





# *Living Inside The Testimony*

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A TESTIMONY OF GOD'S AMAZING LOVE AND ABUNDANT BLESSINGS

*Betty Collier*



CrossBooks™  
1663 Liberty Drive  
Bloomington, IN 47403  
www.crossbooks.com  
Phone: 1-866-879-0502

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## *Dedications From My Heart*



**This book is dedicated to My Dear Heavenly Father.**

Without Him, none of this would have ever been possible.

**To the absolute love of my life whom I love “all the much”  
and our two precious boys who are an extension of my heart.**

**William F. Collier**

**Jordan William Collier & Brandon William Collier**

**To my beloved mother, Thelma Beard**

**Proverbs 3:5–6**

**My Favorite Scripture**

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,  
and lean not unto thine own understanding.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

**My Pastor and Church Family**

**New Covenant Outreach Ministries (Memphis, TN)**

**Bishop Aron Hopkins, Pastor and Founder**

It was my original desire to share my testimony at church (and only at church) about my three-year drama, the long house-hunt dilemma, the dream home saga, and ultimately how it had been God’s plan for my life since the very beginning. All I wanted to do was share a very simplistic account of how we were blessed to build this home, but somehow my testimony at church has grown into something much bigger than I could have ever imagined. We know what testimonies are—words of encouragement and inspiration. As the Bible says in **Revelation 12:11**, *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”* To paraphrase as we so often do in church, **WE ARE OVERCOME BY THE WORDS OF OUR TESTIMONIES.**

So, here is my testimony.



## *Why Am I Really Writing This Book?*

As I was working on a personal DVD project with Kartriece Ward, a friend who owns Visions Promotional Agency, she mentioned that her father asked what I planned to do with it. I had asked her to use the pictures I took of our dream home while under construction to create a DVD—a permanent memory of our prolonged home-building adventures. She was going to add audio to the pictures, including a song and my recorded testimony that I had previously shared at church. I wanted a keepsake to document the three-year journey we took to arrive at our dream home, but it started growing and turned into something much more. Before I knew it, I had gone back to middle school in the 1970s. I also decided to include footage from our amazing experience in New York City in 2001 which included an appearance on ABC's *Good Morning America* just a week prior to the terrorists attack on 9/11. The DVD had suddenly turned into something much bigger than I, and what unfolded is what you see now.

Kartriece sent me an e-mail telling me this testimony was “meant to be heard by more than our circle of family and friends.” She said my testimony was “a sense of hope and encouragement during such a time as this...It’s an amazing thing what one willing person’s boldness to stand up and proclaim the goodness of God can do in the hearts of His people and the sense of hope it can bring.... It can help form thoughts and seeds of faith...” She felt sure God would lead and guide me through the entire process so those the Lord wanted me to witness to would hear or see me through whatever platforms He used.... I noticed she had typed platforms with a plural, red letter “s” at the end. Hmmmm.... platforms.... I had not thought about it before. I never (never ever) desired or planned to write a book, but now things had suddenly and dramatically changed.

She sent the e-mail January 9, 2009, and I began working on the book the very next morning. What started out as a personal home video had suddenly become my new obsession—my passion to share my “personal” testimony with the world, by whatever means the Lord would see fit to use it. It wasn’t about me or the house anymore. It was now my divinely inspired mission to share my testimony with everyone who would listen. I will trust in the Lord and watch Him bring this book to life, for anyone who can and will believe. I am writing this book well aware that not everyone will share my faith, but I am sharing my faith with everyone who chooses to believe.



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## CHAPTER I

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# *In the Beginning*

AUGUST, 1976–MAY 16, 1983

Elvis died. It's funny how certain things can greatly impact some people while they don't impact others at all, or only very insignificantly. I remember I was at cheerleading practice when we heard about his death. Living in Memphis, Tennessee, where he died made it even more newsworthy, although it was indeed world news. Most of the cheerleaders started crying, but I wasn't distraught like they were. It's always interested me how you remember the smallest details during life-changing moments, like where you were when certain historical events happened—such as when President Kennedy or Dr. King were assassinated, or when the terrorists attacked America on September 11. My memory actually isn't that good at all, and for me to suddenly recall so much about my past and write about it is quite remarkable. My sister Tricia often tells me I have selective amnesia. If it doesn't relate to me personally, and sometimes even when it does, I have a hard time remembering details. Not only do I remember *this* whole story because it's true, but I finally realize that it really *is* a story to tell, and all of it has brought me to this point. I'll begin with a flashback to August 1976, when I started middle school.

I saw my future husband for the first time at the age of eleven in sixth grade at Shadowlawn Middle School a year before Elvis died. William and I had both grown up in the same part of town, rural Shelby County, Tennessee. He lived only about two miles from me, but we had gone to different elementary

schools, so our paths had never crossed before 1976. Although our classes were across the hallway from each other in sixth grade, we basically didn't know the other existed, except when passing each other in the hallway. Even then, we were simply a blur in a sea of faces.

It wasn't until two years later in eighth grade that we finally acknowledged each other. He was a basketball player, and I was a cheerleader, but it wasn't love at first sight by any means. Chris Ellis, a boy on the basketball team with William, had pointed me out to him one day and asked him if he liked me. That was the first seed planted. He was so into basketball and how good he was that he never noticed me on the sidelines, but after Chris pointed me out, he started looking at me ... and before I knew it, one thing led to another and we started talking on the phone. I still wonder how he got my phone number.

As they say, the rest is history. We were just kids talking on the phone at first, somewhat attracted to each other in eighth grade at the age of thirteen and fourteen. Basketball and cheerleading became much more interesting after this grand revelation that *he* liked me. So of course, I liked him back. I pointed him out to my mother at our sports banquet at the end of the year, and I remember her exact words: "So that's the little boy you've been talking to on the phone." After school was out for the summer, we continued talking on the phone. On one hot afternoon, he rode his bike to my house with his friend Willie Blevins. I think that was the only time I saw him the entire summer, even though we were only two miles apart.

Bartlett High School, August 1979, things intensified. The attraction grew, and we had more freedom in high school to hang out together. He would just appear at my next class, and we'd talk outside the hallway. He was always around, and we had a lot of fun together. He played freshman football in addition to basketball that year, and I was a cheerleader. I was on the homecoming court, and quite naturally, my "boyfriend" escorted me. We had definitely become a couple in ninth grade, and then we fell in love—deeply, madly, and profoundly in love, as much as fourteen-year-olds can, anyway.

Everyone remembers their *first* love. But how many actually marry them? And of those who get married, how many secretly start writing a book about it without telling them? William is not a very outspoken or public person, and he doesn't like to tell people "his business." I doubt if he wants our fourteen-year-old son to know that we were his age in ninth grade when we had our first kiss under the breezeway during one of the varsity football games. (Now that I think about it, I doubt if our parents know either.) But after all, it is

part of my testimony too, so hopefully Jordan won't get any ideas. And if he does, I will trust that the Lord knows what he's doing...

So, here we were, really in love. However, my immature, moody, and temperamental boyfriend didn't quite know how to behave. He would probably say the same thing about me, but he's not the one writing the book. During our first year as official boyfriend and girlfriend he would frequently "break up" with me, and then come crawling back all pitiful and sad. He did it one time too many, so the last time he did it, I didn't take him back. We had broken up permanently!

Well, if it was actually permanent, then there would be no book because we would not have gotten married. I should say I thought it was permanent because he was just too moody (and still is ... sorry, William, but it's the truth). For the remainder of high school, we were on-again, off-again. William and I didn't appear to be headed for marriage, but the Lord already knew what was to come. I watched William. William watched me. I started liking someone else, and he eventually did too (but I won't mention their names). He went to the prom with someone else, and so did I.

Our sophomore year came. There was this big basketball game that year when we played West Memphis, Arkansas, and the star player was Keith Lee (who went on to lead the University of Memphis basketball team to the NCAA Final Four in 1985). But this was 1981, Keith's senior year in high school, when they came to Bartlett. You should have seen William play! He was awesome. I think it was the most exciting game he had ever played. I was so excited. He was so cute, and so good. I'm sure some of the other boys on the team thought they were just as good as William, but in my mind, he was absolutely wonderful. I can still see his tall, slender body (in those short shorts they used to wear in the early 1980s—a flashback to Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson) making those jump shots, slick moves, and magnificent plays. He played against other boys that went on to play college basketball, but he didn't play after high school. I think he became disinterested in school, and surprisingly, he even lost his competitive love for basketball by the time he was a senior. He still played, but his heart just wasn't in it anymore, so he never tried to pursue a college scholarship and showed no desire to play college basketball. He was actually good enough to be on that University of Memphis Final Four Team with Keith Lee. But a future in basketball was not the Lord's plans for William, although the Lord certainly did have "a plan" for him.

There were times when we thought we would get back together, but it never worked out. Before we could even mend things, we would give up again. I was still a cheerleader, but it sure was hard to cheer for him after we broke up. I just had to pretend. He really was an outstanding basketball player, but how do you cheer for your ex-boyfriend? When we were on, he'd wink at me during the games. But when we were off, he ignored my presence.

Most of the kids we hung out with at school knew about our saga. He wanted me back, but I wouldn't take him. They'd ask me why I wouldn't give him another chance, but I thought it just wasn't worth the heartache and drama. Remember, he was the one who broke up with me, so I simply wasn't going down that road with him anymore. He even sent me a ring via one of our mutual friends, Diane Tate, but I told her to give it back to him. It's really funny now, but I think he bought it at the Mid-South Fair. (I would later sell him my own engagement ring when I was working in the jewelry department at Service Merchandise, so it took him a while to figure out how to give a girl a ring. I must admit he has matured quite nicely though, and I do have some bedazzling diamond upgrades now.) High school romance can be a funny thing when you think back on it. But at the time, it was really intense, and somewhat sad. I thought I had gotten over him, but as you can see, I never did.

Time passed, and our high school days were coming to an end. It was May of 1983, and graduation was soon approaching. But due to our on-again, off-again status, we were off at that time. Actually, it appeared that we were definitely off—forever. We were about to go our separate ways. I was headed to college, and honestly, I don't know where William was headed. He had mentioned going to California where his sister Bobbie lived to perhaps try to get a job on the oil island where his brother-in-law Leon worked. I don't know if he had even asked Bobbie and Leon about going out there to California, but that's what he told me. It appeared that we were separating for good, without ever really working things out or gaining some closure, and with some unfinished business that neither of us could get over.

But in order for this to be a testimony, you know the Lord has got to be in this story. He had other plans for us that we were both unaware of at the time. We would not be separated. In fact, we would be drawn so close together that we never separated again. Till death do us part, and death almost did.

## CHAPTER 2

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# *The Hit over the Head*

MAY 16–29, 1983

When you are going about your daily life, business as usual, you never know what will happen to get your attention, or should I say, what the Lord will allow to happen to get your attention. It was time for high school graduation, and I was very excited about getting out for the summer before starting college. I had been awarded several college scholarships (blessings from the Lord, although at the time I thought it was my intelligence that had earned me the scholarships, not necessarily HIS blessings that allowed me to achieve academic success.) It was the final week of school before the big day, and I was at home when my brother Dennis asked out of the blue if we had heard about “that Collier boy who was hit upside the head and was in the hospital.”

**My heart dropped.**

**Actually, my heart sank into a deep, dark, gloomy pit of agony, anguish, distress, and despair.**

I had grown so far away from William that I didn't know he was lying in a hospital room. Dennis was home visiting from California (I guess for my graduation) and had found out before I did what had happened to William. I remember what my mother said: “I sure hope that boy don't die.” (She can be so blunt sometimes.) Neither my mother nor Dennis, nor anyone else in the family, not even I, knew what that news would do to me.

Upon hearing this tragic and devastating news, I immediately went to my bedroom in total misery. My heart was broken—full of grief, sadness, desolation, and overwhelming sorrow. I don't recall anything else about that evening, what day it was, or what actually happened for the next couple of days. I don't remember any other details except that I ended up at the hospital (the next day I guess, but it's all a blur.)

I had been told he was in the neurotrauma ICU and had undergone emergency brain surgery to remove a blood clot. You know how it is in ICU. Only immediate family members can visit, and they have very strict visitation hours. I remember leaving my mother in the ICU waiting room, while I walked down that scary hallway all by myself, afraid of what I was going to see. He was lying there with his family standing at his bedside. When I walked in, they all left the room. To this very day, I don't know why they left me in there all by myself with him. Remember, we were off again by our senior year, and I don't know how they even knew who I was. I had never gone to his house to meet his family, but I guess he had talked about me so much that they figured it out. I wish I would have asked them what was going through their minds when they saw me that day. I was the girl that had broken his heart, and now I had the nerve to show up at the hospital. I doubt if any of them remember that first day when I came to visit, and now I'm too embarrassed to ask them what they were really thinking.

Anyway, there he lay...with my shattered heart scattered in thousands of pieces all over his ICU bed. How could it come to this? What happened? His head was so *huge*; so swollen, all bandaged up, and there were machines all over the place. Imagine the sight of my eighteen-year-old ex-boyfriend just lying there, looking so frail and extremely ill. I didn't know if he would even be conscious or not, but he looked up at me with his swollen eyes. His eyes had always been very pretty, beautiful actually, but his head was so big now that his eyes were almost swollen shut. What was he going to say, and would he even recognize me? Would he ask me to leave because I had broken his heart? Or worse, was he even able to speak?

I don't remember what he said, and neither does he because he was too sick. No one was there except the two of us, so that moment is lost in time. William doesn't recall for understandable reasons. After all, his head was swollen to the size of a basketball, and his scalp had been laid wide open... And me, well, I just don't have an excuse other than to say the flood of memories from middle school until that point must have pressured my brain so much that I suffered permanent amnesia of that life-changing moment when I just knew... It was a new beginning for us, and all the prior sadness and heartbreak had been

erased. He soon transferred from the ICU to a regular room, and we started talking on the phone when I couldn't be there to visit. It was like a flash back to middle school when we used to talk on the phone until the wee hours of the morning, only this time he was in the hospital, still very weak from surgery, and he would often go to sleep with me on the other end of the phone. I would hear the nurses come in the room late at night, so I would just hold the phone and listen to him sleep until they hung up the phone.

I wish I could remember that first conversation in ICU, but I don't. However, I do recall a few of our heart-to-hearts after William was transferred out of ICU into a private room. He still looked so frail, but the swelling in his bald head had come down very nicely. I even remember those little blue, gray, and black plaid pajamas he was wearing. As we talked over the next week or so, it was as if time stood still. God had given both of us one last opportunity to get it right, and whatever we hadn't been able to figure out during those four years of high school just didn't seem to matter anymore. The hurt feelings and misunderstandings were instantly obliterated, and it felt as if we had never been apart.

Sometimes I think back to that point in time and how my life would have been so very different if God had not allowed William to survive the incident. I guess that brings me to the next point, the head injury. It is a wonder how an eighteen-year-old healthy boy would end up on the operating table having surgery to remove a blood clot from his head.

I won't say who the bad boy was. I'll call him Mark B\_ \_ \_ \_ . Mark "popped William upside the head" as the kids described it back then, with a pool stick during an unfriendly game of pool. William still carries the four-inch scar across the left side of his forehead as well as the ear-to-ear scar in his scalp that serves as a constant reminder of how our lives were forever changed. Things don't happen coincidentally or accidentally. The Lord allowed William to get that hit on the head for more than one reason. Obviously, that is what brought us back together, but more importantly, it is a testimony itself. Had it not been for God's mercy, William would have gone home after the accident and died.

Yes, he would have gone home and died!!! After he was hit with the pool stick, he was taken to the emergency room. He should have been tested for bleeding or hemorrhaging on the brain, but he wasn't. He should have been admitted overnight for observation, but he wasn't. They simply stitched him up and sent him home, where he later began vomiting and having excruciating headaches. His sister, Marcella, was a nurse, and she was checking on him at home.

When she discovered something was going terribly wrong, she immediately got him to a different hospital (Methodist Central, the good hospital) where Dr. Tom Miller was awaiting his next assignment from the Lord. (Not that Dr. Miller knew that, of course, but God had him there just for William.) William had become extremely lethargic. The excruciating headaches were getting even worse, and he continued with the nausea and vomiting all night. There is no doubt in my mind that if his family had not taken him to that second hospital, he would have lost consciousness in his bed, and the blood clot would have killed him.

I've wondered for the past twenty-five years what his medical records showed, what really happened in the first emergency room, and what they really did in surgery. How bad was it? After I started writing this book, I called both hospitals to get copies of the records so I could have more details. I didn't know how difficult it would be to get the records, but I knew William would have to give his signed consent for them to even give him a copy. When I called the hospital that actually performed the surgery, they told me that all of their records prior to 1985 had been destroyed, and there was absolutely no record of his admission from 1983, not even on microfilm.

I then called the first hospital that I believe sent him home to die, and they said they had the emergency room record on microfilm. All William had to do was come in, sign the paperwork, and we could get a copy of the records in three to five days. Although it was a little comforting to know I could get those records in a few days, I still desperately wanted the records from the surgery at the second hospital. I called the other hospital again and spoke with a third person (and was praying this time as I dialed the number.) She repeated that they had no records prior to 1985. I told her that the other hospital had records from 1983 and asked her to check anyway to see if they might have them too. She said they didn't, but to satisfy my request, she put me on hold to go look. She came back to the phone a few minutes later to inform me that she *did* have his records on microfilm. She didn't know why they still had them, but there they were, now sitting on her desk and ready to be copied. She explained the procedure and said that all William had to do was come in with ID and sign the paperwork. *Wow*; prayer answered instantly. I had wanted those medical records since 1983, but I had never tried to get them. Now, over twenty-five years later when they should have been destroyed, they were waiting there, *just* for me.

Earlier I said that I was writing this book without William's knowledge. However, medical information is personal and confidential (as it should be). There was no way I could get those records without William's consent, so

my secret book was no longer a secret. I tried asking him to go sign for the papers without telling him why, and I used the excuse that I was working on a project and would tell him about it later. Normally, when I ask him to sign papers or do anything like that, he'll do it without even asking questions, but he adamantly refused this time. He would *not* get those records for me. Period. "For what?" he asked, and none of my answers satisfied him. I tried again later that same day, but this time I had to break down and tell him why I really needed the records. That was even worse. He didn't like the idea that I was writing a book, and liked it even less that personal information about him would be included. I assured him I wouldn't disclose anything too personal, and that I certainly would not embarrass him (although I do recall that I called him 'moody' in Chapter 1, but that's just a fact). Anyway, his answer was *no*, and that was that. He didn't want any part of this book, and he didn't want *any* information about him to be in the book. He didn't see why I would bother to write a book because he didn't think anyone would want to read it.

I guess when you live inside the testimony, it's hard for you to see it as a testimony, and you really don't appreciate it for what it is. William lived inside this testimony with me, so perhaps it was harder for him to understand my desire to share our story, but I had a testimony to tell, and someone needed to hear it. I left the room to pray. I asked the Lord to change William's mind, right then, because I needed those records, and I couldn't concentrate on writing this book if I would be pouting over not being able to include some of that medical information in it. I needed the facts, and I certainly didn't want to misrepresent anything in the book. However, I knew I would continue writing the book, with or without the records, because I was driven to share this testimony. I came back from praying and asked him again, and this time he miraculously (although very reluctantly) said okay. In one day, records that should have been lost were found, and my husband left the house (mad, but at least he went) and went to sign the paperwork to obtain the records. As I sit here typing this paragraph, I know in a few days both hospitals will call William and tell him the copies are ready to be picked up. God worked that out for me instantly.

When I think back to 1983, I recall those days when William was in the hospital, and how differently things could have turned out. Some of us believe in guardian angels. Many people probably believe angels exist in some way, shape, or fashion. Undoubtedly, William had a guardian angel that evening when he got hit in the head with that pool stick. The angel escorted him home from the first hospital, then escorted him to the second one, and stayed

with him in the operating room as the Lord guided Dr. Miller's hands and those of the nurses and operating room technicians that had any part to play in William's surgery. So many things could have gone tragically and horribly wrong, but they didn't. God answers prayer. Even when we can't pray for ourselves, someone else is praying for us. If you don't take anything else away from this book except this one thing, please remember this: *God is a healer. He hears and answers prayer!*

Actually, there is something even more important than knowing that God is a healer, but we'll get into that in chapter 12 with John 3:16.

I honestly believe that the Lord saved William's life that night for me. It may have been for William too; for his family, and for many other reasons also. But in my mind, I know that William was created to be my husband, and the father of my two children. If it wasn't for the Lord allowing things to happen the way they did all those years ago, there would be no book to write. I've had people praying for me since I was born. My mother has some praying people in her family, and even before they knew William, he was covered in prayer because they were praying for me, my future, and the life that I now enjoy with my husband. None of it would have ever been possible if they had not been praying for me all those years ago. Neither William nor I realized back in 1983, when we were so very young and madly in love that we would end up where we are today. The only thing we knew was that we had been brought back together and given a second chance. Nothing else mattered.