

The book is about wanting to escape the streets, overcoming drug addiction as a junky, surviving brutal street battles, and living through a life of crime, stealing, lying, and cheating just to get another hit.

Game Ain't Over: A Junkie's Journey to the Pulpit

By Rev. Robert P. Harris Jr.

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GAME AIN'T OVER

A JUNKIE'S JOURNEY TO THE PULPIT



The story of a desperate junky who journeyed through the dungeon of drug death to the pulpit.

REV. ROBERT P. HARRIS JR.

Game Ain't Over
"A Junkie's Journey to the Pulpit"

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Prologue

I was dying. I knew I was dying; right there in my mother's house, my life was wasting away. At an age when I should have started living, I was dying.

At the tender age of thirty, fresh out of the Army, I had been dishonorably discharged, not because I lacked the qualities of a good soldier, but because a drugging problem had curtailed my dreams of serving my country.

And now, my life was ending as I crumbled under the bed, gasping for breath; my brain was shutting down, even as my heart's palpitations exploded in my ears like an out-of-control jackhammer.

I was drenched in sweat; the dampness clung to my clothes, emanating a musty scent that reeked of death. My frail body was battered by the constant use of crack and cocaine and cocktails of marijuana, heroin, and alcohol.

As my pulse faded and my eyes glazed over, I knew I didn't want to die. I didn't want to go this way. But, I

had committed the ultimate drugging sin, injecting a massive dose of cocaine into my veins alone.

It was a sin every junky knows is catastrophic. I had lost weight from lack of nutrition. The only thing I lived for was seeking the next high. My body wasn't strong enough to fight this impending doom. The overdose was letting my heart know the streets were about to claim one more drug victim,

It was in the '80s the Projects and Black neighborhoods were in a fierce drug war. The streets' scarred, burned-out, and abandoned buildings were junky's havens. They offered a dilapidated cover for shooting drugs in peace.

Drugs were expensive, and getting money whichever way was a junky's daily goal. So we robbed, broke into houses, swindled, and stole to get enough money for one more hit.

But there is much punishment the body can take. The abuse I inflicted on my body had taken a toll. I was staring at death but didn't want to die.

As a misty glaze rolled over my eyes, my foggy brain clutched desperately to live. I tried to focus on what was

killing me, the cocaine and syringe lying on the floor where they had fallen.

"No, No, Oh No o!" a scream welled from the depth of my soul.

Warm tears trickled down my face. I was dreading the void of darkness descending on me. This was not how I wanted to go.

The tears became a flood of anguished sobs wracking my bony shoulders. I gasped, hanging on to dear life but knowing I wouldn't make it. The loss, the emptiness, the darkness, the desperation of it all, a life created for greatness was about to be snuffed out in a cloud of cocaine.

That thought made me cry harder. I started wailing like a newborn baby, folded into a fetal position.

My mother heard the commotion and came into the room. She saw me lying there on the floor. I tried looking up at her, unconsciously reaching out for her motherly strength. But I was too weak and needed help desperately.

My life's story would have ended then, but it didn't. I wasn't meant to depart without fulfilling my life's

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purpose. God had other plans, He delivered me from the dungeon of drug death.

And now I can write this book, and tell you the story of a desperate street junky who journeyed through the labyrinth of death to reach the pulpit.

Chapter One: The Scene of My Beginning

She stood there looking at me curled on the floor; my mother couldn't understand why I was screaming like a new born baby. I stretched out my hand towards her. "what's wrong?" she asked. I pointed to the cocaine and syringe on the floor.

"I don't want to die, Mom, I'm on drugs, and I don't know how to get off them" she must have thought I was in a drug delirium because she told me, "you need to go to church!"

That made me extremely mad. I shouted, "I've been to church; church never done nothing for me!"

"You've been going to church for the wrong reasons," she responded and walked out.

I slammed the door with my foot. I didn't move, I curled there, sweating and losing my breath, knowing I was about to lose consciousness, and that would be my end.

Before dying, I decided to pray; I pulled myself together and got on my knees. I had not prayed like this before

in many years. I said, “God, I know I've been to you before. But right now, I feel like I'm dying and won't be alive to fulfill the purpose you created me for. Whatever you want me to do, I will do it, God, because I need you right now; I need you to save my life!”

As soon as I prayed, something amazing happened; I felt peace flow over my soul. It was a calming sensation I had never felt before; God's presence filled the room, a purity, joy, love, and something I couldn't explain. I knew it was God because my whole body was electrified, and my heart was filled with joy.

So I whispered, “God, if this is you, I don't ever want to depart from your presence, then I said, “Amen.”

The tears dried up my breathing went back to normal I felt revitalized, with a new freshness; I felt like somebody who had just come from an early morning swim washed over me. It was crazy; I felt so fresh that I walked out of the front door, went outside, and breathed in deeply. Everything looked so different; it was like I was in a new world.

The grass looked greener, the trees looked glorious, the flowers were magnificent, and the sounds in the streets were galvanizing. Familiar sights I had barely noticed

shimmered in exquisite beauty. The sounds were unbelievably clear; I felt alive; I was alive! I was gripped with inexplicable excitement. I felt like shouting at the top of my lungs, “I’ am alive, I ‘am alive!”

I felt like a newborn baby; everything was new and beautiful. I can’t explain the experience; I can only tell you what was happening to me. Later I found it was the beginning of God telling His story through my story.

My life took a 360-degree turn; I wanted more of what I was feeling. So from there, I kept coming back to that spot. I would get into my bedroom, lock the door and open my Bible. I didn’t want to entertain anybody. I locked everybody out and locked myself in with the Bible. I wanted to read God’s word, talk to God and get to know him. I wanted to experience the refreshing coolness of his presence.

I wanted more of His encounters. My mom must have thought I was going crazy. But all I was doing was studying God's word. I didn’t come out except to grab something to eat and to use the bathroom.

I remembered where it had all started, where I had become conscious of my being. My first glimpse of the

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world was on Shearor Street as a child. It was a source of fond memories. That's where the seeds of my redemption had been planted.

Shearor street was a place of fond memories, but everybody has fond memories; we all do. We have distant memories of our childhood. These memories are sometimes bittersweet and other times painful, but they are mostly precious. Like a sand glass, they flow- full at the beginning, trickling out in time, and empty at the end.

Chapter Two: Shotgun House on Shearor Street

My childhood memories go back to Shearor Street, a street in Clarksville, Tennessee, not unlike any other 1960s inner-city America. A beautiful street full of Black love. The neighborhood reverberated with laughter and camaraderie—a Community of Black families united by segregation and poverty.

We were poor but didn't know we were poor, not as kids anyway. Not when all that we experienced was an endless river of love flowing from a bunch of cousins, dozens of uncles, and countless caring aunties concerned about every child's welfare in the street.

When I say cousins, uncles, and aunties, they weren't blood relatives. Most people weren't related by blood relation except for sharing a neighborhood.

Blood relationships weren't as important as neighborhood proximity; that's what mattered. We lived as one large family united by street and color. The neighborhood mechanic, the postman, the Barber, the

hairdresser, the grocery store owners, and the alcoholic were all family.

Like every American inner city, Clarksville's Black neighborhoods were 'woke' to civil rights. It was a consciousness of new societal order sweeping across America. We were living at the crossroads of history. Rosa Parks would start the bus boycott in Montgomery even as Martin Luther King Jr. stirred the nation to a new civil rights consciousness.

But as a child, I didn't know or care about all of this history happening around me. All we cared about was to play. We played in the streets. There were no playgrounds, no communal basketball courts, no baseball fields, and no libraries – we lived to exercise our natural God-given talents.

And thank God that we did; we brought life to Shearor Street. All the running around, climbing trees, shouting, screaming, and building toys from discarded stuff kept us vibrant, healthy, and strong.

Families lived in shotgun houses amidst a smattering of trees, ash trees, black walnut, and flowering dogwood that created tiny groves, beautiful places for kids to run and to play hide and seek.

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Spring was the best time of the year when flowering dogwoods bloomed. White petals crowned their tiny green leaves, some of which were blown into the streets filling the air with a sweet prickly scent. The scent would pervade the streets in the evenings, carried by the wind that swept through the Streets echoing voices of people seated on their porches sharing laughter and evening small talk as mothers shouted to get kids back inside the houses.

You could tell the seasons by the trees when the flowers became clusters of red berries, and then it was fall. The wind would blow as we ran in the streets, getting colder, and the berries and the leaves would fill the streets, their bare branches waiting for the first powdery flakes of the first snow. Then it would be winter, but we would still be out in the streets playing because we had nowhere else to play.

I was probably five or six years old. To this day, I can still remember the warmth and love of Shearor Street.

We lived in one house, my grandmother, my mother, my brother, and I. It was a shotgun house like all the houses on Shearor Street.

We weren't too fond of that house. It lacked essential amenities necessary for today's comfort. The bathroom was an outhouse in the back of the house. We had to walk through the grass whenever we had a bathroom call. And that was in all seasons, winter, summer, spring, and autumn. Dark rainy nights were the scariest when the darkness pressed like an evil blanket, as the night noises snuffed any little courage we had mastered. I still shiver every time I remember those night walks to the bathroom.

Everybody lived in shotgun houses. They were tiny, unassuming narrow wood-framed structures built with wood sidings. They lacked beauty and fell short of aesthetics. They looked derelict and miserably so. The paint was constantly peeling off, and the sidings were sometimes cracked.

Their interior was like a box. It was one large room with a high ceiling and no hallway. You opened the door, looked straight through the house, and saw everything in the place. The floor was wood, not concrete.

The front door opened into the living room. You walked, through the front door, into the living room to the middle room, where everybody slept. Then you had a kitchen, a tiny space reserved as a cooking place; you

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walked through the kitchen to the back door. There wasn't an attic or a basement.

Most black families lived in shotgun houses; several shotgun houses were on our side of the Street. Families with better incomes lived in single-family homes.

That was in the fifties. The projects had not been built.

While writing this, I realized my memory wasn't as good as it should be. It is over sixty years ago. A childhood friend, John Hackney, we called him 'Junior' back in the day, had better memory and could remember most of our neighborhood details.

John is now in his seventies, but he has an impeccable memory. So we went down memory lane together. He reminded me of our time on Shearor Street, of how we were captives of our environment and had to live through it, and how we had no air conditioning and had to open the windows, sometimes at night, just to get some fresh air.

We kept up the houses as well as we could, even though they had no running water. They didn't have stable electric lights; when it came, the electricity would blink on and off for a few hours and disappear for days.

That meant we couldn't have electrical appliances. An ugly pot belly stove standing in the middle of the room was the center of our livelihood; it came with the house. We cooked, baked, and warmed the house in winter on these ugly stoves.

They were a respiratory hazard; coal fumes filled the house every time they were lit because we didn't have proper ventilation. Coal fumes sucked out the oxygen. We had trouble breathing. It was another reason we kept the windows open.

We had to be creative with the windows, especially in summer. We cut boxes that would act as a fan and put them in the window. In winter, we became even more creative and kept the windows open. The boxes helped keep out the cold.

We did not have a shower. Showers just didn't exist for us, except for a few families who could afford to put up an additional structure they would use as a bathroom, then they would connect this structure to running water, but the water was cold. There was no heating.

We showered from bedpans. We would fill these large metallic pails with water and boil them on the stove.

The stove had huge metal plates for burners. We had to take the top off the lid off that burner and put paper or any kindling or scrap paper to light it up. Then, when the coal was lit, we would put the metal plates back, boil our bathing water, or cook food.

Baking on that stove without burning bread was an art our Mamas perfected. The furnace did not have low heat, medium heat, or medium-high. That depended on how much wood, coal, and paper you put in. That's what determined the actual temperature.

Life in a shotgun house wasn't comfortable for most families. Multiple family members, grandparents, parents, and children, would cram into one shotgun house.

Many families lived, like my Auntie Love and my Uncle Myles. Known on the street as the Halls, they lived next to John Hackney's family. My cousins Melvin, Ricky, Ronnie, Wanda, Jean, and Kenny lived in one shotgun house with their parents.

Most children growing up didn't have the luxury of owning beds. Instead, they shared sleeping spaces on the floor or with their parents. Families with few members, husband, wife, and children, faired better.

Another family, the Terrys, lived on the other side of Shearor Street, Mrs. Catherine Terry, and her children, were quiet folks who didn't like mingling. Mr. Henry Terry, the Dad, was a stern man who was always scowling, and his children Joyce, little Henry, Carlton, Donald, Pamela Sue, and Yvonne were good friends to our family.

Large families came up with creative ways to live comfortably. They curved spaces out of the Kitchen and extended that into the living room.

Despite the discomfort and crowding, we lived happily, all the families on Shearor Street.

An old lady lived on the right side of Terry's house. We thought she was a witch. Her house looked haunted, but when we came to know her, we realized she was a sweet old lady who loved kids but liked keeping her own company. She would have the older kids do tasks and would pay them.

The neighboring streets weren't quite like Shearor Street. We had more traditional family homes. They were larger wooden frame homes. Families in these homes fared better than the rest of us. Their parents had better incomes. But as kids, we didn't know any

difference. All we knew was that the homes looked beautiful and better,

In one of those houses next to Corner Street lived Mrs. Dora Poindexter. She was a lovely lady who was friendly to everyone. We were especially attracted to her dexterity and comeliness. Mrs. Dora would give us kids treats when we were well-behaved.

Her neighbors, the Butts family, were quite the opposite. They kept to themselves. Mr. Butts was a military man and was always gone on duty. Although, like many other black soldiers, he had to live in segregated black neighborhoods off-post.

We neither had traditional yards nor nicely manicured lawns - places kids would play. We had the streets. They were dangerous not because of automobiles but because of tree roots. They had lots of tree roots sticking from the ground. We would get injured when we accidentally tripped on them.

The streets were safe from cars, and There weren't many people with cars. I can't remember too many people having cars. The only person with a vehicle was my Uncle Myles,

We seldom ventured beyond our neighborhood. We lacked transportation and had to walk everywhere that we needed to go.

Every neighborhood has its familiar faces. Several people were common on Shearor Street. First, there was Rex, the coal seller. Rex looked like coal. He was always covered in a thin film of black coal dust. His overalls were always dusty black, we didn't like him much, but he brought the coal we needed.

Then there was Mr. Charlie Chilton, a short man, about five feet two inches tall. He was, however, our favorite because he brought ice blocks. We didn't have electrical refrigerators. What passed for a fridge was a box. So we placed Mr. Chilton's ice blocks at the bottom of the box, and that's how we preserved food.

As kids, we would chase after Mr. Chilton every time he passed along Shearor Street. we would scream, "Mr. Chilton, would you give us chips? Give us some chips, Mr. Chilton."

He used a pick fork to pick up the ice. Every time he did that, chips would break off; that's what we wanted. But, he was a kind-hearted man who would give us some chips to lick on.

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We didn't have much food. Most families were struggling. God, in his divine providence, provided what we lacked. We had many fruit trees. There was a pear tree next to Terry's house. It would bloat with ripe fruit when pears were in season.

There were plenty of apple trees in Baby Carol's backyard. And We would sneak into their backyard and raid the trees. Sometimes they'd want us there, and other times they didn't. We would take those apples and do a number when they let us. We would have fried apple pies, apple cobbler, and other creative recipes.

There was a mulberry patch near service street running perpendicular to Forest Street, and we could eat as many berries as we wanted and carry some home.

We made it work; most families did. We subsided what we picked from those trees with what we couldn't afford to buy from the grocery store.

Some necessities, however, didn't grow on trees. We needed money to get them. For example, hotdog sandwiches and hamburgers from Miss Lou Ella's were the favorite; you could go in and sit down at a table and eat.

Mrs. Outlaw's, a restaurant on Carpenter Street, also sold delicious hotdog sandwiches for a quarter. So anytime we had a quarter, we would run down to Miss Ella or Mrs. Outlaw's restaurants and throw down those hotdog sandwiches and hamburgers; they tasted heavenly.

We revered church and church folks. At the corner of Shearor Street and Ninth Street was a Pentecostal church. The sanctified church. People referred to Sanctified church members as 'Holy Rollers,' the members were 'sanctified,' They walked with a 'holy strut.' We had fun imitating their 'Holy Ghost strut.' Little did I know I would be a holy roller' in real life someday.

Their church didn't have air conditioning. So they had to keep the windows open. We loved peering through the church windows to see what they were doing. We would sneak up and peep through the open windows and watch them perform these 'holy ceremonies' - they would sing as they played cymbals and the organ. They would roll on the ground and speak in tongues. They seemed to have lots of fun worshipping God!

The sight of their joyous faces stuck with me. It would later in life become a seed of redemption.

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Most people had an absolute fear of God. Our parents and grandparents instilled it. So even as we peeked and peeped into what they were doing, We were still piously respectful and treated the church ground as hallowed grounds; we dared not act frivolously.

The church was a pillar to most families. Mothers, grandmothers, and aunties instilled the sense of church. They would go to church dragging kids along. On the other hand, many husbands weren't really keen on going to church, but interestingly, men who attended church took on active leadership roles.

Shearor Street and other streets had several small businesses run by black entrepreneurs. There were so many that we had a store every two or three blocks.

Most of these businesses operated on running a tab. People weren't paid much money. It was probably \$25 or \$30 a week, which wasn't enough to keep a family well-fed. So many people lived on Bologna and on credit.

Mr. Elliot Outlaw sold Bologna at the corner of Lee and Forest Street. People would come in and cut a tab. You could have 25 cents worth of Bologna for lunch and

sometimes dinner. You could get yourself a banana, a pound of meat, and several slices of Bologna.

Almost everybody in the neighborhood had a tab. There were no credit cards, and most people didn't have cash. So they had to wait until payday.

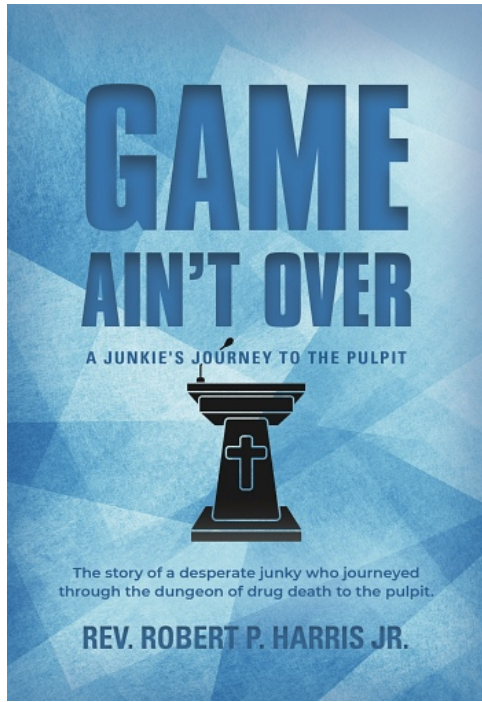
And because people were always low on cash, everybody borrowed from everybody else without malice; people were generous. Whether it was a cup of sugar, a stick of butter, flour, or even a tray of ice, people were generous to lend one another. And it wasn't about being paid back. If you got repaid, that was fine, but life still went on if you didn't get paid back.

Children behaved; they had to; any adult could scold you. It didn't have to be your parent; everybody's mothers were everybody's mothers.

All the memories of Shearor Street are flush with childhood nostalgia. My Mama still says, "Boy, you don't remember that?" and I always respond, "Yeah, I do, Mama. I do remember. We were like one big family; we were family, part of a village!" and she always responds, "Yeah we did!"

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Shearor Street molded us. It hardened us for street life. Soon, we were about to move up, Lincoln homes were being built, and life in the projects was about to begin.



The book is about wanting to escape the streets, overcoming drug addiction as a junky, surviving brutal street battles, and living through a life of crime, stealing, lying, and cheating just to get another hit.

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