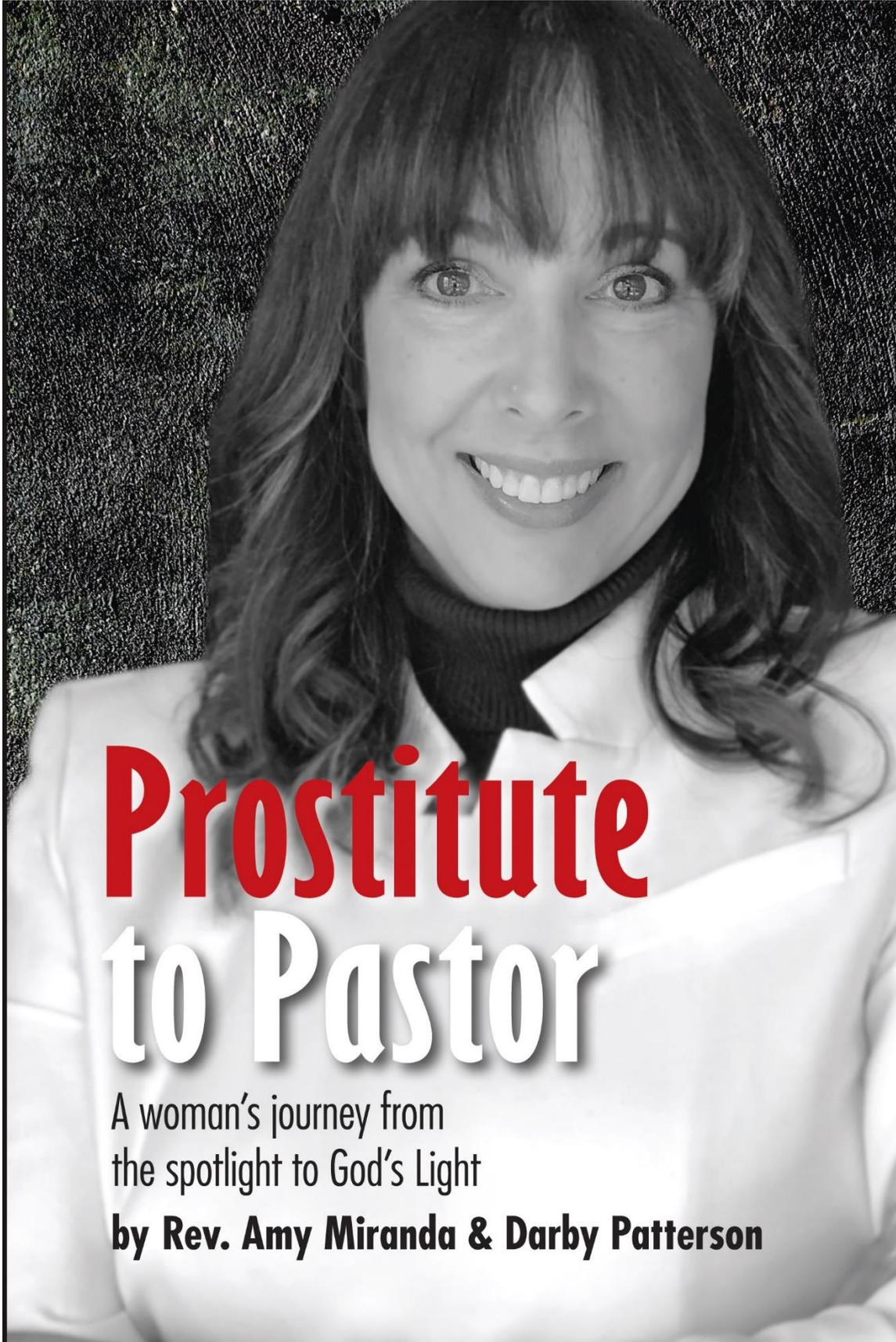


PREVIEW CHAPTERS



Prostitute to Pastor

A woman's journey from
the spotlight to God's Light

by Rev. Amy Miranda & Darby Patterson

Prostitute to Pastor

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Chapter 3 – *Childhood in a Bubble*

Until the age of nine I was an only child living in Lawrenceburg, Indiana, with my mother – a spirited, interesting and impulsive woman. I never knew who my biological father was and I don't recall caring. For me, our relationship was entirely normal, even though there was no father in my life and my mom suffered periods of deep sadness from illness I did not understand. I was always able to focus on the positives of a life that I now know was very sheltered.

My mother would often be the source of endless excitement, planning fun activities, and surprises that were out of the ordinary. I remember the night she woke me up and suggested that it would be great fun to go climb a bridge. I quickly changed out of my PJ's, and we drove to the gully under the bridge that looked to me, as a child, to be as tall as a skyscraper. We climbed the scaffolding from the very bottom to the deserted street above in the moonlight. I also recall the birthday that was supposed to be snowed out by a severe and imminent storm. My mom drove to every little girl's house in her white Mustang and personally chauffeured them to our mobile home. She protected me as much as she could so that I would not be disappointed.

I made lemonade stands, built forts in the snow, went trick or treating in August and filled bags with apples instead of candy.

My memories of childhood are decorated with fun, uncommon activities designed to shelter me from the periods when home life demanded that I play the role of an adult. I remember spontaneous acts of love vividly, while the darker times seem more distant, almost as if I had only dreamed them.

There were repeated episodes in my childhood with a Mom that called upon me to provide for her. She would have days of silence and withdrawal, slipping off to her room alone or burying her face in the pillows of the couch in our living room. When Mom was gone to these lonely places, I'd try to make things better for her. I'd clean the kitchen, rearrange the silverware in the drawers, organize

things in our house so that, when the fun-mom reappeared (as she always did), things would be just right.

There were many ups and downs in our life back then. I loved the high times and chose to focus on those. Indeed, I had a lot of help in the campaign to keep little Amy's life pleasant and protected. The adventures we had when my mom was well were intended to build a bubble around my young life and control, to the extent that my mom was able to, the happiness factor of childhood. The marvelous company of my Grammy only reinforced that I was protected and, within that prism of distorted reality, created a safe zone for me to be me. Anything I did or wanted to pretend to be, was quite fine with my Grammy – pretending to be a beauty contestant in a pageant that I would act out, or a Geisha girl with my face painted white with cold cream and wearing Grammy's scarf, or a prima ballerina in the Bolshoi Ballet. She encouraged me to play roles and let my imagination fly.

She also saw how much I loved music. How easy it was for me to get lost in its magic and leave parts of my reality behind. When I brought home a notice about my elementary school inviting students to choose their band instruments, she stopped washing dishes, wiped her soapy hands on her purple Mumu and unearthed an old trumpet she had stored in a closet. I quickly took to the instrument. When I was in middle school taking lessons and playing in the band, Grammy sat outside in her car and did crossword puzzles, patiently waiting for me. I built a group of friends within the band and we traveled by bus throughout the region to music festivals at other schools. I won many competitions. Medals and awards were tangible proof of my love for music. In my senior year, I was given the honor of being the Drum Majorette. I loved it all – the attention, the accolades and being completely surrounded by the bold music of my high school band.

I remember that my Uncle Bill came to visit us for my graduation. He'd been a professional trumpeter but had not played in many years. He made a very special memory for me when he sat down on our back-porch steps and played his trumpet with me. When I graduated, I was awarded a partial college scholarship based on my musical abilities. My plan was to attend Ball State University in Indiana and become a music teacher.

My mother's younger sister, Cindy, also protected me with weekends at her home in Cincinnati. We gobbled down popcorn while watching The Donny and Marie Osmund show on television and, knowing my love of performing, bought me a Donny and Marie microphone so that I could sing along with the radio. She sat still and let me style her hair as we watched The Carol Burnett Show. We played trumpet together, went ice skating and toured the big city together.

All this happened as an antidote, a bubble of beauty, designed to lighten the load of my mother's

mood swings and my obsessive desire to make things right by organizing, cleaning, and taking on responsibility that I didn't know was unusual for a child my age. I realize now that Grammy and Aunt Cindy were protecting me. Allowing me to escape into whatever musical story I chose to make up. To imprint my childhood with happy memories. And it worked.

I learned to jump into activities that let me pretend to be someone else. When we played 'house,' I ran the house; when my dolls were ill or hurt, I went to extremes to make them well with homemade plaster casts for broken bones and an IV drip fashioned from a personal hygiene bag. Whatever childhood fantasy I acted out – I was in charge.

I had a special childhood friend named Erik who was on the receiving end of my bossy-pants approach. He'd come over just wanting to ride bikes, but I'd turn our play into a family tableau. I made a pretend school on my porch, complete with little desks, teaching materials and dolls. His back porch I'd make our boat. I took charge of our little drama and when I was satisfied I'd say, "Okay, now your job is to ride your bike!" Eric was a lot like me in other ways – the child of a teenage mother who never knew his biological father and lived in his grandmother's house.

Where else would a young girl, growing out of playing house as her ultimate fantasy, go but to a bigger stage! Not surprisingly, I gravitated toward high school theatre. As a thespian, I got to 'pretend' and get applause. Yet behind my drive to become someone else, there was a lonely child who yearned for something she didn't have.

When Mom announced that we'd soon be moving to a new house, I adapted and managed like a child twice my age. After all, I had a lot of practice since we moved four times by the time I was eight years old. The only thing missing in my perfectly constructed life was a dad I hadn't even known I missed.

It was a broken telephone in 1978 that granted my wish. The phone company dispatched a repairman who knocked on the door of our trailer and stole my mom's breath away. Steve was a handsome man with flaxen blond hair and bright blue eyes. He had a gentle manner about him and laughed easily. After he'd fixed the phone and left, Mom plotted with me to get him back. Since he responded to broken phones, we broke ours again and, this time, when he showed up to do the repair, she invited him to dinner. Mom and Steve dated and soon became a couple; I adored him and he treated me like a princess.

One-day Steve came to me with a very serious expression on his face. He had one hand in his jacket pocket and reached out his other for mine. Then he pulled a delicate Silver Sweetheart Ring, set with a tiny diamond, from his pocket. He presented it to me and asked if it would be all right with me

if he asked my mom to marry him. For me, it was a dream come true, a sign that in life, there was a perfect moment. Soon after their wedding, Steve filed papers and officially adopted me. I finally had a daddy.

My life did change in important ways. Soon, I had a little brother and then a sister. I was also introduced to a new religious home. Steve followed his heart and became a lay minister. He was so deeply committed to his Christian calling that he started a small church, not far from our home. The services at the Lighthouse Tabernacle were nothing like the subdued Sundays at the Catholic church I'd attended with my mom. They were impassioned and encouraged participation of the congregation in the music and the praise. I developed a role for myself by learning to play three chords on the piano and rapping out a good rhythm on the tambourine so people could lift their voices in song and move to the music. My mother, brother, and sister sat dutifully in the front row.

It was especially exciting when guest preachers and musicians came to our Pentecostal church. They all fueled my attraction to both the church and the stage. Sometimes my dad would invite other preachers to our home for a meal. The kids were usually sent outdoors to play, but I wanted a place at the table. I wanted to hear the words, soak in the wisdom. Family evenings and weekends were spent immersed in Bible study and worship. And, with a minister for a dad, religion was our daily bread.

I began to dream about my own place in this new and expressive form of Christian worship. In the back of my mind, I was constructing a future, one that I shared with my dad when we were on one of our frequent fishing trips to the levy on the Ohio River. I was ten years old and already planning a life very different than the one I had. I told him I wanted to be a preacher and had seen myself in repeated dreams wearing a pure white suit, standing behind a pulpit in a huge stadium and preaching to a captivated crowd. I was bathed in the golden glow of stage lights and the power of music. It was my future. My dad's response was simple. "Women aren't preachers," he said. This dream of becoming someone, somewhere else, was not my first and certainly not my last.

Throughout those years I continued to provide the kind of family care that was needed when my mom fell into depression. However, now I had a bigger mission. It was up to me to protect my little brother and sister (both much younger than me) from those dark episodes. I made everything right. I kept the house orderly and clean. I put on a happy face for my vulnerable siblings and pretended everything was as it should be. Our life was good. We had great fun together. And our Mom was still uniquely wonderful and loving once the veil of melancholy lifted.

Surely this picture of my childhood doesn't account for the path I chose to walk once I turned eighteen. I had a mom and dad, siblings, friends and many cherished memories of childhood. In school

I was very well liked because I could easily adapt to people's expectations. I was certainly the very picture of a good girl, a child who could shoulder responsibility and take care of business. In retrospect, I think it was my heightened sense of responsibility that contributed to my need to escape – in my imagination and in my vision for the future. There is no one to blame. My parents did their very best with circumstances that were beyond their control. And I responded by running away to an experience almost diametrically opposed to my upbringing.

Chapter 4 – *A Woman on the Move*

The yearning for freedom, the need to live in a world of my own making, blossomed after my high school graduation. It started in innocent ways when I was a senior in high school. I attended parties with friends, not drinking, but carefully watching and absorbing the vibe of independence in darkened rooms where forbidden things might happen. But soon, observation led to participation, and I loved the way alcohol made me feel.

By then, we'd moved eight times, and 'moving' was in my blood. It seemed like a solution to problems. At eighteen, I was yearning to break free and entirely unaware of what I was running from. I just needed to move. I think my mother understood because that year she let me move to Denver, Colorado, to live with Aunt Cindy and her husband.

The accepted plan was for me to live in Colorado for a year to make residency, get a job and attend college there, but my motivation was to have the freedom to party. My aunt and uncle were happy to host good Amy. Once again, I found that I was the center of someone's world, the star of my own show, inside my beautiful bubble.

My reputation for being a very good girl provided cover for me as I sought out adventure, independence. I found it in the person of a married man who was a coworker at the phone company where I'd found a part-time job. He was suave and sophisticated, tall with black, wavy hair and a neat mustache. His dark, Hispanic complexion framed bright white teeth and deep penetrating brown eyes. He wore tasteful gold jewelry. He was also forty years old and married. I was so trusted by my aunt and uncle that they never suspected the nature of my relationship with the man who often dropped me off at their home. But good Amy harbored a secret, unknown even to herself, and her life was about

to take a radical turn down a rocky road.

Not only did my 'lover' provide graduate-level sex education for a girl who'd just turned eighteen, but he was also my guide to the cocaine kingdom. Through it all, he flattered me and made me forget that I was a scrawny, gangly girl from Indiana. I felt like I was under a spotlight, a shining little, dancing star. In exchange, I gave him my innocence which he accepted like a lascivious glutton.

Somewhere in my young, confused mind, I knew this affair was destined to end badly, and I fled Colorado within the year. Mom and dad had moved to Florida. Unlike Lawrenceburg, Indiana, population about five thousand, Florida sounded big, metropolitan, sophisticated. A 'State' of possibilities. I knew from experience that moving could solve problems. So, I admitted to my parents that I'd been involved with drugs and was still accepted back into their fold. Of course, out of their sight, I continued to party.

Almost immediately I learned that, in Florida, so long as I didn't drink, it was okay for me as a nineteen-year-old to be in bars and nightclubs. My underage stature was indicated by a special wristband that prevented me from buying drinks. But there was plenty of drinking before I went and after I left the bar. And, there were so many other things I could do in those dark bars that the absence of alcohol was unimportant! I became a chameleon and adapted to the seductive rock and roll environment. I colored my hair so that one-half was white and the other black. I wore a big metal key in my pierced ear. I entered the wet tee-shirt contests at the bar and revelled in the spotlight.

While hanging out in random apartments, my new friends did not encourage me to participate when drugs were being passed around. No, it was me being in charge of myself, who one day decided to give crank a try. Crank is a powerful stimulant that acts on the central nervous system. It's a derivative of Methamphetamine (Meth) that has lower purity and is taken as a powder. I was learning to favor drugs that brought on an immediate high, euphoria and an energy rush. Of course, the cost of this high was extreme lows during withdrawal and a very troubled Amy in my parent's home. When I'd left for Colorado I was Amy the good girl listening to Tom Jones and Englebert Humperdink; now I was gyrating to the beat of Guns and Roses.

Naturally, this behavior overwhelmed the ability of my parents to have me living with them. I moved into a house with some girls I'd met on my nightly trips to the bar and we built a life of nonstop partying. I did know that I would need a job to survive and support my lifestyle. Since I had no useful

training or education, I reached back into my childhood and, once again, the precious time I spent with my Grammy came to my rescue. Knowing how much I loved to dance, she would put my little feet on hers and teach me ballroom dance steps in her living room. Not formal training, certainly, but enough to land me a job as a ballroom dance teacher. I soon learned the job was about far more than dancing, and it taught me skills that I was able to incorporate in other aspects of my life as I wandered far from the path of childhood. Chief among those lessons was the art of manipulation. Dance studios make money and build customer loyalty by upselling. They appeal to the vanity and ego of clients who are simply thrilled to believe they have extraordinary talent. I would gain the admiration of my dance partner and then deliver the pitch. “You know, we don’t usually allow our clients to skip levels in our dance program,” I’d confide. “But you I think we could advance to the Gold Level just because you’ve really got what it takes!” Most often it was an easy sell. What wasn’t easy was doing work that required a sharp mind and an energetic body. After partying all night, I realized I wasn’t up to the daily challenge of teaching and selling. I needed something mindless, not demanding because it was more important to me to live the high life than to build a good life.

Like a bottom feeder in a fish tank, I sought out the lowliest position that I could find. A job with few expectations and requiring no skill beyond getting up and going to work every day. I got a repetitive, mindless factory job. I was very surprised to discover that my job making bed springs there was still too much for me. It was greasy, dirty and exhausting, and required physical labor that was beyond my ability to deliver. I made it through one paycheck and quit.

My inability to hang onto even a menial job because of my lifestyle reached some part of my consciousness. I felt as if my life was over unless I made a radical change and, for me, not much was more radical than joining the Armed Forces. I tried to clean up my act and marched off to the nearby Air Force recruiting office. I was feeling pretty good about the testing and interviews I’d had, and we were well into the process when the recruiter said he needed to ask me some “protocol questions.” Among the first question was, “Have you ever done drugs?” The good little Amy didn’t lie and I said, “Yes, I have.” He then asked what kind of drugs I’d done and gave him a short list – LSD, cocaine, mushrooms. He stopped me there and apologized. “Sorry, we can’t accept you.” I argued that I had stopped doing drugs and, maybe feeling some sympathy for me, the recruiter quietly suggested that I maybe should try the Navy, since their requirements might not be so rigid.

That rejection catapulted me back into ‘the life.’ I moved in with a drug dealer who had lots of other girls living in the house. I used cocaine every day, every night. Wild sex went along with it. Once, I overdosed on coke and was so buzzed that I jumped out of a moving car. At the same time, my room in the house was decorated with posters of my favorite ballet dancer, Mikhail Baryshnikov. I also had a pair of satin ballet slippers hanging on a hook near my bed. These vestiges of ‘good Amy’ stood in stark contrast to my lifestyle.

Those months in Florida quickly became a blur of drugs, sex, and disappointment. I got involved with a guitar player who went for kinky sex, had the experience of other women being included in those cocaine-fueled escapades, contracted a venereal disease from a guy I barely knew and was visited by my high school sweetheart who came to take me back to Indiana and have a life with him. He soon found I wasn’t the same girl he’d known years ago - the good little Amy. He left after just one week.

I went to my mother, as I often did while wandering through my maze of wrong turns. I complained that even the Armed Forces wouldn’t have me. Like many times before, my mom suggested that a move might turn things around. She said a friend’s daughter had relocated to New York and that might be good for me as well. New York, like Frank Sinatra sang, “the top of the heap!” I did manage to land on the top of the heap, but not the one depicted in the song.

READ THE ENTIRE STORY OF
AMY’S TRANSFORMATIVE LIFE
THAT INSPIRES HOPE & CHANGE!