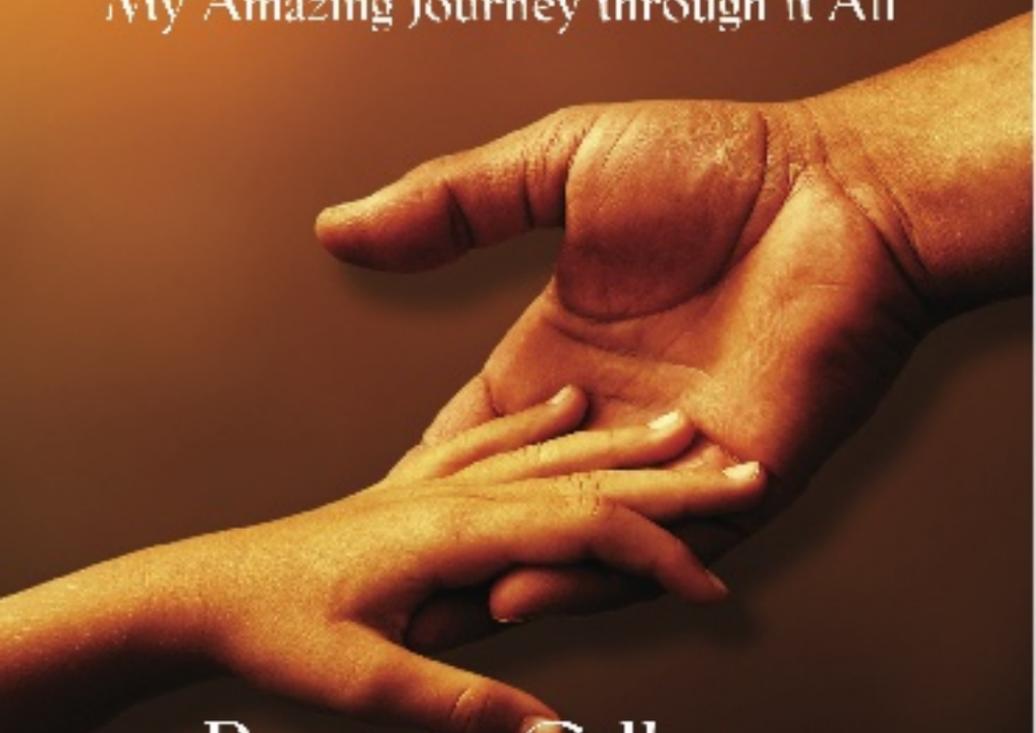
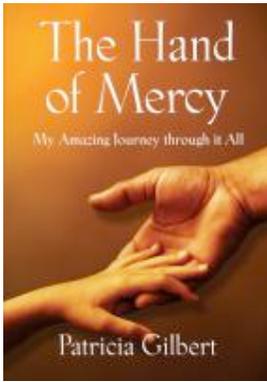


The Hand of Mercy

My Amazing Journey through it All



Patricia Gilbert



"The Hand of Mercy" is an account of one woman's life. A life God has called to be shared with others to give hope to a hurting world...a hope that comes only as we call out to our Redeemer Jesus Christ. This riveting book will bring you to tears as you travel through her journey and see the power of the Holy Spirit at work. A piercing read.

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My Amazing Journey Through It All

PAT GILBERT
With KIMBERLY COLE

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First Edition

Chapter Two

My Southern Gentleman

My southern gentleman came into my life as the knight in shining armor most women dream about. Love like this can be so hard to come by, but when it does, you just have to reach out and grab that special person and never, ever let them get out of your grasp. The likelihood of meeting someone like that again is very rare, perhaps a once in a lifetime occurrence.

I did not always make the right choices in the early years of my life; for in my youth, perfection excluded me and I must say that I learned greatly from those circumstances of life that most of us encounter at one time or another. In making wrong choices, I had dated young men and, without thought, did not always do the right thing. However, of the young men I had dated, no one caught my attention until the year I met Bob—1959. I knew he was the one I would spend my entire life with. I almost missed that opportunity of meeting my Mr. Right.

I was seventeen years old and my brother-in-law, Bill, had a messy habit of setting me up on blind dates; none of these turned out to be the Prince Charming I

was searching for. Bill was more persistent this time. He went on and on like a broken record about having a perfect match for me. He was like a beagle with his relentless barking and hounding of ‘Bob, Bob, Bob’. His words still ring in my ears this day. “Come on Patty! I know the two of you will hit it off. Bob just needs a good friend.”

Oh, how often I had heard those words. Politely, I told Bill to keep dreaming because this lady was through with meeting his friends. But, after a few weeks, reluctantly I finally caved in just to satisfy my brother-in-law from being a nuisance—an annoying bug and not having the wits to chase him off with a fly swatter. I remember looking in my bathroom mirror, brushing my brown, straight hair—no longer blonde or wavy—and preparing to meet this so-called ‘Bob’ I barely knew anything about. I only knew that he worked with my brother-in-law at the General Motors Parts Division in Baltimore City.

I sat my yellow hairbrush onto the small bathroom sink and was pleased with the French twist I had placed in a perfect spiral of circles. Inside, my stomach turned. I found myself actually getting anxious about this blind date. Hoping there may be some truth to my brother-in-law’s words—not that he was lying, but could this man be the one that would lift

me up as a woman? Would I be someone special to him? It kept me captive in my thoughts—hoping he was *that* man...hoping that I could touch his heart and share his hopes and dreams for both of us to be in the right place at the right time. I hoped to be led into the perfect opportunity, where we could possibly connect with one another to establish a good relationship.

I couldn't help but wonder what this man would be like as I brushed my hand down my skirt that was rising a little above my thin knees. It was my favorite outfit, bursting with lines of dark and light orchid stripes with fancy white lines, similar to a zebra. I tucked in my matching short sleeve blouse. I reasoned over and over in my mind with the same questions: *What if this is the man that I have been dreaming about? And my goodness, how would I know if it is him when I first see him? I had to pinch myself. Pat what are you getting yourself into?* Question upon question.

Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted. I heard my father call my name. It was time to go. I didn't have a car and my father was funny about me driving, his pride and joy; so he came along for the ride and the company, but more like a back seat driver. I drove my father's car toward the bus stop. I found myself feeling nervous. I continued to wonder what would come of this. I prayed silently. *I still have time to turn back and*

run. No, no, no! I am going through with this. I remember vividly saying to myself. *This man better be worth this!* I was up to my neck with hopeless dates. But, my brother-in-law was so persistent with me meeting Bob, that I thought there may be truly something special about him.

My father sat in the front passenger seat as I pulled up to the bus stop to pick up my southern date. My night had been planned out to go meet my brother-in-law and his wife, Sissy, at the Lodge. The Lodge where I was losing hope of ever finding a good man. I was beginning to feel as if someone would never love me. Even at that tender age, my insecurities had a way of seeping through like sap leaks from a tree.

At the bus stop, I had a good idea what Bob looked like from Bill's description. But, when my eyes discovered Bob standing tall and dressed in a pair of brown slacks and an ironed button-down dress shirt, I thought that my brother-in-law's description was far from what I had pictured. Bob caught my eye right away. He was attractive and before I could even blink twice, Bob had begun to walk toward my father's car. I was awe-struck. He took my breath away, and no one has ever caused me to feel that way.

Inside I cried out. *Wow! Now, this curious cat is well pleased at what I see.* I had a grin from ear to ear,

The Hand of Mercy

similar to the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland. I lost track of time as I gazed upon his tall figure, like a towering corn stalk with not a rotten defect whatsoever. He looked strong and then his eyes, his charming blue eyes, lit up his face like blue diamonds. I was not saved at the time, but I thought I might have died and gone to heaven. I was looking upon the face of an angel. I sat there and kicked myself in the head for not meeting Bob sooner.

Bob nodded his head in a friendly ‘hello’ before getting into the backseat and quietly set his bag onto the floor of the car. We actually didn't say much on the ride to the Lodge. I did find myself looking into the rear-view mirror at the hunk that was sitting in my father's backseat. I would catch him glancing back at me as if he had caught his fish of the day, and believe me, I was already hooked.

Bob, with his Tennessee southern manners, opened the door to the Moose Lodge, and we went and sat down with my family. He pulled out my chair as if I was a Queen. I had to ask myself, *Am I dreaming? And if I am, I don't desire anyone to wake me up.* I was used to helping my father and taking care of my siblings because of my mother's illness. I didn't know what it was like to be treated royally and have someone wait on me. Now, at this point, Bob was not

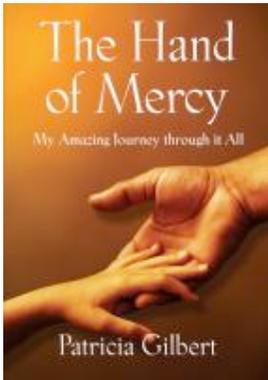
only fine to look upon, but he treated me like a Queen—not any Queen either; I was hoping to be his Queen. I thought. *I could get used to this!*

The Moose Lodge was a cozy restaurant—a little loud being that there was a bar below, but I didn't mind as long as I was sitting close to Bob. Not even a crane could have pulled me away from his side. I felt so connected to him and without even knowing him. Joyfully, we all sat around a big-circled table sharing funny stories until Bill and my sister Sissy went to the dance floor. I was surprised when Bob slipped his hand into mine and asked to go for a walk outside. I thought my heart skipped a beat. There was a river next to the restaurant. It was the same river my sisters and brothers and I used to swim in together.

We walked slowly, in no hurry for this date to end. Our hands were knitted together on that hot day when a fine cool breeze blew in-between us, causing the warmth of his palm to feel like a heating pad. During our walk, time had a way of skipping passed us. We shared so many things about one another, but one thing that surprised me was Bob asking me if I liked sports. I never really gave sports much thought. I was always busy being a mother to my younger siblings.

The Hand of Mercy

Before we knew it, the moon was out and the river shined with a sheer gloss like furniture polish on wood. The sound of waves was music to my ears, placing a hint of romance into the air. It was getting late and would soon be time to go. I was startled as Bob slipped his arms around my waist. I didn't fight off my Prince Charming. I was thrilled and welcomed him as a comfort blanket. I thought of wedding bells as he asked to see me the next day. In that spit second, all we needed were fireworks to finish off the night. Maybe this could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship.



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