



ROLLING ON

CARMELO GONZALEZ

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By

Carmelo Gonzalez

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Rolling On / Carmelo Gonzalez

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Dedication

To my mother, Priscilla, and my sister, Carmen,
for raising me with care and love.

INTRODUCTION

Let me introduce myself.

My name is Carmelo Gonzalez and I'm a 33-year-old person with Cerebral Palsy. I developed this condition as a result of an early childhood illness. Cerebral Palsy is a form of brain damage that affects individuals differently. In my case, I have a speech impairment and limited control of my hands, which means that I often require assistance with eating and other basic functions. I am also unable to walk because of problems with balance and muscular weakness.

So I get around in a motorized wheelchair. I dine out, go to Broadway plays and movies, take long walks and go out dancing. You might wonder how I dance in a wheelchair. I do what everyone does – I move my body in rhythm to the music with another person, and when it comes time to spin around, I hit the controls on my power wheelchair and make a full rotation. Sometimes I let my partner sit on my lap and take a spin with me.

I live in New York City Housing and have done so for about twelve years now. I moved in several months after graduating from Frances Lewis High School in 1988. This was when I became more independent. Still, I rely on Personal Care Attendants for my daily functioning. I employ several attendants to care for me around the clock. I require their assistance to bathe, dress, cook, clean, and accompany me outdoors. While I couldn't live without them, I sometimes find it very draining that I don't have a lot of time to myself.

As a child, I always dreamed of being an actor. One of my oldest fantasies was to be on television. But I didn't believe I could realize this dream. I never saw disabled people on television, and my speech impairment makes it difficult for people to understand me. But as an adult, I found an acting school called The National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped. I studied at this school for seven years. I acted in plays and short films. I also appeared in a "60 Minutes" profile of the school. So I succeeded in fulfilling my dream of being on television after all.

But I ultimately left the world of acting, because it became increasingly clear that my speech impairment made it impossible for me to get significant and consistent roles. So I became a writer instead.

My experience of being disabled has given me a unique perspective on life. It means I have to plan carefully for basic everyday activities. It means I don't take for granted simple pleasures like eating with friends in a restaurant without my attendant. I have to worry about accessibility and ordering food I can manage to eat on my own. It also means I have no desire to use drugs or alcohol or to introduce into my life the problems they cause. My life has enough difficulties already.

I also can't enter into romantic relationships with the ease that other people can. I have a hard time attracting a mate because many people don't see a disabled person as an equal partner. Even when I have a prospect, there are difficulties. My home attendants are always around, so it's hard to get time alone with that person. Although I could ask my attendants to stay home, I feel a certain responsibility to keep them fully employed.

I had been keeping a secret that I'm gay from my family since I was eleven years old. I finally told them on December 26, 1991. At first it was hard for my mother to accept it, but she's all right with it now.

Thank You

We met when I was young.
We met on unfortunate terms.
You were there when no one else was.
You saw me in a situation that no one ever saw me in.
You were there to carry me through.
Even when I would curse at you.
There were times that I wished I had never met you.
There were times that I didn't know where I would be without you.
You helped me play.
When I saw danger you moved me away.
You helped me see things that only you can.
Without each other we are nothing.
When we are together we become one.
I want to say thank you wheelchair for all you have done.

CHAPTER 1

I was born in Lutheran hospital in Brooklyn, New York, on March 13, 1968, into a family that wasn't ready for a disabled child. I had two older sisters Miriam and Carmen, and one older brother Nelson. My father was in jail when my mother went into labor. During birth there were a few complications, but the doctor told my mother that I was going to be okay. He told my mother that he wanted to keep me in the hospital for observation. After a few weeks the doctor gave the okay for my mother to take me home. While I was in the hospital my father was released from prison. My parents had everything ready for me. They had my room all set up. It had everything that a baby would need. A crib, closets, diapers and all kinds of stuffed animals.

Everything was fine when I went home. I was walking and talking like any other baby until I was two years old. That's when I got sick. My mother and father were going out, so they left a good friend of the family watching us kids. My mother told her to keep an eye on me because I wasn't feeling well. This friend had invited some people over. She was getting high with them and she wasn't watching me. I got sicker and my fever got worse. When my parents came home they found me with a fever of a 103 degrees and my eyes had rolled back. Mother grabbed me and ran to Lutheran Hospital. When she got there I was almost dead. They grabbed me from my mother's arms and put me in ice cold water to try to bring down the fever. My father was with my mother in the waiting room. My mother was crying so he tried to calm her down. The doctor came and told my parents that they were trying to save my life, but they weren't sure that they could.

Mother grabbed the doctor by his coat and told him, "You have to save my son! Please, you have to."

"I'm going to try my best, but there is no guarantee that I can. If we are able to save him, he might have some brain damage," the doctor said.

"I don't care, I just want my son alive," mother said crying to the doctor.

A priest came in to tell my parents that he wanted to baptize me. They do this in cases like this as a precaution.

Two to three hours went by when the doctor came to my parents and told them, "Mr. and Mrs. Gonzalez I have good news and bad news. Your son is alive, but he has Cerebral Palsy."

The doctor told her that I would have difficulty doing things and I may not be able to walk or talk correctly. They told my parents that they were going to admit me as a precaution. I was there for a month, and then my parents took me home.

My mother visited me every day to feed and take care of me. However, something happened and she wasn't able to come to see me for a few days. When she came she found me tied up, dirty, and bleeding from my nose.

The nurse came in and my mother asked her, "What the hell is going on? Why is my son tied up? Look, He's all dirty and he has blood coming out of his nose."

My mother untied me and was getting ready to pick me up when the nurse tried to stop her. I almost fell on the floor. Mother put me back in the crib, turned around and punched the nurse dead in the face.

My father was talking to the doctor about when they could take me home. My father came in the room as mother punched the nurse. He grabbed hold of my mother because she was about to kill the nurse. My mother and father took me home that day without the doctor's consent.

My father was using drugs and he used to treat my mother badly. When he got high on drugs, he used to beat on her, so my mother was going to leave him. One day when I was about four, she went to look for an apartment. She left us in the care of a family member. This member of the family was using drugs and she and her husband set my mother up. They put drugs all over the house and called the police. The police came and found us alone with drugs in the house. They took us away. They put my brother and two sisters in a home, and they put me in a hospital. They called my father. My father came and got my brother, my sisters, and me. When my father found out that my mother was looking for an apartment to leave him, he didn't like that she was going to leave him. So to get back at her, he took my brother and my sisters to live with him and he put me in a hospital under a different name so my mother wouldn't know where we were. I was in the hospital for three years, and since my mind was still developing, I have very little recollection of that time period.

While I was in the hospital, mother and father split up permanently. When they released me from the hospital, I went to live with my father. My mother did not know where I was until she hired a private investigator to find us kids. I was seven years old at the time, but I acted like a four-year-old. I was living with my father, my sisters Miriam and Carmen and my brother Nelson. I also lived with father's common-law wife Nancy. My father and Nancy had two children together; Nilsa and George Junior Nancy had a daughter from a previous relationship named Madilyn.

We lived in a second floor apartment on Rockaway Boulevard in Queens. It wasn't one of the best apartments you could have, but it was a roof over our heads. It had three bedrooms, a living room, a kitchen, and two long hallways. One of the hallways was the entrance to the apartment. You had to walk up eighteen steps. When you got to the top, there was a door that led to the kitchen. At the right of the kitchen was the bathroom. Then you hit the living room. It had the basic things that a living room would have. From the living room you could see the other hallway. As you walked down it, you hit the first bedroom, and then the second bedroom, which was my brother Nelson's room. It had a door that led to my father's room. My father's room was the biggest bedroom out of the three bedrooms. My two older sisters, Carmen and Miriam, shared

the first bedroom with me. Miriam didn't want to stay in that room, so she slept in the living room.

I remember when I came home, my two older sisters Miriam and Carmen and my older brother Nelson used to play train with me. They would push my wheelchair around the house going "choo choo," in and out of the rooms. We also used to play Monopoly and sometimes with the Monopoly money we used to gamble. It was fun doing that with my brother and sisters. We had a lot of fun back then. Sometimes I wish I could turn back the time to those days.

When I came home I couldn't speak that well so it was hard for my family to understand me. I couldn't sit up straight in my wheelchair or feed myself. They had to do everything for me. Thinking about that now I realize how much of a burden I was on my family, especially Carmen. Carmen was the one who took care of me throughout my childhood. When my mother and father separated and I went to live with my father, Carmen watched me. When I went to live with my mother again, I was so used to Carmen taking care of me that I didn't want any one else to take care of me but her. After a while my sister Carmen was the only one who understood me because I was always with her. That year I started going to school at United Cerebral Palsy for a year. That's when I started to speak better and sit up in my wheelchair.

One day Carmen and one of her friends didn't have anything to do, so Carmen made me have sex with my stepsister Madilyn. I was about eight years old and Madilyn was about six years old. I didn't want to do it but she made us do it anyway. Carmen took all my clothes off and made me lay on top of Madilyn. I didn't know what I was doing. I really didn't know what was going on. All I knew was that I didn't want to be doing it. When Carmen and her friend had enough, it was over. Later, Carmen asked us if we wanted to do it again. Madeline said yes, but I said no. I couldn't speak well enough to explain how I felt, so I started to cry because that was the only way that they wouldn't make me do it again.

Carmen said, "Okay Carmelo! Stop crying, I'm not going to make you do it again."

I was so happy.

I remember one day one of my sister's friends was taking care of me. My sister had to do something, so she asked her friend to watch me for an hour or so. Her friend had to change my clothes because I spilled something on myself. When she took off my clothes she started to play with my penis, and I started to get hard. The next thing I knew she had taken her pants off and gotten on top of me. I don't remember how long it lasted. I didn't say anything because I didn't know that it was wrong. I just thought that was the way things were after what Carmen made me do with Madilyn.

My mother found out where we were living with my father. My father had custody of us kids, but my mother had visitation. Some weekends Nelson and I would go with my mother.

That year Nancy set my father up and got him arrested for possession of drugs. She also managed to get herself arrested. The court wanted to put my sisters and brothers into a home, and me back in the hospital. When Carmen heard that, she picked me up and ran out of the courtroom. They stopped her and got a hold of my mother. She came to fight to keep us. She won custody of us because she was our biological mother, but they didn't give her custody of Nilsa and Georgie, who were put up for adoption. That was the last time I ever saw them.

We continued to live with my mother in the same apartment that I was living in with my father and Nancy. Back then my brother Nelson and I used to have a lot of fun. We used to play

with these toy soldiers we had. I used to set them up around the living room as though they were at war and were ready to kill the bad guy. Guess who was the bad guy? Yep, it was me. Whenever the army men shot me, I felt every shot. You may ask how I felt it. Well Nelson used to use his fingers as bullets. He would make believe I got shot. To make sure I felt it, he would poke me hard.

Nelson made up these three super heroes called Congor, Thongor and Mongor. They were his fingers. You might be wondering what I mean by his fingers. You see, Congor was Nelson's first two fingers, and Thonger was the other two fingers on the right hand. Mongor was all five fingers on the left hand.

At first there was only Congor. He wasn't on my side. I don't think Nelson would like playing like that any more, because when I got a hold of his fingers, I used to grab them and try to break them. Whenever I got a chance to kill Congor, and that wasn't often, that is when Thongor and Mongor came to life. These games may sound strange, but we had a lot of fun playing them when we were little.

That reminds me of a day that we tricked Carmen. You see one day I was in Nelson's room and his door was locked because we were looking at Playboy magazines. Carmen called me to go to bed.

"Carmelo it's time to go to bed," she said.

"I don't want to go to bed now."

"You have to go to bed, but I have to do something for mom first. When I finish, you're going to bed," Carmen said as she was leaving.

"Go to bed, and when she leaves the room, I'll go and get you and bring you back here," Nelson said to me as Carmen left.

I went to bed. About five minutes later, Nelson came.

"Are you ready?" he asked me.

"Yes, but she is going to know that you came and got me when she comes back and doesn't see that I'm here."

"Not if I put these pillows under the covers to make it look like you are sleeping."

So he put the pillows under the covers and we went back to his room. It took Carmen about an hour to realize that I wasn't in bed.

She came in and said, "There you are! I went to make sure you were okay, and when I went to touch the bed I felt the pillow. I knew that Nelson came and got you and brought you back here."

"Come on, let me stay for a while longer, please."

So she let me stay. I miss those years when everyone got along. Those were the good old days.

After a year at United Cerebral Palsy, I was transferred to P.S. 118. It was a regular school that had special classes for physically disabled students. With the exception of United Cerebral Palsy, all the schools I attended were regular schools with special education classes. That is when I met my first teacher, Mr. Freedman, and my first best friend Fernando. He was Puerto Rican and was in a chair with Muscular Dystrophy (a condition caused by a genetic defect that affects the muscles and nerves, leading to muscle weakness and movement difficulties.)

There was one thing that I didn't like about Mr. Freedman – he never really taught me how to read. He always gave me math homework, but he hardly gave me any reading homework. It's partly my fault too, because I went along with him. I should have asked for some reading homework, but I was a kid and didn't know any better. I regret it now, because I still have problems reading and spelling to this day.

Fernando and I were such good friends that sometimes I would go to his house on the weekends. In school we always ate lunch together, and we were always joking around with each other. I remember one time he had a birthday party. I went and had the best time ever. Someone gave him a racecar set as a gift. We played with it until about one in the morning, when the party ended. I stayed over that night. They treated me like I was part of their family.

The next year it was my tenth birthday. I had a party. Fernando and some of my other friends came to my party. A lot of people came, including my Aunt Etta and my two cousins, Arnold and Elvin. Fernando gave me a stuffed rabbit that I had wanted. I loved that rabbit a lot; I used to sleep with it.

That year there was a song called "Fernando." I used to love that song. I used to play it every day. Everybody got sick of it in my house. They used to tell me to turn that dumb song off.

That Christmas, my cousin Arnold came over. We got fire trucks as gifts. The next morning, Arnold and I got up early, about 7:00 o'clock in the morning. We were playing with our trucks, and we got tired of making believe that there was a fire. We wanted to put out a real fire.

Arnold said, "Hey, let's get some paper and make a fire, so we could put it out like the real firemen do."

So we started to burn some papers. One paper fell in the garbage and the garbage went up in flames.

"OH MY GOD! Get water to put out the fire!" I said.

We put the fire out. The kitchen was all black from the smoke. We didn't know what to do. We were scared of what my mother would do to us when she found out. We grabbed some rags and started to try to clean the mess before my mother woke up and killed us. We didn't make it. My mother smelled the smoke and came into the kitchen. She saw us on the floor trying to clean it up. We were all black from the smoke.

"What the hell are you two doing?" my mother asked.

We looked up at her with our two black faces and said, "We were playing firemen and we needed a fire so we could put it out."

My mother tried to hold it in, but she started to laugh because we had the saddest look on our faces. She couldn't hold it in any longer; she had to laugh. She told us to go and take a bath. We never did that again, but we used to do other things that were just as bad.

The next year a new kid came into my class. About two months went by when Fernando and I had a fight over nothing. You see, one of the other kids was picking on him. I tried to stick up for him, but he didn't want me to.

He said to me, "I don't need your help! Shut the fuck up!"

"You shut the fuck up!" I said.

Then we started to fight. Mr. Freedman came in the room and saw us fighting. He broke it up. When I got home my mother told me that Fernando's mother called her and told her that I had a fight with him and I scratched him in the eye.

I said, "He started with me. I was trying to stick up for him."

"I don't care who started it. I want you to call him and apologize to him," she said. She made me call him to apologize, so I did and we went back to being friends.

In the middle of the next year the whole Special Education unit moved to P.S. 223. My friendship with Fernando started to end. By going to the new school we had new kids in the class. I started to have black friends that year. My second best friend was Nicholas. He was black, and so was my third best friend Derek. Nicholas and I hit it off quickly. Derek and I became friends later on in life, a lot later in life.

Everybody used to make fun of each other. They picked on Fernando the most. They liked to push Fernando's arm off the table when he had his hand under his chin, so his head would hit the table. He would try to get back at them, but he couldn't because he was too slow. Fernando graduated that year and I never saw him again. I found out from a friend that he died the summer of 1987 from Muscular Dystrophy.

The next year new kids came to our class. There was one guy named Ben. You could say that he took Fernando's place. He had Muscular Dystrophy too, but he was weaker than Fernando. We all picked on him. I picked on him because I didn't want them to pick on me, but that didn't work, I still got picked on anyway.

To keep Carmen out of trouble my mother made her take care of me after school. Carmen had to take me everywhere she went. Carmen liked to go to school 226 to play handball. We went there almost all the time. We used to hang out there with Irene (Carmen's friend, who later became my sister-in-law) and her friends.

One day Carmen met a guy named Louis while playing handball. He became her boyfriend. I was about eleven and a half at the time. One Halloween Louis asked us to go to a Halloween party that he was having at his house, so we went. That was when I met my first girlfriend Martha.

You see Louis had three sisters. They came up to me and started to talk to me.

One of them said, "I'm Greeneyes, this is Martha, and this is our younger sister Lucy. What's your name?"

"My name is Carmelo."

"How old are you?" Martha asked me.

"I'm eleven! How old are you?" I asked.

Greeneyes said, "I'm thirteen, Martha is nine and Lucy is seven."

"I'm going to be ten in December," Martha said as soon as Greeneyes stopped talking.

Out of the three girls, Martha was the prettiest. She had long black hair and the prettiest big brown eyes I had ever seen. That night I was having fun talking and playing with Louis's three sisters, not knowing that Martha liked me. We were there until about one in the morning. I saw Martha talking to Carmen. I didn't think anything of it. As we were leaving Martha came up to me.

"When are you going to come again?" she asked.

"I don't know, whenever Carmen comes."

"We might come tomorrow," Carmen told Martha.

"So I might see you tomorrow, Carmelo, Okay!" said Martha.

The next day Carmen asked me. "Carmelo?"

“What!”

“Do you remember Martha, Louis’s sister?” Carmen asked.

“Yes! Why?”

“Do you like her?” she asked me.

“Yes, I think she is very pretty. Why are you asking me all these questions about her?”

“Because she likes you and she wants to know if you want to be her boyfriend.”

“WHAT? She told you that?”

“Yes that’s what she told me. Do you like her?”

“Yeah! But I never thought that she’d like me,” I said with a big smile on my face.

We went to Martha’s after I got home from school. As I was going into Martha’s house, she came up to me.

“Hello, how are you?” I asked Martha.

“I’m okay,” she said.

Louis called Carmen to go down stairs.

“I’ll be downstairs if you need me. Tell Martha to get me, okay?” she said as she left.

Martha and I were alone.

“Do you want to listen to music?” she asked me.

“Yeah why not,” I said.

She put on some records. There are two songs that will always remind me of those days – “Heaven on the Seventh Floor” and “Native New Yorker.” She would always put them on when I was there. Martha’s oldest sister came in the room.

“Hi! You must be Carmelo? I’m Mary,” she said.

“Yes.”

“I’ve heard a lot about you.”

“Shut up, Mary,” Martha said, cutting Mary off.

“I’m just talking to him,” Mary said with a smile on her face.

“Mom’s calling, you Mary.” Martha said.

“Okay I’m going! I’ll see you later Carmelo. It’s nice to meet you. Don’t do anything that I wouldn’t do,” Mary said laughing as she left.

I just smiled.

Carmen and I used to go there almost every day. Carmen would leave me with Martha and she would go out with Louis. Martha and I would go upstairs. When we would go upstairs, we used to like to race up and down the stairs sitting down on the steps. She would always win going up but I always won going down. Sometimes she would win by running down. We liked to play house. She would be the mother and I would be the father. We would even have children. Her little sister Lucy and her brother Kojack would be our kids. My favorite part of the game was bedtime. Martha and I would lie down next to each other. We would only kiss. What do you expect? We were only ten and nine years old in the Seventies.

The funny thing was my family was dating her family. I was going out with Martha. Carmen was going out with her brother Louis. My brother Nelson was going out with Martha’s oldest sister Mary, and my oldest sister Miriam was going out with Martha’s other brother named Nelson. Irene was going out with one of Martha’s cousins, and Carla (Irene’s sister) went with one of the other cousins named Victor.

Martha and I always got along well. We only got into one argument and broke up. It lasted for just five minutes. You see I got mad at her for something stupid. I don't even remember what it was about. Anyway I told her that I wanted everything I gave her back, so she gave me everything. Believe me, I gave her a lot of stuff. Like stuffed animals, bracelets, necklaces, cards and other stuff. As I was going out of the room, I realized that I couldn't go far, because I used to crawl on the floor to get around the house when I was upstairs. I couldn't get anywhere carrying the stuff and trying to crawl at the same time. I turned back and told her that I was sorry and I gave her the stuff back. She took the stuff back and we kissed and made up.

Everything was back to normal until Carmen told me that someone told her that this boy name Boobie was trying to go after Martha. I was so angry.

I went up to him and asked him, "Is your name Boobie?"

"Yes."

"You're the one that likes Martha?" I asked him.

He said yes, so I punched him in the face and said, "If I ever see your fucking ass anyway near my girl again I swear I will kick your mother-fucking ass. Don't think that I can't!"

Then I went to Martha and told her, "I just met the boy that likes you."

"What boy? What are you talking about?"

"Some boy named Boobie."

"I don't like him. You're the one I love." Then she asked me for a kiss.

Everything was okay for about six months. Then Carmen and Louis had an argument. Louis's family didn't want Carmen there, but I was welcome to see Martha. Carmen took me there a few times. When Carmen wanted to hang out with her friends, I had to go with her. I couldn't stay with Martha that much, so we just stopped seeing each other.

That year my father came out of jail on probation. He went back to selling drugs again. My father used to sell drugs for a living. It wasn't right for my father to sell drugs when I was with him, but he did. While with him he made me hold the drugs and the money so he would be clean if the police searched him.

He always told me joking around, "Here Carmelo hold this, and if a cop comes to search you just act like you are crazy. Shake your head and make weird sounds."

I never had to do that. You may be wondering how a man could do that to his son. To me it was a way of life. My mother didn't know that my father was doing that, because if she had known she wouldn't have let my father take me. It didn't bother me. I liked having all that money on me, and I liked being around my father. In fact, I'm glad I had to deal with drugs early in my life. It made me see what drugs do to people and I didn't want to be one of those people.

Father had a lot of women, but I didn't like them at all. They never mistreated me, but I didn't like them because they were always high on drugs. They looked . . . I don't know how to explain it. I would look at them as they sat on the sofa nodding from the drugs. It looked like they were about to fall flat on their face, but they never did. Have you ever noticed that people who do certain drugs and start to nod look like they are going to fall, but they never do. Why is that? Also I didn't like how they would treat my father. They would always yell at him and fight with him all the time in front of me.

That 4th of July my father asked my mother if he could have Carmen and me for the day. We went with him. When it got dark outside I asked my father.

“What are we going to do now dad?”

“Wait here and I’ll be right down.”

So he went up where he lives and came back down with some bags.

“What’s that dad?” I asked my father.

He gave the bags to Carmen to open. She opened it and said, “Look Carmelo, it’s a bunch of fireworks!”

That night we went crazy setting them off.

That year my father opened a store. He had my brother Nelson running the store. My father used to take me there to check up on the store. I liked when my father would take me there, because I was able to get all the candy I wanted. As I write, the vision of those days comes to mind.

When my father had me with him and we were around his friends, his friends would tell me how much my father would talk about me. When I was around his friends, I had it made. They would get me whatever I wanted.

That year Carla and Victor had a daughter out of wedlock. They named her Elizabeth. I was eleven at the time. Carla was still living with her parents. Carla asked me if I wanted to hold Elizabeth. That was the first time I held a baby in my arms. I couldn’t believe that Carla had enough trust in me to let me hold her. Carla took a picture of me holding Elizabeth. I feel that still to this day Elizabeth and I have a special bond. Carmen and I loved going to visit Irene and Carla’s house. One of the reasons that I liked going to their house was because I loved holding Elizabeth, but that wasn’t the only reason that I liked going there. I also liked going there because I had a little crush on Carla. I would go crazy inside whenever I saw her. I guess it was because every time I saw her she would give me a kiss on my lips. Yes, Martha kissed me on the lips before, but by that time I wasn’t seeing her and Carla was older.

Carmen made friends with a girl named Jackie and her sister Jennifer. We used to spend a lot of time at their house. Their father played dominoes with us. Sometimes we would stay over night. I would take a bath with Jordan (Jackie’s little brother).

One day Jordan and I were taking a bath and we became curious about our bodies, like kids our age do. I was about eleven, and he was about nine years old. We started to touch each other’s bodies. We didn’t know that what we were doing was wrong. This went on almost every time we took a bath together and they left us alone. We always liked to take a bath together. I never thought that something as simple as taking a bath with someone of the same sex would change my life. That was my first homosexual experience. I knew that I was supposed to like girls, but I was also attracted to boys. I didn’t know that there was a title or name for what I felt because I was only eleven years old at the time.

We continued to do it throughout the years. We almost got caught a few times. In our teen years Jordan and I spent a night over his sister’s house. We had to sleep in the living room on separate couches. We thought that everyone was asleep so we started to fool around. He came over to the couch that I was sleeping on, and we got undressed. We were playing with each other when we heard someone coming towards the living room. Jordan jumped up, put on his pants and went back to his couch just as his sister walked in. Another time we were at my house when my mother said that she had to go out to run an errand. When she left I asked Jordan if he wanted to fool around and he agreed. We took off our pants and got into bed and started to jerk each other

off and have oral sex. All of a sudden we heard my mother's voice. Jordan jumped up, grabbed his pants and put them on. I couldn't move that fast so I just grabbed the sheets and covered myself. My mother came into the room and noticed that I was covered and that I was shaking.

"What's wrong Carmelo? Why are you covered?"

"Nothing Mom, I'm just cold."

"It's not cold in here. Are you getting sick?" She touched my forehead to see if I felt warm.

"No, I'm fine mom."

I pulled the sheets under my armpits and put my arms down to hold the sheets, because I thought that my mother was going to pull the sheets off.

"Why are you back so soon?" I asked my mother.

"I forgot the money."

When she left I got dressed, and Jordan left. We were always afraid of people finding out about us, but luckily no one ever found out what was going on.

One day Carmen got angry with me because I accidentally got her in trouble. When Carmen and I would hang out with her friends we would come home late, I would fall asleep on the bus on the way to school. I was able to wake up when we got to school, but one day I didn't get up in time. The teacher called my mother and told her. My mother got mad at Carmen and told Carmen that we had to be home no later than ten o'clock. Carmen got mad at me and said, "I'm sick of taking care of you. I can't do anything without taking you with me. You don't want anyone else to take care of you. I don't have any time for myself." I felt so bad.

The next day I tried to kill myself, but I didn't make it. You see everybody went out and I was alone. All that I was thinking about is what Carmen told me the night before. I went to the kitchen and grabbed a knife to try to stab myself. As I was going to stab myself, Carmen walked in and saw what I was going to do. She grabbed the knife from my hands.

"What are you doing?" She said.

"Everybody hates me. I'm always in the way. That's why no one wants to take care of me," I said crying.

"I'm sorry for what I said last night, I was just mad at you because Mom got on my case. I didn't mean it."

The reason that I didn't want anyone to take care of me is because one-time my other sister Miriam took care of me. I did something she didn't like and she hit me on the elbow with the heel of a shoe four times. My mother heard me crying and came out of her room. She saw Miriam with the shoe, and came in the room and yelled.

"What the fuck are you doing?" She took the shoe from Miriam and hit Miriam with the same shoe fifteen times. "If I ever see you hitting Carmelo again I will kill you. Do you hear me Miriam?" my mother said, pushing her out of the room.

Ever since that happened Miriam and I didn't get along that well. We can't be alone too long without fighting. I'm not saying that we never got along. When she was sixteen years old, she moved out of the house, but she would come over to the house to visit. Sometimes when she came we would put on a show with the song "Copa Cabana." I loved when we did that; it was so much fun.

Another time she came over and she brought her dog with her to the house. I was playing ball with him and I went to get the ball from him. I grabbed him the wrong way and he bit me right on the eyebrow. I didn't realize that he had bit me until I saw blood coming down my face. My mother started to scream. She grabbed me and took me to the emergency room. The doctor gave me two stitches on my eyebrow. I didn't get any shots because the dog had his shots, so it wasn't necessary. The doctor told my mother that I would have to stay home for two days. I was upset because I wanted to go to school. The next day was picture day at school. I missed it, but the next week they had another shooting. I took the picture with a patch on my eye. The patch didn't cover my whole eye, just my eyebrow. The next week I went to the doctor to get my stitches taken out. I still have a scar to remind me of that day.

About a month after that, the school had a candy sale. I had to go door to door to try to sell as much as I could. I went door to door for about a week and a half. I sold about \$150 worth of candy. Carmen and I kept the money. I spent my half of the money on toys and pinball games. Downstairs from where I was living there was a club called Bennies. We would go there to play pinball and pool. I loved playing pinball the most. I would spend all my allowance on pinball and cookies. I would play it for hours.

One day while I was playing in the club two guys came in. They watched me play and one of them said, "You are good."

"Thank you! My name is Carmelo. What's yours?"

"I'm Bob, and this is Bill."

"Do you want to play?" I asked.

"No! We have to go, but here's two dollars. Have fun."

"Thank you," I said.

Whenever I went there people would give me money to play the pinball game. I would put on a sad face, so people would give me money. I would get black and blue marks on my legs from playing pinball. I would stand up and lean on the table and bang my legs against it while I was playing.

My mother met Ralph in Bennie's. He's my stepfather. She dated him for a month or two before she brought him to the house to meet us. She would stay at his house sometimes. I remember once she went to stay with him at his place for the night, and that night we had a blackout. I was home with Carmen and she didn't want to stay home. We went out and met up with Irene and some of Carmen's other friends. We stayed out late that night.

When Carmen and I went out, kids would look at me and laugh. Carmen would get mad and go up to them and smack them. Sometimes she brought them over to me so I could smack them myself to teach them not to laugh at people who were in a wheelchair. It would make me feel bad when kids laughed at me. I would wish that I wasn't disabled.

That reminds me of a day Carmen and I went to play handball. While Carmen was playing a game, I was riding around in my chair. I saw this black girl with glasses. She was staring at me like I came from another planet. I didn't like people staring at me. I still don't, but I've gotten used to it.

I asked her, "What the fuck are you looking at?"

She kept on looking at me. By the third time I asked her what she was looking at, I got so mad that I went up to her and grabbed her glasses from her face and threw them on the ground.

Then I grabbed her by her hair and punched her in the face three times. She went crying to her brother.

Her brother approached Carmen and asked, "Why did your brother hit my sister?"

"Because she was staring at him. He asked her to stop staring at him, but she didn't, so he got mad," Carmen said.

He told his sister not to stare at people because it's not nice, and he told her to apologize.

The next day when I went to school I had a fight with Derek. You see, after lunch we would have recess. We would play knock-hockey. That is a game that has a table board and a puck. You have to hit the puck into a hole on the other side of the table. Nicholas and Michael were playing. Whoever won would play the next player. Derek and I were next, but we both wanted to go first. When Nicholas and Michael finished playing, Derek and I grabbed the hockey stick at the same time.

I said, "Let go of the stick!"

"NO! You let go!" Derek said.

"Let go of the fucking stick!"

"Fuck you! I'm not letting shit go."

So I punched him in the arm. He grabbed the hockey stick and swung it at me. He almost hit me in the face, but I picked my arm up and blocked it. Mr. Freedman came in the room and saw us fighting. He started to yell.

"What are you doing?" He broke up the fight, and asked, "Who started it?"

"Carmelo started it, I had the next game. Carmelo grabbed the stick and punched me," Derek said.

"Stop lying! You are the one who started with me," I said.

"I don't want to hear it. If you and Derek don't know how to play, no one is going to play for a week. Now everybody get back to your desk," Mr. Freedman said.

There were two aides who would help us take off our coats, go to the bathroom and things like that. Their names were Doris and Debbie. Doris was a little nuts, but nice. Debbie I didn't like that much, and she didn't like me either. I would always call her names. One day Derek brought some cars to school. We were playing with them when I dropped one.

Derek got angry and said, "Why the fuck did you drop my car? It cracked."

He didn't want me to touch them, so I got mad and grabbed one. Debbie said to me, "Give the car back to Derek."

"Fuck you! I'm not giving shit back!" I said.

She grabbed my hand to take the car from me.

"Let go of my hand, BITCH!" I said.

She squeezed my hand hard to try to make me let go of the car. I got mad and bit her on her hand. She was going to hit me when I threw the car at her. She called my mother, but Carmen answered the phone. Carmen told her that she was going to take care of it. When I got home Carmen asked me what had happened. I told her why I bit Debbie. Carmen told me that she wasn't going to tell mother, and to never do that again because the next time she may not be home to save my butt.

There was an old lady name Ms. Tomson, who was a substitute teacher. She would come in when Mr. Freedman had to step out for a minute. When she watched us, we gave her a hard

time. We called her every name in the book. I didn't like doing it, but I had to. I didn't want to look like her pet and have the other kids pick on me. Ms. Tomson knew I didn't like picking on her and calling her names. When we were alone I was nice to her. Every now and then she used to bring me candy. Before the year had ended Mr. Freedman told us that she had passed away. We all felt bad about it.

About two weeks had passed when Derek started with me. He started making fun of my sister Carmen, so we had another fight. What happened was I missed the bus, so Carmen had to take me to school. After she left, Derek started saying that she looked like a dog. Mr. Freedman had left the room for a minute. I told Derek to shut up. He kept on saying things about Carmen, so I grabbed one of my brake poles from my chair and tried to hit him with it. When I swung at him, he grabbed the brake pole from me. That's when Derek punched me on my leg, and we started fighting. While we were fighting, Kim went to the door to watch out for Mr. Freedman.

When she saw Mr. Freedman coming she said, "Hey guys! Stop fighting, Mr. Freedman is coming." We stopped fighting just before he came in.

When he came in he said, "What was going on? I know something was going on. I heard noise coming from this room, and when I came in, it stopped."

"There was nothing going on," we answered. We went back to our desks and back to our work.

My cousin Arnold came to spend the summer with us. I loved when he stayed with us. Back then we were more like brothers than cousins. We would have lots of fun doing all kinds of crazy things. There was a store name Beer & Soda which was all they sold. Arnold and I would go in and steal sodas from there. We would go in the back where the sodas were and put about four sodas in between my back and the back of the wheelchair. As we walked out, we would say to the storeowner, "We forgot what our mother wanted, we'll be back." Carmen would see us laughing as we went to the park.

"Why are your two laughing?" Carmen asked us. Then we would show her the sodas.

"Where did you two get those sodas?" She asked us.

"We went in Beer & Soda and put them in the chair and walked out with them," Arnold told her.

We would always go and get soda whenever we went to the handball court. Sometimes we would buy one or two sodas so they wouldn't find out what we were up to. If we kept going in and out without buying anything, they would know something was up.

Another thing we liked doing was making the public phone ring to see who would answer it. We knew of a way to make the phone ring without anyone being on the line. That reminds me of an incident that happened one day when we were playing with the pay phones. We were playing with the phone and Carmen called us. Arnold grabbed the wheelchair and pushed it backward and let go of me. He tried to catch me, but he couldn't. The wheelchair spun around and tipped over. When the chair tipped over my mouth hit the ground hard and my tooth cracked. I started to cry, and blood was coming out of my mouth. Carmen started to yell at Arnold.

"Why did you let go of him?"

"I don't know. I didn't mean to make him fall," Arnold answered crying.

"What am I going to tell Mom? She's going to kill me when she sees Carmelo's mouth."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it." Arnold said.

“It’s okay! I’ll think of something to tell Mom. Carmelo, try not to let Mom see your mouth until I think of something to tell her.”

I tried not to let my mother see my mouth, but no luck! When we got home, my mother went to kiss me and some blood came out of my mouth.

“What the hell happened? Open your mouth Carmelo, let me see your mouth.”

“He fell,” Carmen said scared to death.

“How the hell?”

“Arnold was pushing him backwards and the chair tipped over. He hit his mouth on the ground.”

“Get something so I can clean his mouth,” Mother said. My mother wiped the blood from my mouth. Arnold was scared that he was going to get in trouble, but he didn’t. Ever since that day, Arnold stopped pushing me backwards, but we still did other things that were crazy.

Two weeks after that Arnold’s brother Elvin came to stay with us. Carmen didn’t like the idea of having the three of us together. We used to drive her crazy. We would fight about everything and anything. One minute we would be playing and having fun, and the next we would be fighting.

That reminds me of one day we made Carmen want to kill us. Carmen took us to the movies. When Carmen went to the bathroom I had accidentally dropped some of Elvin’s popcorn, so Elvin started to throw popcorn at Arnold and me. Arnold and I threw the popcorn back at him. It was a sight. Popcorn was flying all over the place. When Carmen came back from the bathroom and saw what was going on her eyes almost popped out of her head. She started to yell.

“What the hell are you kids doing?”

“Elvin started to throw popcorn at us first,” I said as I was wiping the popcorn out of my hair.

“Carmelo did it! Carmelo did it!”

“I did not!”

“You started to throw popcorn at me first. You dropped popcorn on me,” Elvin said.

“I don’t know why you have to act like a baby,” Arnold said to Elvin.

“Fuck you!” Elvin said. He was going to punch Arnold but Carmen grabbed him.

“Stop it, or I will hit the three of you,” she said.

The usher came and told us to stop making so much noise or he was going to kick us out, so we stopped.

On the way home from the movies, four kids walked by us and Elvin heard one of them say, “Look at that boy in the chair.” They started laughing.

Elvin went up to them and asked them, “What are you laughing at?”

“We wasn’t laughing at anything,” they said.

“I heard you saying something about my cousin.”

One of them got smart and told Elvin, “What if we were laughing at him, what are you going to do?”

Elvin got mad and said, “Do you want to see what I will do?”

He punched the boy dead in the face. They started to fight. Another boy jumped in, so Arnold jumped into the fight. Carmen saw them fighting and went to break them up.

“What the hell is going on?” Carmen asked them.

“I heard them making fun of Carmelo, so I asked them what they were laughing at. That fat asshole got loud with me, so I punched him in the face.” Elvin said.

Elvin was getting ready to go after the boy again, but Carmen stopped him. Carmen hated when anybody would stare at me. Carmen went over to the boy, smacked him, and said, “You want to laugh, ha?” She smacked him again.

Then she brought the boy to me, and told me, “Carmelo, I want you to smack him.” So I smacked him.

“I don’t want to see you laughing at anybody in a chair again,” Carmen said as she let him go.

Summer ended and Arnold and Elvin went home. I didn’t want them to go, but they had to go back to school, and so did I.

That year Irene, Carmen, and Miriam had a big argument because Irene started dating my brother Nelson and they didn’t want her going out with him. They got into a big argument, and everyone got in involved. I’ll never forget that day. Everyone was hitting each other. Ralph got so nervous that he fainted. He landed right in front of me. I wanted to get out of there, but I couldn’t. My mother told Irene to get out and don’t come back ever. As Irene went down the stairs I went to the window to beg her not to leave. I didn’t want to stay and watch everyone fighting. I was so scared watching what was going on that I pissed on myself.

I missed Irene. Sometimes I would call her on the phone. One day while I was talking to her, my mother came in and asked me whom I was talking to. I told her that I was talking to Irene. I thought that she was going to get upset, but she didn’t. As time went by Irene and my family patched things up, so she continued to date Nelson. Nelson and Irene had two daughters, Crystal and Leila.

I was going on twelve when our landlady gave me a bag of stuffed animals and a big wheel. I used to drive Carmen crazy with the big wheel. I couldn’t keep my feet on the footrest, so Carmen would tie my feet on the footrest to keep them from falling off. Sometimes when we went out, I would go on the big wheel instead of my wheelchair.

That summer my mother had an accident in our house. One night she was coming up the stairs and there wasn’t any light in the stairway. The light switch wasn’t working. We had told the landlord to fix it, but he never did. My mother thought that she had reached the top step, but she hadn’t. There was one more step to go up. She missed and she fell all the way down the eighteen steps. She broke an arm and messed up her back.

She hired a lawyer so she could sue the landlord. When my mother told our landlord that she was suing him, he didn’t believe her. My mother told him that when he got the papers from her lawyer he would drop dead, and believe it or not when he got them he had a heart attack and died. His wife had to sell the building and we had to move.

Growing Up With The Pain

Growing up with the pain that people caused you.
You cry to me, but I don't here you.
I wonder why there was no one there to hear your cries.
You learned to live with all those lies.
You thought that you had it under control,
But someone else came and showed you that you don't.
Once again you faced those feelings.
Now that you're older you can face the truth,
And no one can make you feel the abuse.

CHAPTER 2

That same year my doctor told my mother that I needed an operation on my legs to loosen the muscles so that I could stand straighter. They said that they would like to do it after my thirteenth birthday. They set the date for March 20, 1981, at the Hospital for Special Surgery if she could wait until I went in the hospital for us to move. It was just three weeks until I had to go for my operation. The landlady agreed.

The big day came. I was scared to go into the hospital. I didn't want to stay. They took me to the room that I was going to stay in. There were three other kids in the same room. My mother, Carmen, and Ralph, my stepfather, went with me.

"Isn't it a nice room?" My mother asked me.

"I don't like it. I don't like it here. I want to go home," I said. It was the first time that I was going to be away from home and away from Carmen. Carmen had become a surrogate mother to me since she was the one that always took care of me. The nurse came in and told my mother, Carmen, and Ralph that they had to leave.

My mother said, "We have to go now. Carmen and I will come tomorrow. You'll be okay."

"Yeah! You'll be okay! We'll see you tomorrow," Carmen said.

I was scared after they left, but I turned to the boy in the next bed and started to talk to him.

"Hi! My name is Carmelo, what's yours?" I asked him.

"My name is Mike, that's Tom, and over there is Jim." I said hi to them.

Mike asked, "Was that your family that was just here?"

"Yes! That was my mother, my sister and my stepfather."

"What are you going to have done?" Tom asked.

"They are going to loosen the muscles in my legs. That way I'll be able to stand up straight," I said.

"Is this your first operation?" Jim asked.

"Yes, How about you?" They all said yes. Then my phone rang. I had my own phone next to my bed. I answered it. It was my mother.

"Hello! Oh hi, Ma! I'm fine. I was just talking to the guys."