

## Long Bio and Personal Testimony

I wrote my first book in kindergarten about a family of mice that lived under the boardwalk in my hometown of Asbury Park, New Jersey. I continued to write through middle school and high school and served as the senior editor on my high school newspaper. I attended college at the *Fashion Institute of Technology*, in New York City where demands on my time made it difficult for me to write anything that wasn't a required assignment. I had school papers, on which I excelled and I started, edited and basically wrote the newsletter for my church, but the make believe world where mice lived under the boardwalk had disappeared.

I believe the most awesome gift the Lord ever gave me was salvation at an early age, because to this day I continue to have a childlike faith. I made a public confession of the FAITH and was baptized on Easter Sunday at the age of eleven. I didn't really understand the idea that Jesus died for me. I just remember yelling "He washed my sins away," before the pastor dunked me under the water. For many years I think I lived my life doing what I pleased, because "my sins were washed away", and although I never strayed from the church, I also never experienced the fullness of God, and the promises he made to me as a believer. I was living on the fringes of the kingdom. It was a safe place, but not one that truly set me free. It was not until age twenty-eight that I really came to understand what salvation was and what it meant for my present and my future.

Under the tutelage of two great pastors (Rev. Ronald Green (Hightstown, NJ) and Bishop Donald Hilliard, (Perth Amboy, NJ) I changed my life from one where church was little more than a religious habit to an opportunity for a spirit-filled life through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It was then that I began to think about my purpose. I was a wife and mother, a daughter, sister, employee, and Sunday school teacher, but my soul was crying out, telling me I was so much more. I just had to tap into the gifts God had placed in me, which bought me full circle to my gift of writing.

At the time, I was an avid reader of African-American romance novels and decided this was what I would write, but in 1997 God upset that plan when I read an interview given by one of my favorite authors. She stated she was saving copies of her books in Ziploc bags for her children so that when they were old enough they could read them. This bothered me. I began to question whether or not I really wanted to write something my child couldn't read or my

father, or pastor, or neighbors for that matter. I began to think if romance wasn't for me, maybe I didn't have a place in adult fiction at all. What was I to write? The stories where the mice lived under the boardwalk was my style.

In 1997 I discovered an author named, Victoria Christopher Murray on the Internet. Murray wrote and self-published the book, *Temptation*, and shared it with me. *Temptation* is a fiction book about African-American Christians who have real problems, but depend on a real God to solve them. It was then that I realized there was a place for me. Once God revealed that, I just had to trust HIM to get me there.

In 2002 the Lord blessed me to join the *Atlanta Black Christian Fiction Writers Group*, and attend several Christian fiction writing conferences where I was encouraged by my fellow sisters in Christ about writing fiction for the Lord. We taught each other the craft, praying along the way. Victoria Christopher Murray and other African-American trailblazers in the genre mentored us. As a result I finally birthed my novel, *Secrets and Lies*, in 2007. A story I believe truly exemplifies the power of faith and hope in overcoming personal pain; and the power of forgiveness to set us free.

As you can see the journey was not short, but now that I'm here, it was worth every step. I pray that the Lord will continue to use me to write stories that touch the heart of my readers.

Thank you for reading my testimony.

Many Blessings,

Rhonda McKnight