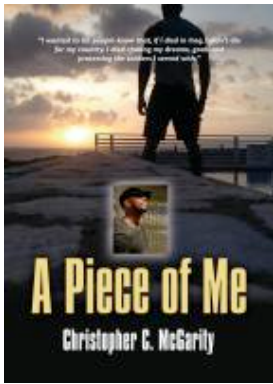


*"I wanted to let people know that, if I died in Iraq, I didn't die for my country. I died chasing my dreams, goals and protecting the soldiers I served with."*



# A Piece of Me

**Christopher C. McGarity**



*A Piece of Me is a heartfelt, riveting biography of the complex life of a man whose story will captivate your mind and touch your soul. Christopher (born the 8th of 11 children) shares his journey through life, whether it's growing up with 11 siblings, betrayals, relationships, Army life or being shipped off to the War. Christopher's story was written from a promise that he made to himself. "Dreams don't work unless you do."*

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# **A Piece of Me**

Based on a True Story

Christopher Conan McGarity

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## **Burba**

My name is Christopher Conan McGarity. I was born November 29, 1977, at 3:42 pm. My grandmother named me. She had told my mother she always wanted a boy named Christopher. To this day, my grandmother, who is now 80 years old, still reminds me she was the one who chose my name. As I sit here, only God knows how much time I have left to live. I wish my whole life were a movie capturing the best parts of my life, and although few, those sad times as well. That way, when my time comes, I can sit back, relax, eat some popcorn, and watch it all over again. This would give me the chance to laugh, cry, reminisce, and probably want to kick myself a little for all those times I should have known better. We probably all feel that way as we hit our thirties and start to rethink where we are and everything we've done up to that point. I try to remember simple things; the innocence of being a child, girls I'd had a crush on, jobs I've had, times I've been humiliated, the fun times, and the rough times. All of these experiences have made me the man I have become. As I get older I notice some memories fade, some lay dormant, and certain people in my life tend to reactivate those memories. A familiar song, smell, or interaction can spark those memories of when I was young. There are things I remember which seem to

be more than just a piece of me; they are what make me who I am. They are something I have shared with others, passed along, and used to solidify my legacy.

Although my family moved three times while I was growing up, we still never managed to leave good old Mt. Clemens, Michigan. I was born and raised there. Mt. Clemens, The Clem, as it's called by locals, is the center of nightlife in Macomb County. For a small town, we've had some notable talent start here, such as Kid Rock and Uncle Kracker, some professional athletes, and actors such as Dean Cain. But, I'm not here to talk about Mt. Clemens. The purpose of my book is, beyond anything else, to see if I can actually write like I think I can. Most people at one time or another in their lives seem to want to write a book, but few do it. This is my chance. Plus, it may be my backup for that movie I may never be able to see. I'm still counting on that one though.

My mother, Ida Nell McGarity, is a proud mother of eleven children. All of us are difficult in our own ways. We rarely had privacy in our house. We grew up and spent time in groups of three or four kids depending on age. I am the 8th oldest and I usually hung around my siblings who were six and seven (Courtney and Camron).

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There were three siblings younger than myself. As they grew up, they stuck together.

Thinking back, I guess it didn't seem as if there were many people in the house, not until you wanted privacy or you were getting ready for school and needed to use the bathroom. Notice I said bathroom, as in one. That's a lot of people to share a single bathroom. It seemed there was always someone waiting outside the bathroom door. In my life I've witnessed many things. I've learned, been inspired, and have had the opportunity to connect with others through those experiences. I want to share what I've learned and show others the way I view the world. We all take different paths in life, but no matter where we go, we take a little of each other everywhere.

Life is like a performance to me in many ways. In life, we play many roles. Each situation determines the role I play. When I'm with friends, at work, at a club, on a date, or playing sports I act differently in each situation. I find this is the same with everyone. I've yet to find someone who doesn't act a little different once their environment changes. When I am with friends, I feel as if there is a sense of acceptance and freedom without boundaries. I don't need to pretend or feel as if I'm being judged because of my views, actions, beliefs, opinions,

or mistakes I have made. I find it dynamic that even among my friends, there is a tier system of closeness. Categorically, I have friends I can go to for certain things such as if my car breaks down or if I need help with something. I like to call this group, “the dependable.” Then there are my friends who are fun to hang out with. We're close enough to hang but I may not be comfortable sharing my intimate thoughts with them. I would guess with both of these groups their feelings toward me are mutual.

When I worked as a waiter, I was merely playing a role. I had to hold my tongue sometimes. If I were to say what I was thinking all the time, I would've been fired the first day. You can bet that holds true for anyone in the service industry. I had to act as if I care and put on a certain persona. So, as you read this book try to play the role of me. Pretend you are auditioning to be cast for my character in that film of my life.

We are born innocent to the world, but at some point innocence fades and we begin to see people and things for what they truly are. Perception changes as we grow. An analogy comes to mind of the uncle all of the kids loved when they were young, but as you grow up you



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realize he was just an alcoholic. What was once a fun-loving guy turns out to be someone with a real problem?

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My mother was born in Tupelo, Mississippi and was one of three children. Ida really enjoyed reading novels and all kinds of books as I recall growing up. We had book shelves filled with books that she had read. She also enjoyed bowling when she had time to get away. My mom does not drive, and as far as I can remember she never did. I remember walking to the grocery store with my siblings and we all carried bags of food home. She smoked Salem 100s. I remember times when I would light her cigarette and take a puff or hold the smoke in my mouth to blow it in my sister's face. Mom had a habit of eating ice. I'm sure it had something to do with the stress of raising 11 children. These are only a few of the subtle moments of my mother I can recollect while growing up. Thinking back, I wonder why these moments are important enough for my mind to cling to while others, I'm sure more significant, I've lost.

My mother was a very strong woman. I only recall my mother crying one particular time. I was 12 years old and overheard my mom on the phone telling a friend she

didn't know how she was going to manage to get gifts for all 11 of her kids. She had begun to cry.

“Don't cry. You don't have to buy me anything for Christmas. I know you love me.”

My mother had hung up the phone by now. My comment made her cry even more. I was so anxious to be older so I could get a job and my mom wouldn't have to worry about not having money for Christmas. I told mom that when I got older I was going to buy her a ring one day. That was important to me. I wanted my mom to be happy.

I associated material things with happiness when I was little. My mother had stopped wearing her wedding ring and I decided I would buy her a ring to replace the one she didn't wear. When I was 21, I purchased a gold ring with her birth-stone (sapphire) mounted to it. Keeping true to my promise, I remember saying, “I told you that I would buy you a ring.”

We weren't raised believing in Santa Clause. On Christmas day of that year, I woke up and to no surprise there were presents. I could hardly see the tree. I enjoyed decorating, the gift giving, the snow, the cartoons and movies, and the generosity of our community around the

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holiday seasons. As I reflect back, although there were 11 children in our house, we had everything we needed while growing up. Maybe we didn't have the fanciest, or the top of the line stuff, but we rarely found ourselves wanting for anything. Mom should have won an Oscar award for her performance in raising the 11 of us. Ida taught us how important family and friends are compared to material gifts. This was the greatest gift I've ever received. Somehow she managed. I don't know how, but she did.

I was a cute, fat, little baby. My aunts and uncles use to call me baby Huey. I'm not sure where they got it from, but I'd guess it was either the singer front man for Baby Huey and the Babysitters or the cartoon with the big 'ole duck in diapers. I'll go with the singer. I was attached to my mother like bees to honey. No one could hold me without me screaming, kicking, slapping, and reaching for my mother. The only exception would be if someone had food, candy, or something tasty to drink. As soon as the food was gone I wanted my mama again. Even though, there were eight of us when I was born I acted as if I was the only child.

I remember being scared of my father, but I'd do anything to get to my mother. No matter what obstacle

stood in my way I would fight my brother or sisters, and win or lose, I'd run as fast as my little legs would carry me to get to mama. I had set myself up plenty of times to get a whooping.

If I damaged something, I would run to my mother. Of course, depending on what I broke, I'd be spanked. If I thought I would get in trouble for anything I had done; I would run away and hide. Mama would send my brothers and sisters to find me. Like a search party, they would run around the house until they found me. Then they would drag me to mama as I kicked and screamed, "Let me go! I didn't do it!" After I would get my spanking, I would be mad at mama. I still loved her and wanted to be around her. I just didn't want to talk to her.

## **The Decision**

One day while I was in a math class I reflected back on my life up to the present day. I thought about the bad times, the good times, the goals I've accomplished, and the goals I had yet to reach. I felt as if I had already decided to join the Army by the time the class was over for the day. I drove down to the recruiting station and decided the first door I saw I was going to go inside. I felt like I was a recruiters dream, educated, athletic, and intelligent. To come in on my own without having to worry about background checks, high school diploma, wife, kids, or being of age.

When I got home from my recruiting station, I compared my life to the Army. I would be able to get money for college. I could still pay my bills, and I could help out my family more. I would get medical, dental, and life insurance. I would be able to travel. I would get to fight for my nation's freedom as many before me had fought and died. I would learn a new trade as a motor transport operator. And Military service on a resume is very marketable. On January 16, 2000 I went to the college to drop all my classes and take my books in for return. I received a full refund for my books, but I only got half my tuition.

There are a lot of tests you must take before the army accepts you. The last thing I wanted to do was wait, and I had already filled out so much paperwork. Honestly, the paperwork bugged me, and I began to question my decision. But, I continued to sign papers and ask questions. I asked things like, “What if I die? What if I don’t like it?” I wanted them to start from the beginning and explain what basic training was like. After about a million questions and 1000 hours of testing and paperwork, the date was set. I was scheduled to leave on February 24.

Three weeks before I left for basic training, I began wondering what the hell I had done. I know what I did. I just didn’t know what to expect. I’d heard so many different stories about the army. I’d heard things like, “Hey, you’ll be okay; it’s a mind game.” What kind of mind games? I heard one lady say, “You joined the army? Oh, just wait until you go to war. You’re going to cry like a baby for your mamma.” That pissed me off. I had to use some self-control. I wanted to say, “Bitch, I didn’t ask for your opinion. But, I didn’t pursue it. Another guy told me, “Hey man, after the first couple of weeks it’s easy.” He didn’t tell me what *happened* the first couple of weeks.

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When I told my friends and family everyone asked why I chose the military. But, it was something I decided to do and I didn't know exactly how to explain it at the time.

Two weeks before I left everyone I knew was showing me love. I was receiving unexpected visits from people who wanted to take me out to eat and just kick it. I wish I felt this much love every day. Even at the club, females were showing a brother some love after I told them I was going into the army. Maybe they just wanted to do the "nasty." Though I don't operate that way, I still enjoyed the attention. I didn't plan on meeting anybody of interest in the final two weeks. But, hey, everything had been going my way so far. One night at the club I was out on the dance floor doing my thing, and I saw some people staring at others. Around 1:00 am someone touched my head, and I looked up. I was thinking this better not be a man touching me because I can always bring a can of whoop ass. I looked up and saw this beautiful face, hoping she was the one who touched me rather than this hefty girl slightly to the left but luckily it was the one I wanted to talk to. After talking with her for a little while, I wanted to know more about her. But, time out men...she didn't give me her address, phone number, or beeper. Yeah, beepers were big back then, if you had

one you were pretty cool. “Damn!” Well, I was hoping she would come back to the club on Saturday, which was just four days before I left for basic training.

There was one other person I wanted to see and go out with before I left. She was my number one even to this day, but she wasn’t mine. I called her and told her about the decision I had made. She told me she thought I made a good choice, and then I asked if we could go out for a bite to eat before I headed out. She said, “Yes.” I was so excited. Wednesday we met at the MCC south campus at 7:30 pm. I wanted to see her so bad that when I did, I felt butterflies in my stomach. This woman is the love of my life at the time. We went to a nice restaurant called Andiamos, and we had a wonderful dinner and conversation. I could see, in her eyes, she loved me. I could have stayed there forever and tell her how much I would miss her. I started to tell her about the day I left my job. She was crying tears of love and sadness. She asked me what I wanted to do for the rest of the night. I replied, “Honestly? I just want to hold you in my arms until morning.” She said, “Is that all?” and I nodded, “yes.”

We got a room, and for three hours we talked, laughed, and danced. My whole body felt love which it



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never had before, and then we finally laid down together. I held her in my arms and realized my dreams had come true. As time passed, it felt so good I couldn't sleep. I just watched my beauty. Then I heard a sweet voice say, "Chris what do you want to do?" I wanted to make love, but I didn't want to ruin the night we'd already had. Then again, I thought I might never get this chance again. I told her. We did and still to this day I get chills thinking about it. I couldn't believe it. I wanted more, but I wasn't trying to be greedy. I whispered, "I love you," and we fell asleep. If I ever get another chance to be with her, I swear she'll be my wife. With only one week left until I left for basic training the love continued to flow.

Saturday night would be the last club night for a while. Usually I would have chilled for before I went to the dance floor, but not that night. That night I was going to dance like I was trying out for an MC Hammer video. I'm always hyper at the dance clubs, but that night I was more hyper than usual. I won a t-shirt and a cd. I had to dance for it. We took pictures, and I had about six long island ice teas in one hour, in other words, "I was buzzing." Time flies when you're having fun, and I was having too much fun. Then from across the dance floor I saw a familiar face. It seemed as if everything had stopped. I couldn't believe it. It was the girl from the

previous week. I went up to her and we both screamed. She came all the way from Grand Rapids, about 2.5 hours away. I told her I would come to see her before I left on Wednesday, and she didn't believe me.

On Monday, I got the directions, jumped in the Ford Probe, and I was on my way to Grand Rapids. We went out to eat and bowled, which I won. Then we went for a walk down by the river. We took some pictures. The night sky was beautiful and so was that night. She laid her head on my chest as I ran my fingers through her hair. I fell asleep and woke up to her gone. She had to wake up early in the morning, but I forgot. I thought she stole my wallet and my car—just playing, but I did think I was dreaming. She left me a kiss on my driver side window. I drove all the way home, high on life. When I got home, I got my boy Diondre to come over. This Negro is silly as hell. He and I have the same personality. We sat around and talked about our trips to Canada, the time when he fell off my motorcycle and the day he tried to go running with me knowing that he was out of shape. We had different perceptions of what happened as we tell these stories. We add our own twist to make one person funnier than the other, but what can I say, he's a good friend of mine.

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My little sister came down to my room to chill, laugh, and say goodnight. I think she wanted to tell me she was going to miss me and that she loves me. Sometimes the easiest words are the hardest to say. I wanted to tell her the same thing, and I did.

My brother Camron didn't have a reaction. He didn't believe I would go, so I think he was shocked. As much as my mother cussed me out, which I deserved, she seemed a little choked up. I love my mama, if only you knew half the shit she's been through and sacrificed for her kids you'd love her as well. Believe it or not, if I ever got the chance to pick my parents and family I'd pick the same I have now. My oldest brother had come over right before I left. He and I did what every McGarity does best, make each other laugh. He rocked the house when he showed off his preacher skills. I admired him ever since I was little. He acted like a father. He took me to work with him. He taught me that hard work pays off, and he always says, "If you're going to do a job, do it right the first time." My brother Courtney was my "insurance club" brother. He always had my back. We had some classic nights at the clubs, basketball and football games and motorcycling. I gave him advice, and I gave him more advice.

On Wednesday night I was in my hotel room, Cam and Courtney came to visit me. I was thinking we'd have a good time but, I started getting nervous about my upcoming life change. We didn't talk about the army; we talked about the good old days. Sometimes there was just silence. I gave my brothers a hug and told them I loved them.

## Love Life

Of the two years I was in Germany I went out on a lot of dates and had a few flings, but I did manage to have a few relationships as well. I met a lady at a wine festival name Sani. She was Portuguese, had a smooth accent, pretty smile, and a nice body. We had great conversation and hit-it off well. She was an older and well educated. She fluently spoke four languages and majored in English. She was also a teacher and well established. We dated for a month before I realized I was in a serious relationship. She knew who she was and what she wanted in life. She was ready to be with someone who was looking for marriage and wanting a family. To me, I was only going to be in Germany two years and I was headed back to the States. I wasn't planning on staying in Germany or bringing someone back home with me. My mentality was to enjoy and explore Europe...and don't get anyone pregnant. We talked a lot about our lives and expectations, eventually seeing there was that difference in our personal wants and needs. The relationship eventually faded.

I met Lindsey in my mandatory German driver's training class. She was always half asleep and me and some of my friends use to pick with her. The classes

were not *that* boring. So, we made up stuff to mess with her, teasing her asking if she was at the club the night before. She was from North Dakota and played soccer for the Army. She lived about an hour away in B.K (Army base). We exchanged numbers and began seeing each other more often. I even took Saleem with me to visit her. Lindsey had a friend whom I called Miss Piggy. I usually meet people and quickly reference something or someone they resemble. I do this in my mind and sometimes I say it aloud. She looked just like Miss Piggy from the Muppets. Khalid swears he “took one for the team.” A phrase used often when you meet someone who has an unattractive friend, and yet someone has to keep her attention while you’re occupied. Some of our friends still misunderstood the meaning and they’d say, “Man, I took one for the team last night.” They more than likely slept with someone fat, ugly, or someone they would've never slept with unless they were under the influence of alcohol. Anyway, Khalid was nothing but company to Miss Piggy. Lindsey and I dated for a few months but we weren't able to see each other as much due to some of my work missions and being in the field for 45 days every other month was rough on any relationship. We parted and went our separate ways, yet remained in touch.

Lastly, I met Marjia at my favorite nightclub, the Park Cafe. They had a live band and a DJ that played between intermissions. The DJ closed out the night playing various mixes. All the music was western music (American, R&B, hip hop and some of the top 40) She was from Serbia and spoke German, English, and Serbian. Marjia taught me German just about every day. She would speak to me in German and I would translate it back to her in English and then German. It was annoying at first but after a while I began to pick up on the language quite well. I couldn't write it, but I could speak and understand well. When she spoke in German I would write out the words I remembered. I wrote them out the way it sounded to me and that helped me with my pronunciation. Even though she was fluent in English, when she met JB she could never understand him. She would look at me and ask softly, "What did he say." JB didn't speak clearly and his lips hardly moved to form words. On top of that he had a strong southern accent. He would've been a hell of a ventriloquist. Marjia was the most affectionate girlfriend I had ever had. She would kiss me constantly. It was only too much when we were at her house. I didn't want to hurt her feelings but I ended up telling her that she kissed me too much. That helped for a moment. After a while I just began turning away as if I was a toddler. She also showed me all around

Frankfurt and other cities. Places that most tourists wouldn't know about unless they knew someone who lived there. One thing I learned is to not to assume everyone speaks English. For the most part if I was lost or wasn't sure of how to get somewhere, I always tried to asked someone youthful such as a teenager or college student as they are most likely to speak English. Most Germans are taught English throughout grade school. Did you know "Kindergarten" is German and it means children's garden?

I was near Hamburg, Germany on a joint training with German soldiers. We got a chance to visit Denmark. We were all eating inside the Cantina (dining area) listening to a jukebox and talking about our training and our lives. Specialist LaSane had finished playing, "*Who let the Dogs out*" five times in a row. No one really paid any attention until about the third time the song came on and each time LaSane acted as if he was surprised to hear the song. Shortly after that the news was broadcasting the coverage of the world trade center's being hit by a commercial airplane. It didn't seem real. My heart sank as I saw the building collapse. I felt helpless and sorry for the people trapped inside those buildings. Within about 30 minutes we, US Army soldiers, cancelled the rest of the training, and headed back to our base. As we

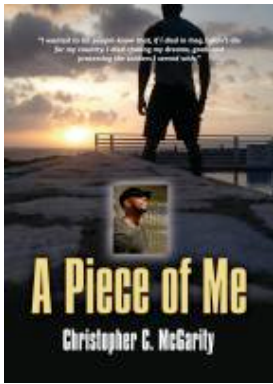


returned to our base there were flowers everywhere outside the base in the wake of what happened in the U.S. on Sept 11, 2001. Security was very tight around our base and all other bases throughout Germany after that incident.

Of the two years I was stationed in Germany, I was probably in the field doing training exercises a total of six to seven months. When I was back on base, I was hardly there after the workday was complete. Some of the places visited while I was in Germany were France, England, Denmark, Trier, Amsterdam, and Austria. Germany was too good to be true. The people were great. I enjoyed everything from the food, festivals, and culture to the sights and history. I never felt the stigma of being black in Germany as I do in America.

One of my most memorable moments was my 24th birthday. I use to take a lollipop with me when I went to the club (which was quite often). I always craved something sweet after having a few drinks, so I choose a lollipop as my fix. We went almost every Sunday to the Park Cafe, knowing we had to be up early for fitness on Monday. They had a live band and a DJ. We got to know the entire band because we went so often. Sometimes they would invite us on stage, to dance, sing, and even

rap a few lines while the beat dropped. I felt famous some nights. For my birthday we went to the Park Cafe. I ended up going alone because my friends had other plans and told me they would just meet me there. I walked in and everyone in the club had lollipops, even the band and DJ. I thought that was the coolest birthday ever. We partied hard that night!



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