

The story of a girl who grew up in the 50s and 60s when life was simpler in some ways but complicated in others. She learned from experiences which at times were not very pleasant. Finally, she saw that the destination was worth the journey.

Destined for Ever After

By C. B. Wilkes

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DESTINED *for Ever After*

THE WINDING ROAD  TO SELF-DISCOVERY

A tale of real life experiences



C. B. WILKES

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Part 1

Chapter 1

Today is December 3, 2014, my birthday. Happy birthday to *me!* As a child my birthday was just another day with no presents, cake, or parties, and even worse, no one remembered your birthday when it fell in December. I love my birth month, and Christmas is the best time of year for me, but as I get older December comes much too often.

When I got up today, I thanked God for life and health, had tea and sweetbread for breakfast, and called my retired friends to arrange a luncheon get-together. Then Joe, my better half, and I went to lunch at our favorite Red Lobster restaurant. He crossed my path forty-five years ago, and my life changed forever.

There is no explanation for the series of events that started so many years ago. Some have called it fate, others destiny, some a learning experience, and others, answered prayers. Since I rarely prayed in those days, I can only explain it as part of a plan.

Throughout the day I realized that if my life is spared, I will be seventy years old—three score and ten—on my next birthday. As we all know, this is all that was promised.

When my mother was forty years old, I thought she was *old*, and by the time she got to sixty she was *really old*. I stopped classifying her after that because I needed to pay

attention to my own advancing age. I believe that the older we get, the older *OLD* gets. I know I am getting old because of poor memory and body pains. I may not live for as long as my mother, but I hope for many more useful years.

The past year was memorable, and not all happy memories since this was the year that I lost my dear mother May, or Mamie as we called her.

In the years before her passing, my sister and I would travel to Trinidad, the country where we were born and grew up, in May to spend her birthday and Mother's Day with her. We attended church service on Mother's Day and took pictures as she sported her lovely dresses with matching hats. Even in her nineties, May modeled for church functions.

As I celebrate my birthday, I reflect on my life, my past, present, and future and honestly believe that our past determines our present and our future. I also think that whether we believe it or not, *Que sera, sera* (what will be, will be), and people come into our lives for a reason. We can call it luck, fate, destiny, or God's will, but I am convinced that life's journey with its many twists and turns leads to a predetermined destination.

I never considered myself a Christian. In my early years I was taken to church, and then as I got older, I attended occasionally, feeling that it was expected of me. My mother sent her children to church even though she often didn't go herself, and my father never went. She raised us to be good Anglican children.

My Mother May

Throughout my life I have met many persons professing godliness and Christianity, but I truly believe that my mother was the best Christian and the best person I have ever known. Of course, I am prejudiced, but believe me: She did not have a mean bone in her body and forgave everyone who ever wronged her. She advised us all to “buy a hatchet, dig a hole, and bury the past.”

I am not sure whether all my mother’s children loved her to the same degree, but I do know that as we both aged, I felt closer to her. We shared stories and jokes and did not take life too seriously. I believe the closeness I felt was because I did not grow up with her but was raised by my aunt Audrey, whom we all called Tantie, in the town of Arima. She was my mother’s only sister and my second mother.

May gave birth to ten children; two died soon after birth and eight survived, five boys and three girls. As I understand, my mother believed that she was done with childbirth after me—at least her oldest child hoped so. Then lo and behold my mother gets pregnant again, and instead of one baby she has twins.

Rumor has it that the eldest child, my sister Norma, who was my mother’s right hand and helped take care of the rest of us, was so upset that she burst into tears. She was probably sad that her job seemed never-ending. My mother was very proud of her oldest child, and she swore that she would never give her away, not even if she were offered a “sweepstake ticket.”



Chapter 2

The Early Years, 1950–1957

As a young child I could not understand why I lived with my aunt and uncle in Arima while my siblings lived with our parents in San Fernando. My mother explained to me when I was older that I wanted to live with my aunt because I did not want to go to school. This made no sense to me or to anyone else because Tantie was first, last, and always a teacher. Teaching was her life.

The two sisters were opposites. My aunt (Tantie) did very little since as far as I remember she always had domestic help. She did cook at times, and her stewed chicken was quite good. My mother enjoyed being active and kept busy cleaning, cooking, baking, and sewing, which was her first love.

Tantie was a loner. She was either in school teaching or at home in bed reading the newspaper or other literature. She married my uncle at the age of thirty-eight and was very set in her ways. I doubt that she ever had a male friend prior to her marriage.

My uncle was married previously, had two daughters, and became a widower. He worked for the first few years of marriage and then retired for health reasons. As I remember, he was sick for a major part of their married life, and my aunt, who had no social life, devoted her time to caring for

him. He was afraid to do much and spent most days in a rocking chair or bed.

Tantie taught at the Arima Girls' Government school, which I attended from the age of five until twelve. I have vague memories of these early years and cannot say whether we walked or took a taxi to school at first, but as I grew older, I walked three miles to and from school daily. It was fun walking with other children, especially when it rained and we took our shoes off to splash around on the watery pavement.

The fact that my aunt was a teacher at the school did not afford me preferential treatment, and I received punishment, as did the other children. In those days, teachers could "beat" students. We got licks with a strap or ruler or were slapped or pinched to encourage learning or improve behavior.

Even though I was a quiet, reserved child, I would retaliate if I felt provoked. I never quarreled or got into fights but would bite fellow students if they offended me and suffer the licks that followed.

I suspect that I was a slow learner or just lazy in primary school and needed a lot of encouragement. My aunt spent many nights helping me to read and do math. She never gave up, and I was not allowed to do so, either. When I could or would not concentrate on my studies, she would beat me with a ruler, belt, or clothes hanger. This made me angry, and on one occasion I rubbed garlic on one of my bruises because a friend said it would emphasize the wound. I expected my aunt to get in trouble, but in those days, adults were not

arrested for spanking their children and did not believe in sparing the rod and spoiling the child.

I forgave my aunt a long time ago, and I am convinced that her methods and continued encouragement helped me to achieve academic success. “Licks” was used to instill good habits and promote respect and obedience. Looking back, I suspect that it also helped to relieve parents’ and guardians’ stress and frustrations. Counseling was not an option in those days.

Tantie taught me responsibility. I took care of schoolbooks and pencils because if I lost them, I did without. I was taught “waste not, want not.” I had no regular pocket money until I got to secondary school and was given twenty-five cents for lunch on Fridays. Salaries were minimal in those days, and my aunt spent wisely and provided for all my needs.

While my education was adequate, my emotional needs were not met. I was a lonely child, very quiet and shy. My aunt and I had few conversations. We did not discuss life, growing up, or anything else. This may not have been unique because in those days, many adults lacked the ability to converse with their children, especially about the birds and bees.

I was left to my own devices and amused myself reading, writing, and drawing on scraps of paper. There were many trees in our yard, and I climbed the short ones to pick plums, mangoes, or oranges. My aunt’s house was built on very low ground with poor drainage, so when it rained, the flood water

surrounding the house was at least one foot high. I enjoyed making paper boats and throwing them out the window to float on the water.

Because of my reservation, over the years neighbors and friends complained to my aunt that I was unfriendly and even unmannerly. I am sure they were correct because I had no idea how to be friendly with my aunt as a role model. I hated Arima and lived for school vacation when I could join the rest of my family.

Life in San Fernando

As soon as school was out, I would take the train to San Fernando. I was in heaven and could not wait to be with my brothers and sisters and play and sing with my friends. My mother had a busy home with many visitors, while Arima was quiet, and we had very few visitors.

My mother was a seamstress all her life and made all our clothes in the early days, including church clothes, school uniforms, and even some underwear. She also made gowns for a few well-to-do families and used the money to assist my father, who was a tailor, in providing for the family.

I loved everything about San Fernando, especially the never-ending activity. My happiness showed when I would jump, sing, and dance on my mother's bed. San Fernando was so much fun. It was High Street with all the stores, the tailor shop where my father spent his days, my brothers' record collection with music for dancing and jumping up in carnival bands. I enjoyed myself immensely since I never

had these opportunities in Arima. The only things I hated about being in San Fernando were worm oil and having to return to Arima.

In those days, children were given medicine for a “clean out” at the end of vacation before returning to school. In the early hours of a morning, my mother and father would wake us to take worm oil. This was followed at breakfast with senna tea to rid our bodies of worms, which we were told was a result of eating too much candy.

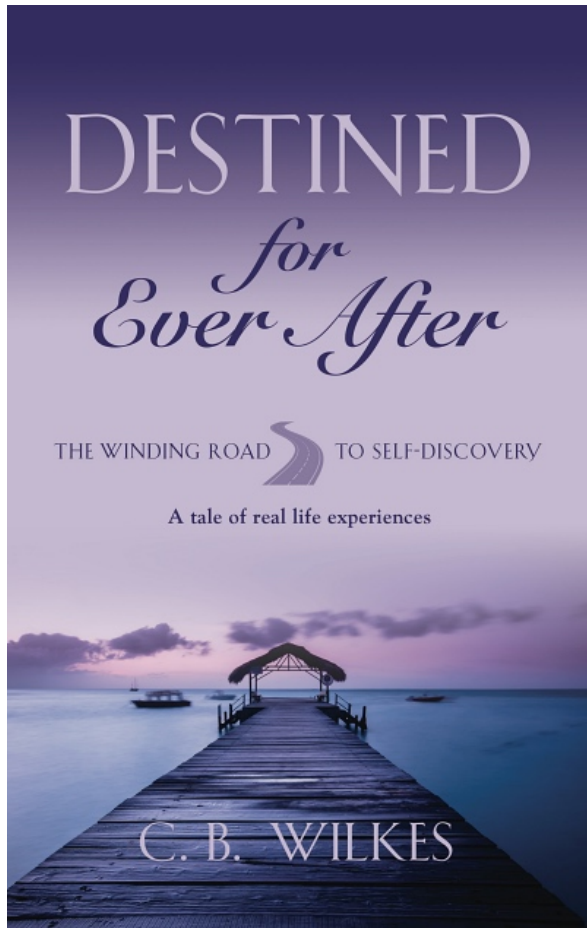
She must have been on to something because on one occasion one of my younger brothers passed ten worms after a dose of the oil. The long, wriggling, pink worms scared me so much that I fear worms to this day. Suffice it to say, after this I was so afraid of passing these worms that I refused to swallow the oil and would spit it out behind the bed.

When school vacation came to an end, I was so unhappy that I cried for days at the thought of returning to my aunt’s home. I suffered with allergies and would sneeze a lot, so it was easy to blow my nose and mess my face and clothes to gain sympathy. This had no effect on my mother or anyone else. She was happy that I lived with my aunt, who had no children of her own.

C. B. Wilkes



Tantie's house where I grew up



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