

**BRING  
MY SOUL**

*Out of*  
**PRISON**



# BRING MY SOUL

## *Out of* **PRISON**

Chicago's Jail Chaplain Releases His Soul  
from a Personal Prison

**Herb Schluderberg**



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# DEDICATION



To all the inmates, chaplains, and deputies in Cook  
County Jail, Chicago, and to the city of Chicago.



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# FOREWORD



It was never my intention to become involved in jail and prison ministry. Often asked to support those in jail ministry and to volunteer myself, I retorted, “*No.*” Yet, somehow, I kept sinking deeper into what I refused. Not believing in predestination, I was stunned at my uncontrollable downward departure into an addictive destiny—Cook County Jail, Chicago.

The inmates and main characters represent real people, whom I knew inside and outside of the jail. Their names have been fictionalized, and some separate individuals have been combined into one character.

I took the difficult task of retelling a past experience often in the present voice to make it real for today. Though some pure fiction abounds, the adventure of freeing an imprisoned soul is a real saga.

Do you feel at times your soul is imprisoned even though you are not in jail? I did.

My soul is real—and now it’s free.



**PART I**  
**The Spirit**



# THE LAST CHAPTER FIRST



## **The world must be upside down, backwards.**

I am Henry. I have just returned from Europe, where I spent my carefree twenties seemingly long ago. I often returned there to visit whenever life in the States seemed crushing and inescapable. When a journey was not possible, I too often traveled there in my mind. I just left Europe behind for the last time because I have found a new place for renewing my mind—Chicago’s Cook County Jail.

Back home again in Chicago. It’s evening. I am driving onto the dark parking lot of the jail that is surrounded by a chain-link fence with razor wire on top. I am not alone on the parking lot as my car quietly slips into a space. People are stealing across the lot, visitors of the incarcerated. Many walk to the entrance with their heads bowed as if in deep reflection. The wind, that Chicago wind, is active tonight, blowing paper trash across the lot. The crisp fall sky reveals a bright moon looking down on the visitors, the tumbling trash, and me moving across the lot. The wind propels the trash; from whence cometh the wind? Who knows? What spirit is propelling the visitors; what spirit is propelling me or, for that matter, you?

Once again I am descending the staircase to the maximum-security area of the Cook County Jail and starting to feel good as darkness and depth engulf me. Depression seeps into my soul. Depression is reassuring. I see the despair on the faces of the wives and children here today to visit their locked-up husbands and fathers. I absorb their despair and depression. The stench of failure also penetrates my nostrils as I pass from one guarded door to another in the dim concrete passageways underground where trays of foul-smelling food are being transported to the incarcerated.

Once again, I am without a complete picture of what I am going to do, and that feels reassuring. Uncertainty is reassuring. All the pain of past failures as a father, husband, and as a businessman begin to surface now. That too is reassuring. It means I better look for God really hard. No, it doesn't mean that, for all I need to do is to relax. Be gentle, God is near. Here, in jail, he has penetrated the walls of prison, the bleakness of circumstances. In bleakness and brokenness it is easy to experience God. He whispers where least expected.

Mission accomplished, Sir, I am in spiritual community with Otis and the bad man. At home in Chicago, in jail, but out of prison. And for that, I will give God some of the credit. Thanks, God, for luring me into this jail. You have brought my soul out of prison by putting me in jail. You bring us all out of our prisons when we face the truth and live the truth.

# THE SACRIFICES OF GOD



*The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,  
a broken and a contrite heart.*

—Ps. 51:17 NKJV

Whenever I enter the Cook County correctional facility, I ask myself, “What are you doing here? Why do you even come here?” Most people stuck in here have lives that are train wrecks. Jail itself is not a train wreck, but for me it is a car wreck. It is like when you are cruising down the highway only to be forced into a crawl without knowing why, and you’re angry at the drivers in front of you. Then you see there’s an accident ahead, a serious accident. Now you start to slow down ... slower than you actually need to because you are compelled to discover what horrible things happened to other people. You want to experience their nightmare accident without actually being a part of it.

My life was a train wreck without my being incarcerated. My soul was imprisoned. Jail became my obsession. Why? How could I release my soul?



I am Henry, a volunteer chaplain. I am entering Cook County Jail. As I enter I am reminded of the passage in the Apostle's Creed that refers to Christ after his crucifixion: "He descended into Hell." This incarceration facility, locally known as the Chicago jail, is the largest single correctional center in the US with 11,000 to 14,000 detainees. Los Angeles has more inmates, but they are housed—imprisoned—in several separate facilities. In order to enter the Chicago maximum-security unit, first you must descend into darkness down a long concrete staircase that leaves you at the door of a subterranean pokey. Jail is a temporary holding facility before trial, or also after trial if the sentence is less than a year. Prison is long-term incarceration.

I first visited the jail as a volunteer but was actually at the same time in my own self-styled incarceration. If I'm already in my own prison, why do I choose to hang out here?

Why? To be harassed?

Herb, one of the deputies, lean and fortyish, peering steely-eyed through his titanium framed spectacles and loaded with hostility that he confuses with high-powered perception, patrolled the control desk near the bottom of the stairs. As always, he had a nasty greeting for me.

"Hey, everyone, Henry is here. Chaplain Henry, I mean. Now the murderers will be saved. I feel so much safer now that a chaplain's here, don't you?"

Officer Wanda, a young, highly-disciplined black deputy in uniform with short, straightened black hair, jumped in, "Why you bein' so nasty, Herb?"

"Because chaplains are worthless. They're naïve," Herb shouted out to everyone.

"You always talkin' mean."

"Nah, just around females," Herb said sourly.

"Oh, now I unda'stand." Wanda's sarcasm was flowing. "That why you are surrounded by so many women, huh, deputy?"

Marion, a petite thirty-something deputy with auburn hair pinned back, glanced over at Wanda and said, "Yeah, you're bad, Herb. But you



never know—you might just surprise us one day. People can change ...” she said, shaking her head as if not quite believing it herself.

I had to move quickly past the guard station and get beyond Herb’s predictable magnum onslaught. *Bad enough not to be paid for what I do.* Countering his attack would only escalate the incident in public and give Herb a deep sense of satisfaction. The other deputies seemed embarrassed.

The underground catacomb of a jail is dark, dreary, and full of hardness—hard concrete, cinder blocks, hardened deputies and hardened inmates. There is constant traffic in all directions as guards lead inmates around the facility.

Yet, here are some people who you want to stay near, people who have souls. Being with some people is like being home.

Now, Otis is a guy who I like to see regularly. This inmate’s life has changed. He is one large man—yet not big and strong from working out, for Otis doesn’t have that chiseled look. He’s big naturally, and his physical features warn you: do not mess with the man. His head is connected closely to his coal black body. He’s from the South Side of Chicago. A short, narrow moustache sits on a sleek round face. But it’s his heart that makes Otis such a human magnet.

He’s in jail for a horrific crime: he’s a lawless murderer. But now his big threatening exterior betrays the man’s inner world. He’s still an awesome sight, but he is changed on the inside. He is repulsed by his former nature, ashamed of it. Now he is a showcase gentle giant. But I still wouldn’t want to cross him. Though a restrained soul now, Otis has the dual radiance of conflicting signals—a gentle countenance amid an imposing physique.

In jail there’s another guy who is bad. He is not changed at all on the inside. He is just as bad and as powerful inside as he is outside. The bad guy is a magnet, attracting people into the jail who are ego driven to claim they either are “fixing” a celebrity thug or they know this guy, talk to him all the time, or are part of an inner circle of celebrity thugs. Attraction pulls on the press, preachers and evangelists who want a

reputation. This guy is street smart about that. He allows people to visit him so he can turn their mission into failure after they've invested in hope.

The bad guy is in charge. Inside the jail, he still has contact with the outside world and continues to direct traffic from the inside. Nobody wants to get on the wrong side of the bad guy.

Otis isn't stupid. He won't blindly obey the bad guy and wind up in trouble, but he will pay close attention to the dude's rap.

Otis and I communicate. Often I sit with him in the "pod" at the steel tables outside the cells in the large dorm housing all the cells.

That night we began talking through the open slot in his locked cell door as I stood in the pod and looked in.

"Hey, Chaplain, how ghetto is it to be white and live in the 'burbs? You like seein' me in here, just to rub it in?"

"No, Otis, I'm here as your little punk to get protection. Daddy, you da' man. I used to work out daily to get as big as you. I'd get stronger, harder, but stayed just as skinny as an underfed newborn. I want to be like you and have people get out of my way when they see me movin' dead on them."

Fair exchange for us, though tongue-in-cheek. Man, that almost makes us soul brothers: the skinny white guy from the suburbs and the hurricane from the South Side verbally poking each other. Salt and pepper soul brothers.

"Chap, you want respect? You wanna go deep? Go chill with the bad guy. Just go into his cell and talk to him. Don't worry that you won't make any headway with him. When you walkin' out, ask him how his mama be. Find out where she be livin.' "

I took his advice. I was surprised when I quickly got the jail's approval to visit the bad guy. It was Thursday when I stopped by his cell. I didn't know what to say or do. So I just followed the end of my white nose into the bad guy's dark cell. Unlike the cell for Otis with its solid door, the bad guy had the traditional iron bars. I was amazed that he'd see me. Had Otis done the prep work for me?

“Dude, I hang out around the jail and try to get to know as many people as I can.”

He just stared at me. This dude is not impressed.

“I help deliver Christmas presents to the families of the incarcerated. If you got names, let me know.”

He raised an eyebrow. Nothing more.

“You got any kids on your list? No? How about your mama? Where does she live?”

That stirred him. He whispered his mama’s address on the West Side. That area is one of two districts in Chicago where a majority of all the crimes in Illinois are committed.

I got a street number but I hadn’t influenced the bad man in any way. I was just another failed envoy, another missionary without a mission accomplished. I didn’t care. I was totally at peace. When I am in this hopeless place, I feel a peace that feels like hope. I have never understood this peace.



Outside the jail, my life had become a living hell. My marriage was falling apart. I was about to change jobs and would soon find out there had been big-time fraud going on in the new company. No one had been aware of it when I signed up. Not the auditors, and not the headquarters of the company in London. The company heads would make a brilliant decision: instead of fixing the company first, they’d quickly roll it into an affiliate in California since that operation was doing well. In that one move, they could eliminate the entire Chicago corporate staff—me included—and save money. They could then just use the existing staff in the healthy company. No one perceived they were exporting a virus into a healthy company. A year later the entire operation was on the auction block. As treasurer, my advice from the start would be to sell off worldwide all the weak parts of the company that

were not big contributors, fix the US operation, and then be a smaller more profitable company. But, no one listened to me.

My children became the helpless victims of a marriage that turned into the American way of uncaring selfishness—and the freedom of divorce. The responsibility and love of a marriage did not appear to matter or even to exist. In a country where competition and productivity make the latest overpaid sports hero an icon and a god to be worshipped, the freedom of divorce is seen as a self-fulfillment. Forget about your responsibility and your love. Grab what you can and go your way. To hell with everybody else.

My daughter made sure that either she was always surrounded by her friends or she stayed alone in her room. Why try to flourish in the gang warfare that had become our family? My son's perfect scores in school deteriorated.

Men often don't realize they have become their wife's daily dose of ogre. They continue, unaware they are doing anything wrong. This is reparable if they don't trip the emotional wire connected to the "done" mechanism. It is done when the wife reaches a certain emotional point. Even if the man changes his ways and earnestly tries to put a new tire on to replace a flat—as it were—it now makes no difference.

The woman won't listen or care. And if the man keeps trying to make things right, it only makes a hopeless situation worse. By then he has demonstrated to his wife that he did bad stuff, and that he doesn't even understand the "done" feature.

That was the way it was with me.

"Henry," my wife said. "It's too little, too late. I think divorce is the only way out for us. I'm not happy."

"Not happy about what?"

"Everything."

*When would we be released from our prison?*



With the weight of the oppressive sorrow steadily building in my life, I turned to walk away from the bad man's cell. As I turned my back to walk away, the bad man softly lobbed a verbal hand grenade through the bars, "Chaplain, don't come in next Thursday." As if I was recoiling from an explosion, I was abruptly awakened from my drift into my own troubles as I twisted around only to see the bad guy in the back of the cell turning away from me.

*What's going down in the jail on Thursday?*