

A LESSONS FOR LIFE BOOK

# Ten Years Ten Tears



The dramatic story of how a minister lived through 10 tragedies from ages 8 to 18 that affected his life more than he knew, until God stepped in.

An Autobiography

Keith Hammond

DEDICATIONS



*This book is dedicated to my mom and dad.  
Jettie and Margaret Hammond*

*To  
The Hammond and Fitztrick Family.  
We've suffered through a lot of these incidents, and more,  
which many of us still to this day never talk about.  
I love you all.*

If you're a member of my family reading this book for the first time, know that it was written out of love, concern, and the need to start the healing process in so many of our lives. Especially mine. Although I hesitated to start writing this book, I've since learned that this process was necessary to peel off the layers of pain I've lived with so long. Please read it with the love it was written with.

May God bless you with with the same love, peace, understanding, patience and guidance He has shown me. Amen.

## EPILOGUE

*“Lord, why do I need to write my autobiography?”*

*“Because my son,  
there are layers of tragedy that occurred in your life,  
that you have never dealt with and are still holding on to.  
I need you to let them go.  
Once you do,  
you will make it to the next level of your walk with me.”*



Most people experience tragedy in their lives at some point. Whether it's the death of loved ones, violation of your physical body, or mental anguish from experiencing the devastation of war, something happens in the lives of many people. These incidents often cause us to retreat into stages of depression, anger, guilt, and other states of mind that sometimes preclude addiction, and/or destructive behavior.

In my life, there were ten tragedies that occurred from age 8 to age 18. There were ten tragedies in ten years. They brought on grief, anger, depression, frustration, loneliness, guilt, confusion, and a whole range of other emotions, even some misplaced ones, that I never dealt with because I didn't know how. I was too young. In my neighborhood in that era therapy was not an option and something most of the folks in my community had never even heard of.

So, 25 years after leaving Throop Street, I'm writing this book to help peel off the layers of unresolved grief I've carried all of my life. Underneath the layers, you will see me emerge into the person that God used those ten tragedies in ten years and other incidents in my later years to mold and shape into the minister He designed, gifted, trained and matured me to be.

## EPILOGUE

*(continued)*

Peeling off the layers of tragedy in my life was not an easy thing to do. I spent so many years in bondage behind it that I'm still amazed that I'm still here, that I survived it, didn't commit suicide, didn't go insane, lasted this long, and a number of other categories that my siblings and I could have been slotted into from our experiences.

The darkness that grew inside of the tragedy-fed, ever-growing, emptiness, otherwise known as my heart, got bigger, grew larger, and became more dangerous as the years went on. It caused rebellion, anger and so many other emotions and actions that I had to reveal them, honestly, in order to get free from them, and move forward.

It all started because no one ever said a word about any one of the many deaths that were happening around me. I would give anything to be able to go back and try to let them know how by just talking to me, things would have been so much different. I would never have had to cry all those silent tears, all those years.

This autobiography is about my life. The entire life. Nothing much left to the imagination. It has all the detail, the truth about the lies, the innocence lost, the strength found, and the miraculous way that God showed up, once I hit complete and utter rock bottom. I have since learned that through the lack of communication by the adults, God began to orchestrate the epilogue, for His purpose and for His glory.

God, please bless those who will read this book and take to heart what is said in it. I pray it helps someone heal in some way and opens the eyes of others. In Jesus Name, Amen.

## CHAPTER ONE



I was born and raised on the south side of Chicago on a typical city block amidst tree lined sidewalks, narrow streets and bumper-to-bumper parking spaces.

70<sup>th</sup> & Throop Street was littered with two-story, A-frame, single-family homes on narrow lots, green front and back yards, garages that held old furniture and makeshift mechanic shops. The cracked sidewalks led to tree-shaded front porches that served as the stoop for those on block watch, the daily grind gossipers and other gatherers.

The 3-ft space between most of the houses on my end of the block served as nothing more than a gangway from the street side of the house to the rat-infested alley where we hung bicycle rims and empty milk crates on wooden light poles to play basketball.

The families that lived in those A-frame houses were poor in cash but rich in class. Typical blue-collar Americans transplanted from a plethora of origins. We took pride in our block, our neighborhood and our community. It was who we were as black folk. Close enough to befriend you as neighbors, but distant enough not to let you get too near the often exposed but never discussed family secrets.

There were two schools. John P. Altgeld, a K-8 a block to the west of Throop Street. And Julian Bond, a K-8 two blocks to the east.

My parents were the greatest parents on the planet. They were very honest, loving hard-working people. They raised their children to the best of their ability and took pride in doing so. Both medical professionals, my dad worked in the morgue, and later in a clinic where most of the people in the community received health care. My mom worked at Cook County Hospital miles away on the west side of Chicago. Their marriage was a testament to their commitment to one another and to their family values and it showed.

My dad, Jettie, was a tall, strapping, dark-skinned man with a short, matted head of hair and a deep voice. He was from Osceola, Arkansas with three brothers and one sister: John, Carl, Sugar and Elizabeth. I only remember seeing his mother, my grandmother, a few times but you'll have to wait until later for her story.

My mom, Margaret, was a beautiful, svelte, light-skinned woman with long, wavy black hair. She was from Helena, Mississippi. The only sibling of hers I know anything about is her sister Leola, who is still living. My mother had been married before. She had six kids prior to marrying my dad. Four boys and two girls: Charles, Willie, James, Bernard, Ida and Phyllis. Then, my mom and dad had six kids together. I was the last of them all; Baby of the family; the only boy in the second group. My siblings are: Kim, Naomi, Renee, Marchelle, and Sharon. They tell me I had a brother named Gary who died before I was born, but that's all they ever say.

In 1968 or thereabouts I remember my brother Willie (buck) coming in the house with fatigues on, leaving some large duffel bags in the basement, and leaving again. I remember seeing a pillow case full of what I thought was some kind of dirt and grass mixture and I remember he and my mom arguing about it after she'd found it and flushed it down the toilet. I remember my brother James coming home with fatigues on, getting out of a green and white Checkered Cab. I remember our family friend who drove a Checkered Cab. I don't remember his name but I remember that he was a family friend.

My mom and dad were also entrepreneurs. They had a business, a few cars and owned a home. As children, we never wanted for much of anything. Three meals a day were always on the table. I've since learned that our home life was somewhat unusual for most families who grew up on Throop Street. We were the 'meals around the table' kind of family. Close. Loving. Endearing. Caring.

I started school at John P. Altgeld. My mom registered me in Kindergarten. I remember the day well. It was the first time I had seen the inside of the school. The white-haired, older white woman gave us a brief tour and showed me and my mom the classroom I would be in. I was excited. I had wanted to go really badly because I would always sit in the window and see other kids going to and from school.

When the time came for me to start my first day, I was excited. My mom walked me to the back of the school building where the playground was. Although I was five years old, I still had a baby's bottle full of juice by my side. It was my security blanket. Mom wouldn't let me take it inside so I freaked out. As I was throwing a tantrum I heard this loud, blaring buzzer that scared me out of my wits, and only made my tantrum worse. I screamed that I did not want to go to school and that was that. I didn't go that day. Mom took me back home. I woke up the next day ready to go. I even got dressed on my own. Mom was surprised when I told her that I was ready to go.

I took to Altgeld like a fish to water. I loved the environment, the teachers, the new things to see, recess, reading, the teacher's desk, the classroom, and the fact that I knew I was very close to home. The only thing I didn't gravitate to was the little dark-skinned girl named Nicole who sat next to me in my Kindergarten classroom. We all sat on the floor in a circle. I didn't like Nicole because she liked to try and poke me in the eyes with crayons. I had no idea what she was doing her way of telling me she liked me, and to let everyone else know that she was marking her territory.

After settling into school the first couple of years, I became the most popular kid there. I was the kid everybody wanted to be near at recess. I could throw the ball further; catch better; jump higher; climb higher. I was basically fearless. Scraped knees and elbows didn't stop me. They came with the territory. However, the sight of blood would

send me running and crying for help like the scared little spoiled brat that I really was. That year my brother James spent time with me and taught me how to play the game of chess. I became a chess master. I won a lot. I became so good at it that he was the only person I never beat consistently.

### THE FIRST TRAGEDY (1971)

It was the typical summer afternoon. Warm but overcast. I was outside playing, riding on my red tri-cycle. My mother and a few of the neighbors sitting on their front porches began yelling for everyone to get in the house. I was oblivious to what was happening. I was a kid. Seven years old. I remember looking down the street to see what the others were yelling about and saw two men, one on each side of the street, dressed in black with trench coats on. A sure attention getter. It was 70 degrees outside. They were walking from the north end of the block toward where me, and a few of the other boys on the block who had bicycles were playing.

My mother yelled for me again. I continued playing and rode faster in the opposite direction. She ran off the porch and in what seemed like one swift motion, grabbed me with one arm, lifted me off the bike, tucked me under her arm, turned back toward the house, ran up the stairs and slammed the door behind us as we made it into the living room. She yelled for everyone to get in the back. While everyone in our house that day rushed toward the back of the house, in the commotion, they had somehow forgotten about me. I snuck back up to the living room and like an infantryman crawled over to the window. I wasn't at all curious about what they had been yelling about, my mom had just left my new tri-cycle outside for any and everyone to take rides on without my permission.

I peeked under the shade toward where she had snatched me up off my bike. I saw the two men walk up on the Harris' front porch. They knocked on the door, someone answered, one of the men asked for Boone, one of the Harris boys, and then opened fire with a sawed-off

shotgun hitting Boone squarely in the chest and knocking him back inside the doorway. I was no more than 10-feet away. The only thing between me and them was 5-feet on the Harris' porch, and the 3-ft gangway. I saw it all. The two men ran off the porch toward 71st Street and made their way around the corner. My heart nearly jumped out my chest and ran in the opposite direction. I felt someone pull me from behind. My mom pulled me away from the window and yelled at me for what seemed like the next hour.

I didn't know what to think. I was shaken. I had seen stuff like that on *Gunsmoke* but never in real life or up that close. I would carry the tragedy of Boone getting shot as an indelible image in my mind for decades. After the police and ambulance left, I eventually got back outside to my bike, but things were quieter, almost solemn. I thought Boone was dead. I later came to learn that the Harris' were a family of drug dealers displaced from some other neighborhood. The very humble and quiet Mahomes family (Maxine, Phillip, and Barbara) lived their before.

## SECOND TRAGEDY (1971)

My grandfather, my mother's father, was from the Island of Madagascar. He was a tall man, light-skinned with a short-cropped military-style haircut and one arm. I never asked him what happened to his arm. I was afraid to. When I first met him, my mom and dad took me with them. If my memory serves me correctly, the place we visited him was in St. Louis. I saw him again one other time and he gave me a quarter.

Soon after, my parents dragged me off to my grandfather's funeral; (possibly also in St. Louis). He was my mom's father. Although I didn't know him very well, I knew him enough to know he was my grandfather and I wanted to get to know him. Every child has an internal longing to know their grandparents. I was forced to sit through the funeral. I was scared. I was shaken.

I didn't know what to think. I was unable to speak to anyone because I was confused. At the funeral, no one ever said a word to me about what or how I felt. I remember my grandfather exactly like the pictures I have. In the funeral pictures I have, I look dazed and confused. This was my grandfather. No one ever said a word to me about his death or asked me what I was feeling. For the next 30 years I wouldn't be able to attend a funeral or get anywhere near a corpse.

A word of advice for all parents or those who would be parents: never, ever keep answers about death away from a young child once they've interacted with a loved one, especially grandparents. I met my grandfather, then he was gone and no one told me why. I still believe to this day that the lack of communication is the reason I would carry Boone's shooting, my grandfather's death, and the eight other tragedies that would occur by the time I was 18, as indelible images in my mind for many, many years to come. No child should have to endure such things. Especially ten tragedies by the time they are 18. I am living proof that it can affect your life in ways that you can't even imagine.

### THIRD TRAGEDY (1972)

Shortly after my grandfather's death, early one evening, just as dusk has settled in, I was coming home from the playground at Altgeld School dribbling a basketball when my sisters Naomi, Kim and Sharon stopped me in my tracks. They told me I had to go back up to the school to hang out with them for a while. Since this had never happened before, I could sense something was wrong so like most kids with inquisitive minds, I started asking questions. My incessant why's annoyed them, but it led to them telling me absolutely nothing.

When the four of us arrived home the ambulance was just pulling away. Everyone from the neighborhood was sitting and standing outside my house. No one said a word. Just the blank looks on their faces let me know that this wasn't a normal visit from the neighbors. And why was the ambulance there? And why was the police car still sitting outside our house. What had happened? Where was my mom and dad? No one said a word. The whispers from the people standing around would haunt me in my dreams for decades.

When I entered the house I saw my dad duck in to his bedroom off the dining room. I tried to follow him but he whisked me away and closed the door, never saying a word. My sisters were all in the living room seated except my sister Kim who was sitting at the dining room table. I sat near Kim. The kitchen light was out. No one was moving. Nervously, I got up and went to the bathroom. As I was reaching to flush, something caught my eye. A single drop of blood was on the floor.

I went into the living room and sat on the couch. I could still hear a lot of commotion outside. The front door was open but the inner door was closed. I sat there, and sat there, and sat there. No one ever said a word. After what seemed like hours, my aunt, my mother's sister, came into the house. She went into my dad's room. After she came out, she came over to me and muttered the words, "Did anyone tell you your mom died?"

My aunt tried her best at being tactful. She asked me again. I was frozen. I didn't know what to say, what to think, how to answer. Didn't the same thing just happen to my grandfather? And where is he anyway? No one ever told me what "death" was. Not again. I'm not a kid. Tell me what's going on. Somebody say something!

My aunt sensed I didn't understand so she asked me if I wanted to go with her to spend the night. I said OK. I was scared and confused but I didn't know what else to say. She got up, went back into my dad's room, came back moments later and we left. My dad never came out. I was scared and confused but I went anyway. In retrospect, I'm not sure that if they had explained to me what the word death meant, I would've understood. But I certainly wish that they would have at least tried in some way. I wish they would have said something.

My mother was my mother. She cared for me, wiped away my tears when I fell down; took me to school on the first day; rescued me when I fell head first on the floor with my feet sticking up in the air into the little space between the twin bed and the wall in the bedroom

off the kitchen – she moved the bed to get me out; my mom even took care of me when I had the chicken pox and couldn't go to school.

FOURTH TRAGEDY (1972 – just hours after my mom died)

I was a nine year old who knew nothing about death. I wish they would have told me in some way what death meant. I may not have understood it then, but at least they would have told me.

My aunt lived in an upper-middle class neighborhood on the south east side of Chicago called Avalon Park. Her husband, my uncle, was a police officer. They lived in a very nice house. It had a mirrored wall in the living room, plush green curtains and very nice furniture. I could always tell they were living much better than my family was, by the neighborhood and the furniture in their house; and the fact that all the houses in their neighborhood were brick.

My aunt was a nice lady, very pretty and classy. She didn't talk like any of the black folk I knew. She and my mom looked a lot alike. My aunt had children. Two boys, two girls. I admired them. I even went to church with them a few times. A Lutheran church. I went to a bake sale there with my aunt once. But the night my mom died changed everything about my love, and even my image of them as my family. To this day, I want so badly just to go to my aunt, crawl up in her arms, and cry the tears I've never been able to release.

The night my mom died I woke up screaming about midnight. My aunt and my uncle both rushed to the kitchen outside the room where I was supposed to be sleeping. They thought I was having a nightmare because of my mom. I wasn't. I was up screaming because my cousin was molesting me. I couldn't believe it. When I woke up I didn't know what to do. I lay on my stomach unable to move, unable to speak. When he finished, he turned me over and performed oral sex on me, and then tried to get me to perform oral sex on him. I got up and started screaming. Screaming in pain. Screaming in anger. Screaming in confusion. I didn't know what had just happened. Before I ran out the room, he tried to get me to be quiet.

I screamed, and screamed, and screamed. I yelled until my aunt called my dad and told him she was bringing me home. Apparently, my dad convinced her to wait until morning because the next thing I knew, they were getting a spare bed set. I ended up on the Bamboo sofa on their back porch.

The Bamboo sofa was fine, but the back porch was not. The couch was next to a set of French doors that led to the bedroom I had just been molested in. I lay there in fear listening to him threaten me all night that if anyone told he would come and get me again. I have lived with that fear all my life, especially years later after he became a police officer. My fear was that he would make up some lie, put me in jail, and torture me. That fear gripped me so long that later on in life when I heard the news of him becoming an officer, I moved out of town and haven't lived there since. I always had a fear of driving and seeing him pulling up behind me in his police car, taking me somewhere and torturing me to death.

The next day, I arrived back home. My dad still never sat me down and talked to me. He never said a word to me about my mom after she died. Or even asked what I was screaming about the night before. I guess it was too hard for him. But I needed that from him.

That day, I got angry, and went upstairs to my sister Kim's room. She had this small gold and brass treasure chest. It had a key lock on it. I knew where she kept the key so I opened it and took out an antique dime she had been saving.

That was the first time I had ever stolen anything and to this day I don't even remember why.

The day my mother died was the worst day of my life.

The tragedy of losing my mom, the confusion of it all, and the lack of communication around it, was compounded a hundredfold by yet another tragedy. A tragedy that I would keep silent about and that would haunt me for many decades to come.



Brother Keith Hammond

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Brother Keith is a born again Christian. He is a Spirit-led man of God, teacher and author. His life has been transformed from things such as pride and prison to passion and purpose.

God is the author of the Bible. It is meant to be our instruction manual, our roadmap home. Without it, we are lost. Use the information in these books to help you and others.

God destroys the darkness behind us, to direct us toward our destiny ahead. So whatever you do on your journey, never turn back. God bless you in your walk with Christ.

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