



*A Birmingham
Bombing Survivor
Comes of Age
During the Civil
Rights Movement*

WHILE THE WORLD WATCHED

Carolyn Maul McKinstry
with Denise George



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While the World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes of Age during the Civil Rights Movement

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*This book is dedicated to my grandparents,
Reverend Ernest Walter and Lessie V. Burt,
whose prayers sustained us and whose wisdom and love
still live within me and my family;*

*my parents, Samuel and Ernestine Burt Maull,
who gave us their absolute best and prepared us in such
a loving way for the rough road that lay ahead;*

*my husband, Jerome McKinstry, whom God sent
in the midst of all my pain and confusion and who
still stands today as a cornerstone for me; and*

*my children—Leigh, Joya, and Brandon—
who are the fruit and the joys of my life and who
have made this struggle worth every day.*

*Finally and especially, this book is dedicated
to the memory of my friends Addie Mae Collins,
Carol Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and
Cynthia Wesley, killed September 15, 1963,
when Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was bombed,
and to the memory of Johnny Robinson and Virgil
Ware, also killed September 15, 1963, who now laugh
and walk with Addie, Denise, Carole, and Cynthia.*

*May they all rest in peace and in the knowledge
that their story and their witness live on in the
hearts of people of goodwill all over the world.*

— C. M. M.

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Introduction

Almost half a century has passed since the Klan bombed Sixteenth Street Baptist Church at 10:22 on Sunday morning, September 15, 1963, and my four young friends died agonizing deaths. And it's been almost half a century since, as a young teen, I marched under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and got a handful of hair torn from my scalp by Bull Connor's powerful water hoses.

For twenty years after these experiences, I tried hard to forget the senseless deaths, the inhumane injustices, the vicious German shepherds, and children getting arrested right on the streets of downtown Birmingham. In fact, we were encouraged by our parents, other church members, and our black community to forget what had happened. For almost five decades, I had not been able to muster the courage, nor the composure, to publicly record the stories that have become such a dark part of our nation's past. I had struggled to forget these stories, to rid them from my head and heart. They proved too horrible, too painful, to dredge up to memory.

But now, as I see new generations coming and old generations passing, I feel compelled to remember, to write down in permanent ink my eyewitness account of just what happened while the world watched . . . lest *I* forget. Lest *we all* forget.

I hope this story will challenge you to reexamine your life; your daily living; your values; and your relationship with God, our Creator. As you consider the events on these pages, may you choose to love, and may you commit yourself to live a life of reconciliation—first with God and then ultimately with those who share this world with you.

Carolyn Maull McKinstry

SPRING 2011

CHAPTER 1

TOO GREAT A BURDEN TO BEAR



*Hate is too great a burden to bear. . . . I have decided to love. . . .
If you are seeking the highest good, I think you can find it through love.
And the beautiful thing is that we aren't moving wrong when we do it,
because John was right, God is love.*

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.,
"Where Do We Go from Here?"¹

*In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the
silence of our friends.*

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

I WOKE UP ON SUNDAY MORNING, September 15, 1963, and looked out my bedroom window. The sky was slightly overcast, but the sun was trying hard to shine through the clouds. It was a warm, beautiful September day in Birmingham, Alabama—an ordinary busy Sunday morning at the Maull home.

I laid out my white Sunday dress. I had starched and ironed it before I went to bed the night before. At age fourteen, I didn't own a lot of clothes because there were six children to clothe in our household. But I had several special church dresses and one pair of black patent leather shoes I saved just for Sunday church.

Today was Youth Sunday at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. On the fourth Sunday of each month, Reverend John H. Cross asked the church's youth to lead the service, teach the Sunday school classes, and take over jobs the adult members usually did. It proved an exciting day for us each month. The boys wore dark pants and white shirts on those Sundays, and the girls wore their prettiest white dresses.

I had been an active member of Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, for as far back as I could remember. In 1950, when I was two years old, my parents registered me in the cradle-roll Sunday school class. My church served as the center of my life. I worshiped there. I socialized there. I even worked there part-time as a church secretary. Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was the first black church built in Birmingham. Since its construction in 1911, the church had become a worship home and meeting place

for most of the city's black community. A host of Civil Rights leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., had recently met there and, along with other community pastors and leaders, had planned nonviolent protests and marches. Dr. King called the Birmingham campaign Project C, with the *C* standing for "confrontation." Dr. King—and the entire black community—yearned for equal rights for blacks. Birmingham was considered the most segregated city in the South. If we could break the back of segregation in our city, it would send a strong message to the rest of the nation. But it would prove to be an extremely difficult fight.

Several responsibilities awaited me at home before I could leave for church. One of them included combing my younger sister's hair. Little Agnes had a lot of it, always uncooperative to the comb, and she had a sensitive, tender scalp. Mama herself was never good at fixing hair. At ten years of age, I started washing and pressing my own hair. I'd heat up the metal comb and run it again and again through my tangles. After Agnes came along, Mama gave me the assignment of combing her hair too. I loved taking care of Agnes and her hair, and I loved making her look pretty. It was like having my own live baby doll.

In the mornings before I left for school, Agnes usually held still and allowed me to comb and braid her hair. Even though I tried to be gentle, it usually hurt her to get the kinks out. Sometimes she'd cry. That Sunday she refused to hold still. Restless and not wanting to be bothered, she kept pushing me away.

“Please, Agnes,” I begged. “Be still. I’ve got to be on time for Sunday school. It’s Youth Sunday. I have my reports to do, and I’ve got to get there and count the money. I need to be on time this morning.”

But my sister refused to cooperate.

“Mama,” I called in desperation. “Agnes won’t let me comb her hair, and I’m going to be late for Sunday school. I need to go.”

“Well, just leave her here this morning,” Mama told me. “You go on to church. Agnes can stay home with me.”

Thank goodness! I thought. The last thing I wanted was to be late and upset Mrs. Shorter, the church secretary. She would have been working in the office and answering the phone all that morning. Mrs. Shorter and I worked side by side in the church office on Sundays.

“Come on, Wendell, Kirk!” I called to my younger brothers. “We’ve got to go!”

Now that my oldest brother, Samuel, was a freshman at Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, that left my sixteen-year-old brother, Chester, as the oldest child at home. He had just gotten his driver’s license, and Mama asked him to drive us to church. Chester was excited to have permission to drive the family car that morning. He sat up straight and proud behind the steering wheel of our 1960 royal blue Chevrolet Impala.

“Bring the car right back after you drop off your sister and brothers,” Mama called to Chester. “Your dad needs it to drive to work.”



My dad was well educated. He had earned a master's degree in applied sciences, and he taught physics and chemistry during the weekdays at the all-black George Washington Carver High School in North Birmingham. Prior to that, Daddy had taught at Industrial High School, which later became A. H. Parker High School—the first high school in Birmingham built specifically for black students. In the evenings and on weekends, in spite of his intelligence and education, he worked a menial job. He waited tables at the elite, white-members-only Birmingham Country Club in prestigious Mountain Brook, a city with old money and deeply ingrained segregated ways. It proved a lowly position for Daddy, but he did what he needed to do to feed his family and keep the roof over our heads. He couldn't eat at the Birmingham Country Club, of course—people of color couldn't. But they worked there cooking, serving, and cleaning up. My parents had dreams that each of their children would graduate from college, so Dad earmarked the money from this job for college savings for the six of us kids.

Before Daddy left home in the evenings and on weekends, he'd slip into the club's waiter uniform, a short white jacket trimmed in green cord around the sleeves and neck, with *BCC* embroidered on the front. After he arrived, he would pull on freshly bleached waiter's gloves and begin his work. My father would occasionally speak to us about his experiences and interactions with the customers at the BCC. He

did his job well, responded with the mandatory “Yes, Sir” to diners’ demands, and pretty much just kept his mouth shut. He never spoke about his education or teaching position while he was there, not wanting his employers or customers to call him uppity and take away his job.

Daddy never told us what he overheard around the country club tables he served. I guess he didn’t want to frighten us—he always tried hard to protect us. He wasn’t alone in his approach. In those days, adults in the black community didn’t talk to their children about painful happenings. They just kept quiet about those things and tried to move on, in spite of all that was going on around them. But I have no doubt that during the thirty years he worked there, he learned much about racist Birmingham. I suspect he occasionally heard conversations from Klan club members that caused his heart to miss a beat. But when such remarks caused him additional fears and concerns, he just enforced new rules upon his children—hard-to-follow, strict rules. He was very much a disciplinarian, and he regimented our coming and going. He expected complete obedience to whatever rules he laid down at home. We understood, and we usually obeyed to the letter. If we decided not to listen, we knew harsh punishment would follow. It was years before we realized that his unwieldy rules were designed to protect us from the evil possibilities of the mean-spirited world around us.

“You children aren’t to go near the railroad tracks going toward the pipe company,” Daddy ordered us. He gave no reason. He didn’t have to. As strict as he was, we knew Daddy

was just and fair. We knew he loved us and wanted what was best for us.

Daddy often warned my older brothers, “Samuel and Chester, you protect our ‘girl-child’ and walk to school together.” Daddy rarely called me by my name, Carolyn. He referred to me as the family’s “girl-child” or “Caroline.” It wasn’t uncommon to hear Daddy demand, “If three children leave this house together, then three children must return to this house together!” We had to know where each sibling was at all times. We were definitely our “brothers’ keepers.”

As Birmingham grew increasingly violent in the 1960s, Daddy’s list of nonnegotiable rules grew longer from year to year. We knew he meant business, and we knew better than to question him. I sulked when Daddy insisted that I, his girl-child, be escorted almost everywhere I went. I didn’t mind so much when my older brothers walked with me down the streets of Birmingham or accompanied me to neighborhood parties. But I felt terribly embarrassed when Daddy made my two younger brothers go with me. Because of Daddy’s tight leash, I also wasn’t allowed to spend the night at any of my friends’ homes or babysit for children in the community. About the only place he permitted me to go alone, unescorted by my brothers, was church. It was a safe place, and I had certain responsibilities there. I escaped to the church as often as I could.

When we occasionally disobeyed a rule, Daddy enforced punishment that we would long remember. Sometimes he grounded us or put us in temporary isolation if we got out

of line. The boys got their share of spankings, but my father hardly ever spanked me. Instead, he'd take away Sunday afternoon movie privileges or not let me talk on the phone or tell me I couldn't go to club meetings with my friends. He believed discipline and rules were a must for children, especially young boys—and especially those growing up in Birmingham, Alabama.

Daddy also imposed a five-minute limit on the use of the bathroom and the telephone. If we exceeded our five minutes, particularly if someone else was waiting to use the phone, Daddy simply unplugged it. He also made strict rules about hitting a girl-child. My brothers knew not to hit me or my little sister because if they did, they could expect to be in a lot of trouble. Daddy believed in respecting and protecting women. We knew we needed to show Mama utmost respect—showing Mama disrespect always, without fail, meant severe punishment. If my dad thought we had even looked at my mother in a disrespectful way, we faced big trouble.

Sometimes we unwisely tested Daddy's rules. One day when Chester was fifteen, with a learner's permit but no license, he slipped away with the family car. According to reports from the neighbors, boys ran alongside the car, holding onto the door handles from the outside, while my brother drove really fast. But in the course of this showing off, one of his buddies fell to the ground and ended up scraped and scratched. Soon enough the boy's father paid Daddy a visit. My dad became really angry, and he not only whipped Chester

but took away his learner's permit for three whole months. Chester learned his lesson. He never did that again!

Wendell, my mischievous brother, was always in trouble. Daddy enrolled Wendell in the ninth grade class at Carver High School, where he worked, even though it lay outside our school zone. For the sake of convenience, teachers were allowed to enroll their children where they taught. But Daddy had an additional reason for wanting him there.

"I can keep an eye on this boy if I take him with me," Daddy said.

I remember when Wendell, shortly before his high school graduation, grew a little beard on the bottom of his chin—just a few hairs that formed a goatee. But Carver High School said it wouldn't graduate any student who had hair on his face.

On graduation morning Wendell decided to be clever. He put Band-Aids over his chin hair and told his teachers, "I cut my chin when I shaved off the hair."

As far as the school was concerned, he had gotten away with it, and he graduated with his class—and his Band-Aids. But he didn't fool Daddy. Not a bit. Daddy was so upset with Wendell he wrote a letter to the dean at Knoxville College, where Wendell had been accepted for the coming fall.

"It appears that I have not yet taught my son the meaning of character and integrity," Daddy wrote. "He has not learned to be a responsible member of society. For this reason, I am canceling Wendell's acceptance to attend your college in the fall semester."

Wendell was shocked when he read the letter. He begged Daddy to reconsider, but my father refused. Wendell had to be punished.

Daddy never mailed the letter, even though he made Wendell believe he had. Later, a month before the fall semester was to begin, Daddy pretended to have changed his mind and told Wendell he could attend after all. But for most of the summer, my brother thought all his friends would go without him to Knoxville College, and he would have to get a job and stay home. It was quite a lesson.

When we entered high school, my father would make us take the same tests he prepared for his high school students. He worked us hard. If he didn't like our grades on his tests, he made us study and retake the tests until we made better grades. His rules proved a real source of aggravation for me. I thought we had the strictest father in town.

Daddy liked things organized and efficient—a place for everything and everything in its place. He knew where things were: socks in the top dresser drawers, toys in the bedroom closets, skates and bikes on the back porch, and pots and pans stacked neatly in the kitchen cabinet. He arranged the kitchen in a certain way, and he made sure we put things back in their designated places. No doubt these habits were a carryover from his mother, whose name was Sweet. She died when my dad was sixteen, but in that relatively short amount of time she taught him to cook, sew, iron, and make his bed. Sweet was not formally educated, but she trained Dad well in the practical aspects of life. Daddy's time in the U.S. Army

no doubt influenced his orderly lifestyle too. As an Army cook, he'd learned to live a strictly regimented routine. It wasn't unusual for Daddy to wake us up at three or four in the morning after he got off work at the BCC and walk us to the kitchen to look at what we'd failed to clean properly before bedtime.

He'd stand us all in front of the kitchen counter and ask, "Whose week was it to do the dishes?" After he determined who was responsible, he'd point to the less-than-perfect kitchen and ask, "What's wrong with this picture? What didn't you do here?"

Before the guilty child could return to bed and go back to sleep, Daddy made him or her scrub down the kitchen—as he or she should have done earlier. Daddy insisted that the kitchen be clean and ready for his use in the morning. He had enough challenges each morning—waking us, feeding us, and making certain he arrived at work on time. After a long night of working at the club, he saw no reason why he should have to come home to a dirty kitchen.

Early in their marriage, Daddy and Mama created a special arrangement involving family responsibilities. Daddy cooked breakfast every morning for the family, and Mama cooked supper each evening after she got home from her school-teaching job. Mama proved just the opposite from efficient, organized Daddy. She had a laid-back, unassuming personality. Totally unorganized, she didn't care if we never washed the dishes in the kitchen sink. Nothing upset her. The house could burn down around her, and I don't think

she'd pay much attention to it. I guess Daddy knew that if he didn't establish some order and organization in a house with six growing children, chaos would rule.



As Chester drove Wendell, Kirk, and me to church that fateful Sunday, I thought about my best friend, Cynthia Wesley. Her father had been my elementary school principal at Finley Avenue Elementary School, and Cynthia and I were in the same Sunday school class. We talked on the phone almost every day, and we were both members of a small all-girl community club called the Cavalettes. The group of about fifteen black Cavalettes got together mostly to socialize, eat cookies, drink punch, talk, and dance to records we played on the portable record player. We had just had a club meeting the week before, and we had another one scheduled for the afternoon of Sunday, September 15. The upcoming meeting would be particularly exciting for us because we had placed an article in the local newspaper about it. The announcement simply said, "Cavalette Club to meet Sept. 15 at 3 p.m." I served as our president, and I had told everyone to bring three dollars that Sunday to pay for the matching gold caps and shirts we had ordered from Fred Singleton's, the downtown Birmingham sporting-goods store. Our first names would be printed in black letters on the front of the shirts, and the letter *C* for Cavalettes would be printed on the back. We could hardly wait to get them the following week.

The Wesleys had adopted their only child, Cynthia. They lived in a beautiful brick house in Smithfield, an area of Birmingham better known as “Dynamite Hill” because of the routine Klan bombings there. Back in 1948, the year I was born, several black families had crossed the “color line” that separated white homes from black homes in the Smithfield area of Birmingham. The Klan responded with random bombings for almost two decades. Several well-known Civil Rights activists lived in Dynamite Hill at the time, including Angela Davis, whose family had a house at the top of the hill on Center Street, and Arthur Shores, one of the first blacks to practice law in Alabama. The Klan bombed the Shoreses’ brick ranch house on two different occasions. Fortunately, neither he nor his family was injured either time.

I wondered what Cynthia would wear on that Youth Sunday. Her mother sewed all her clothes because she could never find anything to fit Cynthia’s petite size-two frame. Mrs. Wesley made beautiful clothes for her daughter—dresses just the right length and color and that perfectly fit Cynthia’s tiny waist.



Chester pulled the car to the side of the street in front of the church. My little brothers and I stepped out of the car and walked into the church’s lower-level door, which opened to the basement. The children’s Sunday school classes met each Sunday in the lower auditorium. The adult Sunday school

classes met upstairs—each one in a corner of the large main sanctuary or in the balcony between the two great stained-glass windows. In one window, Jesus tenderly held a lamb in his strong arms. I sometimes pictured myself as that little lamb, so safe and secure and loved in my Shepherd's hands. In the other window, my favorite one, was the kind-faced Jesus, poised with his hand in front of a large wooden door. I could almost hear him knocking softly, respectfully, on the door . . . again and again and again. His face showed a tender pleading for the person inside to open the door and let him in. I came to learn that the door represented a lost person's heart—a heart Jesus longed to enter and live within. I studied those windows closely every Sunday, and each one permanently etched itself in my mind. On both sides of the sanctuary, the stained-glassed images of Jesus comforted me and brought me great peace and joy.

The children's Sunday school classes were already in session when I sat both boys in their metal folding chairs. I walked upstairs to the church office and found middle-aged Mabel Shorter unusually flustered as she laid down the telephone receiver.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Shorter?"

"All these phone calls!" she said. "People have been ringing the phone all morning. But when I try to get more information, they just hang up."

"Who are they? What do they want?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "But they seem more like *threatening* calls than just *prankster* calls. The callers say they are going to bomb the church."

Mrs. Shorter was the nervous type. I felt she might be overreacting, so I mentally dismissed her comments.

I didn't think any more about the threatening phone calls. I just felt so proud Reverend Cross had asked me to be the Sunday school secretary on Sunday mornings. I'd held this job since the seventh grade. I would man the office, listen for the phone, open the week's mail, greet guests when they came through, and compile the morning's Sunday school report. I would also record the attendance and the amount of money contributed to church that morning. I felt so grown up.

After the Sunday school lesson, the classes would all gather together in a large assembly before the morning service began. I would read the report summary out loud to everyone and make some necessary announcements before the superintendent dismissed everyone at 10:45. During those fifteen minutes before the next worship service, church folk would talk with one another, admire the babies, purposefully compliment and encourage the youth, and visit the restrooms.

My friends and I would slip out of the church between Sunday school and the 11:00 a.m. worship service to drink Cokes at Mr. Gaston's motel restaurant. This was a black-owned restaurant, the only place in the area that served blacks and allowed us to sit in a booth and have a waitress bring us a cold drink. We felt so grown up when we sat at a table; said, "Coca-Cola, please"; and waited for our drinks. We would each pay our thirty-five cents and then hurry back to the church.

Some nine years before, Mr. Arthur George Gaston, the grandson of slaves and a popular self-made millionaire, had built the A. G. Gaston Motel on the edge of Kelly Ingram Park—across the street from the church—on some land he had bought years earlier. The motel provided a place for black Civil Rights leaders to stay, as well as other visitors to the city. No other motel in Birmingham would allow black visitors to eat or sleep there. Before the A. G. Gaston Motel opened, they had to stay in the homes of church members. Mr. Gaston hung a large Z-shaped sign from the top of the two-story part of the brick building. It read simply,

A. G. Gaston MOTEL
Air-Conditioned

Before long, Daddy found out about our visits to the Gaston Motel restaurant, and he put an abrupt stop to them.

“When you go to church,” Daddy said, “you stay at church until you leave to go home.”

It was just another rule he added to the already long list of restrictions. So I didn’t leave church anymore and order Coca-Colas at the Gaston Motel.



I left the flustered Mrs. Shorter in the church office, distributed record books to each of the Sunday school classes, and then quietly slipped into my own classroom. Around 10:20,

after I had collected all the children's records, I headed toward the steps leading to the sanctuary to collect the adult Sunday school records. I paused and lingered a minute at the door to the girls' restroom.

"Hey! Good morning!" I called to four of my friends who were primping in front of the restroom's large lounge mirror. At that time, I didn't know that *five* girls were in the bathroom. I didn't see Sarah, Addie's sister, who was in a separate area near the washbowls and toilets.

The four girls—Denise, Addie, Carole, and Cynthia—combed their hair and chattered excitedly as they readied themselves for the 11:00 morning youth service.

Denise McNair smiled at me. She was always smiling, showing that little gap between her two front teeth. One of our teachers told us that in Africa "the gap" was considered a rare and enviable beauty mark. At eleven years old, Denise was a few years younger than I was, but I thought she was pretty and smart, and I always liked the way her mom fixed her hair.

An only child, Denise was doted on by her parents and grandparents. She always wore pretty, dainty clothes—dresses with fluffy matching pinafores. Denise's father, Mr. McNair, was my ninth grade teacher. He taught diversified education at Parker High School on Fourth Avenue North in Birmingham. An accomplished photographer, he also owned a black portrait studio. Mrs. McNair, Denise's mother, had a beautiful voice and sang in the church choir. Sometimes

Denise sat beside her mother up in the loft during worship services.

Poised at the bathroom mirror next to Denise was Addie Collins, a sweet, quiet girl. I liked Addie, but we weren't particularly close buddies. Addie was just kind of *there*—serious and serene. She never fussed with anybody or said anything mean. I was closer to Addie's sister, Junie—I just seemed to gravitate toward her. A little mischievous, Junie laughed a lot and was always so much fun. Junie told me later that she and Addie had argued on the way to church that morning.

Carole Robertson glanced up and smiled at me too. Our mothers both taught school and were good friends. Carole, a member of Girl Scout troop #264, pinned the numerous badges she had earned to a long sash that draped across her chest and proudly wore her uniform to school. She was cute and always looked impressive in her uniform and badges. Carole played the clarinet in the school band. She was supposed to play that next night—Monday—at Parker High School's first football game of the year.

Carole loved God and church as much as I did. We'd grown up together in the church, attending the Easter egg hunts as children and later participating side by side in the youth programs. Carole carried a small Bible in her pocket whenever she went to church and was involved in most of the Sixteenth Street programs, usually with a speaking part. Though she lived in a segregated city with few opportunities for girls of our race, Carole found all kinds of things to do to keep busy. She seemed to hate just sitting still and was always

on the move. Mature and ladylike at just fourteen years old, she was a person on a mission: she seemed to know exactly where she was going in life, with a sort of inward direction driving her. I imagined that Carole would become the president of something when she grew up or a leader such as Dorothy Height or Mary McLeod Bethune.

My best friend, Cynthia Wesley, also stood at the mirror in the basement restroom. I loved Cynthia and her family. She had a great sense of humor, made jokes, and laughed all the time. Her father, Claude Wesley, had been my principal at Finley Avenue Elementary School. That day the Reverend had asked Cynthia to be an usher. She stood at the mirror adjusting the handmade dress that perfectly hugged her tiny waist.

The Wesleys were professional people, prim and proper, but not in a stuck-up way. I think Mrs. Wesley had had throat cancer years before, although I'm not sure. No black person I knew would ever say the word *cancer*. When someone slipped and said "the word," a dark, evil cloud seemed to settle over the room, and everyone started feeling uncomfortable. After Mrs. Wesley's surgery, she wore some sort of voice box with a small microphone attached. She wrapped pretty scarves around her neck to hide the box, and somehow these scarves always matched her beautiful outfits. But I could hear it when she spoke—the raspy breathing, the gathered mucus, the slightly mechanical tone.

I remember the way Mr. Wesley walked into my classroom at school—so proper and organized, but not intimidating.

He wanted everything to be just right, much like my father did. He never commented on the racial slurs scribbled on the pages of the used textbooks the white schools gave us when they received new ones. Instead, he poured his energy into the positives. When I won the city, county, and state spelling competitions organized for black students, Mr. Wesley publicly expressed a special pride in me.

The Wesleys' home was neat, orderly, and beautiful. Mrs. Wesley made their drapes, and she made sure their hardwood floors sparkled. We had many of our Cavalettes meetings at the Wesleys' home on Dynamite Hill.

In later years, after the bombing, Mrs. Wesley often reflected on her last conversation with Cynthia on September 15. "That morning," she told me, "Cynthia walked out the front door, and I called her back into the house. 'Little lady,' I said, 'is that your slip I see showing below your dress?' A bit of slip lace hung longer than her dress. I suggested she change it before she left for church."



I left the girls in the restroom. "See you later!" I called and started up the stairs.

I hurried because the reports had to be summarized by 10:30, when the classes reconvened and the superintendent would stand up and announce, "Sister Maull will read today's Sunday school summary for us."

As I ran up the stairs, I heard the phone ringing in the

church office. Out of breath, I rushed inside, picked up the heavy black receiver, and put it to my ear. I opened my mouth to say hello, but before I could say anything, a male voice said simply, "Three minutes."

Then he hung up.

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