **mic is always on.**

ESOPHAGUS 3 THE 80% RULE

Many people suffer from inaction and miss out on God's best for them. They could overcome this by following what's called the 80% rule.

If you wait until you are 100% sure of everything, you will accomplish nothing. Think about when you were deciding to get married. Were you 100% sure you would get a yes? If you were on the receiving end, were you 100% sure you would be asked? No, but I bet you were at least 80% sure.

Pray, seek wise counsel, and then as long as you're not doing anything illegal or immoral, proceed when 80% sure.

ESOPHAGUS 4 THE SHEEP, THE SHEEPDOG AND THE WOLVES

I recently went through a trying time at work. A friend shared this story with me, which he attributes to a speech he heard by a Colonel. I am adapting the story slightly. There are three types of people in the world: The Sheep, The Sheepdogs and The Wolves.

Most people are sheep. They live a somewhat normal life...they go to work, do what they're told, pay their taxes, raise their families, watch TV, hang out on weekends. Basically doing life but not creating any waves. Most of them think life is great until - dun dun dun - the wolves attack.

The wolves are all around us. Some of them are obvious, like the criminals we see in the news each day. Some of them are not as obvious; they often occupy leadership positions in business, government, education and religion. The wolves are out to steal, kill and destroy. The wolves are on the prowl for the weak sheep, those who have fallen away from the herd, those who are scared, those suffering from an injury. The wolves are out to fulfill their own needs and care nothing for the sheep.

Then we have the sheepdogs. The sheepdogs have a mission...protect the sheep from the wolves (and sometimes from the sheep themselves)! The sheepdogs round up the sheep, promoting unity. This makes it much harder for the wolves to attack (the wolves like wounded and solitary sheep because at heart, the wolves are cowards). The sheepdogs often bark in warning to keep the sheep together. The sheepdogs sometimes have to inflict pain through a nip on the legs of the sheep. When compared to being eaten by wolves, this pain is minimal but necessary. The sheepdogs often seem to be all alone. Like the wolves, you can find many sheepdogs

in leadership positions in business, government, education and religion. However, some of these people **should** be sheepdogs, but are actually sheep being controlled by the wolves. These can be more dangerous than the wolves.

But...something strange happens in this scenario...Even though the lives of the sheep are dependent upon the sheepdogs, the sheep often **hate** the sheepdogs. Some sheepdogs look like wolves; they have sharp teeth and claws and are always barking, but it's to protect the sheep! The sheepdogs often get into terrible fights with the wolves **to protect the sheep**.

Over them all is the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. He gave His life for the sheep. Many of them hate Him too. Many of them reject Him. He made the sheepdogs. He gave the sheepdogs their mission because He cares for the sheep even more than the sheepdogs do.

My friend made my day by sharing this story. He said he saw me as a sheepdog. How about you? Are you a sheep, a sheepdog or a wolf? Maybe you're a sheep controlled by a wolf? Have you met the Shepherd? Share your experiences with me as a sheep or sheepdog; wolves - you cowards - go away. And you sheep and sheepdogs, the Good Shepherd warned us that the wolves often come to us in sheep's clothing.



First home we bought, Colorado Springs, May 1993



Visiting Italian relatives, summer 1991
Christine 3, Joshua 6 months, Pinelli Family