

**WHO  
I'VE BECOME**  
*is NOT Who I AM*

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTERRUPTED—THE HANDS THAT CHANGED ME

“Are you having sex?”

“Uh...no, Mama, I’m not having any sex,” I responded, fidgeting with my school bag.

“I keep washing your underclothes, and I do not like what I’m seeing. It looks to me like you are out there having sex with somebody!” My mama was demanding an immediate answer.

Here was my opportunity, my big chance to get this huge burden off of my shoulders. But I was scared. How could I explain all the wetness and discharge in my panties, at age eleven? After years of being touched, fondled, and squeezed—my body was now responding to the very thing I hated—the *touch of his hands*. And I couldn’t tell my mama that.

“Sonya, you bet not be standing up here, in this house, lying to me!” My mama stood there fuming while I remained quiet.

I wanted to speak, but the words wouldn’t come out that would allow me to share the secret I’d been carrying with me for many years.

I just stood there staring, thinking. *You should know who’s touching me*. But I’d dare not say that to her. I grew up under an old-school regime, and to be disrespectful wouldn’t quite fly at that moment. So there I stood, trying not to move or

blink so that my tears wouldn't flow. He told me not to tell anyone about what was going on.

“I tell you what—I'm making an appointment to take you to the doctor. Then we'll know.”

I could have worked the streets as a prostitute, at nine years old, if left up to the *hands* that touched my body and changed my life. When most little girls were jumping rope, playing with dolls, or learning to braid hair, I was being sexually abused by trusted family members. I should have told my mother the truth that day, but I didn't. The hands that touched me, changed my life, and hurt my body, also forced me to keep my mouth shut.

I had many who chose to use me as the object of their perverted affections. They forced me to do things that a child should never have to do or experience. Family members, who were supposed to love and protect me, touched and fondled me. My sense of security fled because of other people's wrongdoings. It created cracks in my foundation, which altered my life forever.

I was changing; *I became a perfectionist at wearing a mask.*

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## CHAPTER 4

### MERCY SAW ME

I was down by the couch; I didn't know which way to turn. Every memory I thought was gone, suppressed, or forgotten emerged on that day. There were two rape attempts as an adult when all I could see was the oppressor's face. *I remember. The Lord made a way then...*

I had suppressed that memory, even though I had to look at the man every week and not as a little girl. I covered his sin by not telling; also thinking it would go away. All the things in my life that I didn't want anybody to see were right there in my face, so vivid. My enemy purposed to bring it before me. In my mind, I was again begging God to take away the embarrassment, pain, and shame, but the Lord whispered, *No*. I felt it was something I had to go through, but I didn't want to. I couldn't make it through all of this. *Lord, why do I have to feel this?* I worked so hard to cover it, and there I was naked, uncovered in my home, ready to give up my life. This evil had me ready to leave my husband, my child, my mother, my father, and my sisters—all of them at this point. All I could think about was stopping the pain. There was only one way out—death. *I told myself that it would be better if I were gone.* This way I could spare my husband and my son any shame or pain. Not thinking that they would have more pain for me leaving that way—by my own hand.



## CHAPTER 5

### EVERYBODY HAS A MASK

Why do people wear masks? Why do you and I wear a mask from one occasion to the next? We all have done some sort of masking for one reason or another. I am not talking about the minor incidents. It's those things that are tucked away, causing internal damage that war against us. Masking is done to some degree in every walk of life because people feel the need to hide. Basically, we try to hide the things we are ashamed of, or we try to hide the person we are on the inside.

I was taught how to effectively put on the right mask at a young age by watching others. Somebody is always observing this person or

the next. When I was growing up, I watched the church women put their faces on to hide tears. I watched them come to church; some without a husband, pretending all was well, but lonely. It was clear in my youthful observations that even after sleeping with a trustee or a deacon, they just couldn't tell anyone their pain. Those women still held their heads up while being used or becoming the user.

I saw how most played the game, thinking nobody knew their story. See, I watched, and I learned not to tell a soul who the true Sonya was, or what she had been through. Some things you just have to keep to yourself, being a good Christian and all, you know. So as an adult, I didn't have to tell them *what I had done* the night before or how my life truly was. All I had to do was go through the motions of playing church. Nobody needed to know my truth. Until one day, the mask almost killed me.

Before we get started on this topic, let's make it clear that we all have some business we must keep to ourselves. *Come on, I'm a realist and know that you can't be out here in the world, telling things that only you and God should know.* But there are some things that if allowed to become unveiled would change lives. The challenge of being real or unmasked is threatening because of the protective walls that masking creates. Suicidal thoughts, drugs, depression, and abuse have many faces. But it is so liberating when you do take off the mask.

Now let's deal with this thing called *masking*.



## CHAPTER 6

### SILENCE IS NOT THE ANSWER

To have one page of an entire book does not mean you have the entire story. This is how it is in the lives of the people who cross our paths. We may know something about them, but it doesn't mean we really know them.

Who can they tell? Who can handle their stories? Who can trust a gossiping tongue or a critical person with their story? One thing is for sure, silence can kill, but if there's no safe ear, what will happen to those hurting all around us?

Masking is silencing the true you, but the true you still speaks loudly.

I would have my story on the tip of my tongue to share with "Lucy," but a few seconds later Lucy would talk about another sister. I was like, *She definitely is not the one*. Many times I found myself in this predicament, ready to share only to find that there was no one who could hear me. So I settled for remaining silent. I cared way too much about the thoughts of others.

#### **SOMEBODY TOLD IT!**

I remember one lady at church who didn't care what others thought. I couldn't believe this lady, who was known for selling her body, drug abuse, and child neglect, opened her mouth against all odds. The people in the church gave the attention her demeanor commanded as she spoke boldly. When she was finished, we all realized that it took courage that some of us knew we didn't have. That woman left church saying to herself, "I'm glad I did." Let me tell you what she said.

## CHAPTER 7

### CAN I TELL YOU MY STORY?

*Can I talk to you for a minute?* I mean like really; can I trust you with *my stuff*, or my situation? Or are you one of those people who run and thrive off somebody else's trouble or mistakes?

If people are really going to break the silence, are you a safe place for them?

Masking is often implemented because most folk can't really handle the truth about others or what they are hearing. The situation, if shared, will usually render responses that immediately are classified as judgment or rejection. There's a rare group of people who can handle the true story that's being told or deposited into one's hearing.

If someone came and told you that they were struggling with lust, pornography, lying, stealing, homosexuality, or lesbianism, what would you say? How would you address the problem presented? I mean, both you and the person know that the issue is wrong, so where do you go from there? People are dying because they can't find anybody to be real with. So they remain quiet and undercover, which will eventually rot the inside of their souls.

My heart goes out to the person who everyone perceives to have all the answers, but in reality, they are barely making it. He finally comes to the point of sharing his heart, only to hear the person he was about to share with speak against someone else with a similar problem. So what happens? The mouth is closed; there's a retreat. A whisper on the inside says, *I can't tell a soul*.

This secret continues to eat at the inside of them. I know, because I felt that I could tell no one my story. It has to come out in order for the individual to be free. I tried, but they responded with the “right” religious jargon, but not the right spirit. Sometimes just having an ear to listen is the best gift you can give someone. The right heart or spirit loves the person right where they are, at that moment.



## CHAPTER 8

### DON'T LET THE DEVIL NAME YOU!

Say your name. No, really. I mean it; say your name right now. Out loud. Hear the sound? How does it sound to you? If you didn't say it, let's try it again. *I'm serious* because there's no sound like the name that has been given to you. This is the name that people call you, the one you answer to. You have to know your name, otherwise, you'll respond to anything. Your past or a temptation can call your name because it knows you. If you don't know your name, you'll answer to something that can take a hold of you. That something will name you and call you its own. You have to know the sound of your own name.

Let me explain. You know how it is when you hear somebody call your name, right? Okay, there could be three other Susans in the room—but nobody will respond, but you. They all look up because they heard the name called, but they returned to what they were originally doing, because the sound, the call, was for *you* only.

What my name represents is my parents' bloodline, history, and my purpose. But what's greater than all of that is the Blood of Jesus that

calls me. I respond to that call because that's who I am. *But I didn't always answer, too busy allowing my situations to name who I was.*

It's when I respond to the name Jesus that He begins to call me into the place that is my purpose.

What are you answering to? Who or what sin keeps calling your name? For me, in the whole season of darkness, it was suicide calling my name. I responded, but not with a verbal yes. My actions said yes, that's my name. See, I really didn't know the true essence of my name. But when I found out I was answering the wrong calls, I began to listen to *my* name. I soon stopped answering to every call of distress, temptation, and discouragement from my enemy. *It just didn't sound right anymore.*



## CHAPTER 9

### WHO *WE* HAVE BECOME

Do you remember having to repeat, *I am somebody*, the famous saying by Jesse Jackson, as a kid in school assemblies? I do. Everyone declared *I am somebody* very loudly to affirm our worth and value.

People like to feel important and loved. In an effort to go through life with such feelings of accomplishment, the whole truth is sometimes not heard. How many lies do folks tell, trying to be something other than who they are?

In all races and cultures, you will find people searching for their identity. In this, they look for validation, prestige, and position so that they can prove that they are truly somebody.

You see, my weakness became my identity crutch. I could no longer stand on the strength of a mask. I had to be introduced to the person that I am.

When your identity is covered behind a new face to adapt to the people you are with or to a circumstance, you—the person—are no longer living, but the mask lives and takes on a life of its own. You are transformed into who you are trying to emulate. You send a message that says, *This is who I am*.

We do it to escape from ourselves. It is so exhausting to put on a front and live a lie because you wish you were somebody else. It is so much better to be the you, you were created to be.

We play so many roles because of the different hats we wear and because of the responsibilities we have in our lives. Those roles help shape an illusion; meaning, because I am a wife, mother, daughter, sister, preacher, and writer, people believe an illusion based on my role(s). Does it mean that they really know who I am or only what I am doing at any given time during a day?

We all know of men and women today who, if they lost their jobs, they'd lose themselves. If their friends stopped calling them and kicked them to the curb, they'd feel worthless. Or if their husbands walked out on them for no reason at all, feeling used and abused, they'd have no reason to live. Why? This is their ID card. Because of this wrong assumption of identity, when the friends leave and the husband walks out, they have no identity of their own. Now what? People from all over the world feel that certain groups or connections can make them. Some believe that if they had *this* job, *this* car, *this* house, *this* man or *this* woman, *this* many children—that *this* makes them who they are. If it were that simple, wouldn't we be all right then?