

Injustices Encountered by an Educator In an Inner City School

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Book Sample Excerpt

Chapter 1: Migrating to the USA

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Chapter 1: Migrating to the USA

“Prayer is the cure for a confused mind, a weary soul, and a broken heart.”

How often have you reached a point in life where you have been stuck in the middle of something? Or when you can't make the right decision? Or you don't know what step to take next? In all those times, what have you done? You might have asked people around, you might have done the research, or you might have quit. But are these the right way to go?

People confuse spirituality with religion, which I believe are two different terms. Religion is basically a group practice; however, spirituality is your personal belief and experience. It is about your faith; it is about your power of prayers. For me, spirituality and praying are peace and guidelines to go in the right direction. Whenever I had to make any big decision, praying was my practice.

I always believed that praying helped me listen to my inner voice, the voice that will always tell me the right thing to do, and every time I heard that voice, I made the right decisions. You might think I am being superstitious, but this is not about that. It is about finding peace with my inner self, resolving the conflicts between my mind and heart, and listening to my gut.

I have been following this process for years and have never regretted it; even when I decided to migrate to the USA, I remember being baffled about the decision. It was similarly scary as it sounded exciting to relocate to a whole different country, study there, and start a completely new life there. I was scared about how I would manage things; would I be able to achieve my goals? What if this is not the right move for me? I had never been more confused!

I kept asking myself for months, “Are you ready for this? Do you think this is what you need? Will you accept all the changes that it will bring? Have you thought it through?”

All these questions made me lose my peace for months, and I finally turned to the only thing I knew that could help – My Spirituality! I started looking for my inner voice and decided not to make any decision until that voice told me it was okay to go that way. I prayed for months until I found peace with my inner self, knowing I was ready to start this new chapter of my life.

I could feel my inner voice saying, “Go for it! Good things are coming for you! This is the right way!”

Finally, in 1979, I made a move and landed in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I was very excited about this move. However, fate had something else planned for me. I could only survive there for

six months and had to move again. These six months were the worst. I had problems with living and transportation from where I lived to anywhere else. I had to spend most of my day finding the right commute.

Well, I can say that I could have resolved all those problems, but the reason when I knew I had to leave the place was the shocking betrayal I got from the people I lived with.

Whatever happened to me was bad, but I didn't think I had made the wrong decision, not even for a moment. I was still happy with the decision to move to the USA. It is the country that provided me with everything. The success I wanted, the education I came looking for, and as a bonus, a good spouse.

Chapter 5: My Teaching Career

My teaching career started as a '3100' at a high school. When I got into the system, that coding meant being treated as a teacher. I had to complete lesson plans and grade papers and got observed. This position was one year, which afterward aided me when I applied for a full-time teaching position.

What was my experience like as a 3100? It was very rough because I was assigned a class with mostly boys, and they were unruly and disruptive. I handled it very well because I interned at an inner-city school. I got a good evaluation from that school but did not seek a full-time position there the following school year.

Subsequently, a school in the inner-city hired me, where I spent 18 years. I was hired by a principal (now deceased) whom I was very fond of. Some people did not like her, but I thought she was an honest person. She had two good APs that I was fond of; Mr. J. Gibbs and Ms. J. Teal.

I was placed on a team that housed students in SARP (Students at Risk Programme). These students were not incorrigible; they just had various issues. However, they made tremendous learning gains with me. The program was funded to enable special privileges for the students. In addition, the teachers in the program were paid a stipend. In my second year at the school, I was assigned a Team Leader position after the departure of the prior leader. Being on the team was a pleasure. I had the principal's granddaughter in my class, so she knew my classes were rigorous and what my expectations were.

Were there obstacles? Of course, there were!

There were resentments because I was given the position of a team leader instead of a senior male teacher. Regardless, the teacher and I had a good relationship and worked together. After a couple of years, the program was dissolved, and we were placed on separate teams, and at that point, the relationship paled. I continued to be a team leader until I was offered a Literacy Coach position, referred to as a Reading Coach back then.

That position opened a "can of worms" I had never seen before. The resentment was greater than when I got the first team leader position.

Dislike and resentment for me came from many directions. At least two individuals wanted the position, but one did everything to achieve it. Although the Coaches were not paid extra, the

position appeared appealing to others. The ones that did not want the position had a problem with me having it.

The job entailed being trained by the school district. To elaborate, the Coaches had to attend annual training during the summer breaks, some of which were held in some of the most beautiful hotels in Orlando.

However, once we returned to our schools, we had to impart all the information we gleaned to the teachers by modeling. That meant going into the classroom and modeling specific teaching standards, referred to as benchmarks. Based on the many undermining attempts or plots, I eventually returned to the classroom.

In all honesty, I did not mind returning to the classroom because I preferred giving the information to the students instead of imparting it to the teachers. After all, there was no guarantee that they would follow it anyway.

The focus of my book is not on the resentment, envy, or dislike that some people might have had towards me; instead, the allegations made by students. I recall talking to a young custodian about the student's attitude toward me, although I was kind to them. His response, "I don't know why because you are so kind to them. I can't understand it." I told him that I believe it is because I am stern, and my classes must be structured.

Nonetheless, I did not let that bother me because I knew I was a fair, kind, and caring teacher. For the adults, it was inadvertently made clear that the professional way I dressed made me an "outsider." However, I guess the fact that I obtained my doctorate while at the school and the only teacher there with one did not help me either. The most important issue for me is that I was/am a good teacher. That fact was established by all administrators and even those who did not care for me.

Chapter 6: The Varying Allegations

This chapter is the primary focus of my book. It reveals all the crises I encountered that could have ended my teaching career. Please note that the incidents I am about to disclose did not occur within the same school year but throughout my 18-years-career at the school.

Although these allegations were unfounded, the result was that they tarnished my reputation because when an individual is doing well, some people are happy to see or hear that they are encountering difficulties.

“A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish.” – Proverbs 19:9

Allegation One

On a specific morning, while driving to work, I had this strange feeling; a sudden urge to say, “No weapon formed against me shall prosper, and every tongue that rises against me in judgment shall be condemned.” I pulled up the parking lot and walked down the corridor toward my classroom. While walking, I saw one of my students accompanied by two ladies. I was not concerned because I did not have a problem with the student, nor did I request a parent conference. However, when I got close to the office to sign in, I was told that this parent needed to have a conference. The student was also there.

When we got to the classroom, I greeted the parent and introduced myself. The parent began to tell me the reason for her visit, and it went like this: “Tasha told me that you called her a bitch.”

“Me, What? I never call her that. How could a teacher call a student a bitch in class before others or even refer to her as such? Also, I had no problems with her.”

The student repeated that I did call her that, so at that point, I looked her straight in the eyes, raised my hand, and said, “Look me in the eyes and tell me that I called you a bitch.”

She said again, “Yes, you did.”

I turned my back in despair to walk away; then, suddenly, I heard her say, “No, she did not call me that; I just made it up.” Immediately, the mom gave her two slaps for lying and told her to apologize to me.

Well, I was in disbelief. When I reflect on the incident, I see God’s grace.

Allegation Four

On this specific day, the class was reading a novel. I read aloud while the class followed silently. A student had her head on the desk and appeared to be sleeping. In passing, I touched her shoulders and asked her to sit up. She did. Maybe five or ten minutes later, she asked if she could go to the restroom. I said, "Yes, go ahead." The student was gone for a long time, but I was engrossed in the reading activities. Maybe an hour or so later, our only male AP at that time came to speak with me. I am sorry that I do not recall his name, only that he was Hispanic and genuinely nice.

What he told me left me in a state of shock once again. "Ms. Mills, Jessica (not the student's name) told me you choked her." I said, "What? How and when did I choke her? Mr. Gonzalez, I am not crazy."

Of course, there was an intense interrogation of the student. The answer to one of the questions was almost humorous if not for the seriousness of the allegation. Mr. Gonzalez asked her, "Did any of the students see Ms. Mills choking you?" Her answer was, "No, they did not see because they were reading." Hello! How could a teacher choke a child with 29 other students in the class, and none of them saw that? These students always get involved in everything. If I speak to someone, they all think they should get involved.

The student was kept out of the class while they continued the investigation. After further questioning, the Holy Spirit must have gotten a hold of her, so she decided to confess. She confessed, "Ms. Mills did not choke me; I said this because I wanted to get her fired." My other students told me she was in the cafeteria crying with long tears rolling down her cheeks while telling everyone there that I choked her.

The AP returned to me with the conclusion of the investigation and informed me of what the student said. All I could do was thank God for delivering me from a very grave situation that could have possibly cost me my job and have me arrested. Although none of the two happened, the damage was already done to my reputation throughout the school. I am doubtful that the truth was made to the students and teachers that I was innocent of such a heinous act. So, all my haters had something else to gossip about regarding "that Dr. Mills."

At this point, it was clear that God gave me the assignment to teach at that school, and all these heinous allegations did not remove me until HE told me to go.