

Part I

The Journey Begins

An Early Start...

Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races, one after another.

Walter Elliott

My family had very little money when I was growing up on the north end of Escambia County. With four boys to feed my father held two jobs. He served as a minister to a small church and worked for Golden Flake Potato Chips Company. Two paychecks still were barely enough to provide for my family's needs, but he and my mom filled our home with values and love, things that money can not buy.

We were always looking for a bigger house with cheaper rent. My family's limited resources caused us to move frequently. As a result, I attended four different Escambia elementary schools. Entering elementary school at P. K. Yonge, moving on to Scenic Heights, transferring then to Pine Meadow, I finally finished my primary education

at Jim Allen. When we found a house in Cottage Hill, Florida, that was big enough and cheap enough, we were able to stay put and grow some roots.

As I grew older, I learned to adapt and solve problems without money and to think creatively to find solutions. If I wanted something extra, I would work for it. I would do an odd job here and there, maybe a little trading, whatever it took to earn honest cash for what I needed. Early on in life, I realized there was a big difference between what I wanted and what I needed. Even today, I ask myself this important question before spending money on extras: Is this something I want or something I need?

My parents and my faith instilled high moral standards that became the cornerstone of my life. The training provided by my parents and Sunday school teachers established anchors that sustain me still. My father used to say, "Son, if something is worth doing, it is worth doing right." Doing the right thing, caring for others and setting high standards for myself have been principles that have guided me through the years.

The sixties and seventies were growth years for Escambia County as

new communities inched northward from the city while many of the established communities like Ensley, Beulah, Gonzalez, Cantonment, Cottage Hill and Molino remained stable. Thus, many of my friends from elementary school continued to be my classmates through high school graduation. My Cottage Hill roots allowed me to attend Tate High School for grades seven through twelve.