

POWER

MONEY, MUSIC AND THE ALMIGHTY

The true story of Melvin Couch, a man of Power



MELVIN COUCH

with Kate E. Stephenson

Copyright © 2009 Melvin Couch/ Meltone Entertainment Group, Inc.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without
the written permission of Meltone Entertainment Group, Inc.

Written by Melvin Couch with Kate E. Stephenson
Meltone Entertainment Group, Inc.
4046 Whistler Dr., Douglasville, GA 30135
Phone: (678) 715-8795
Fax: (678) 715-1961
Email: MelvinCouch@yahoo.com
www. MeltoneEntertainmentGroup.com
Distributed by Meltone Entertainment Group

Published by Welstar Publications, Inc.
628 Lexington Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11221.
Phone: (718) 453-6557
Fax: (718) 338-1454
E-mail: drbatson@optonline.net
or editor@welstarpublications.com
ISBN: 978-0938503-1-18
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Managing Editor, Kate E. Stephenson
Developmental Editor, Victoria Sandbrook
Copy Editor, Joseph Pierandozzi
Book Design/Typography, Kate E. Stephenson
Text set in Calibri.
Cover Design by Michael L. Buie
Cover Photo by Jerome Mitchell

*This book is dedicated to my family,
who have loved me through it all:*

For my wife, whom I prize above all of God's creation;

For my children, my salvation and the foundation of my faith;

For my parents, angels watching over me.

I love you, with all I am and all I will be.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	1
Preface	3
Prayer of Power	6
Section One: Power of Poverty	7
1. Darby Township	9
2. Into the Woods	13
3. Out of the Woods	19
4. Playing the Numbers	29
Section Two: Earthly Power	33
5. Living the Life	35
6. A Change Gon' Come	45
7. Corrections and Close Calls	59
8. Entrepreneurial Vision	67
9. The Golden Wings	83
Section Three: Divine Power	89
10. Growing Pains	91
11. Rebuilding	107
12. Scandalized My Name	111
13. Losing My Life	133
14. Rooted in Salvation	143
15. Giving Glory to God	149
Afterword by Rick Sanjek	156
More About the Man	160
Reflections on the Man	162
An Entreaty for the Return of Gospel	163

“You Took My Song, Now You Are Gone”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are so many who I would like to and need to thank—so many that I cannot name you all; forgive me if I don't mention you by name (blame it on "senioritis").

To my ever faithful Meltone family, especially Rick Sanjek, Russ Wheeler, "Mama" Curtis, Charlie Brown, Gus Redmond, Keith Winslow, Winton Cobb, Anthony Delco, Haran Griffin, Sharon Saddler and Virginia White: You help me stay on the straight and narrow—you have my deepest gratitude. I would like to say a special thanks to all the artists of Meltone who have blessed me with their trust; together we have climbed many mountains and enjoyed many glorious sights. I look forward to praising the Lord with you until my last days.

To the many production and distribution teams, especially those at Central South Distribution and Select-O-Hits: You get the songs to the people; without you Meltone would go nowhere.

I would like to show my appreciation for my publishing team at Welstar, especially my co-writer, Kate Stephenson. Thank you for seeing my spirit and printing the message in my heart.

To my entire church family all across the nation and the world: You have my never-ending gratitude and prayerful appreciation. I know your collective prayers have continually pushed back the Devil and forced the evil from my body. When my disease sought to take me down, you prayed over me and won the battles that I could not wage on my own. Your continued support is a buoy to me, heart, body, and soul. You may never know how much you mean to me, but I'll whisper it in God's ear.

And last but not least, I'd like to again acknowledge the ever-present love of my family. Times were not always easy and we do not always see eye to eye, but we will forever be heart to heart.

PREFACE

I wasn't sure I wanted to tell the whole thing. The truth can be ugly, impatient, violent, and flawed. I want the world to know the goodness of God but not the frailty of man. But how can I or anyone appreciate the way that God's hand has touched this life and the great heights to which He has brought me unless we first understand the valleys through which I have crawled and the less-than-perfect man I have been and still am? It is a scary thing to look back at your life and tell all of the good, bad, and ugly. I have done a lot of things in life that were all about *life*. I have not always been a "good guy." I have been lustful, gluttonous, greedy, wrathful, envious, prideful, and guilty of spiritual sloth. The bad and the ugly are reason enough to skip some details, but even a few of the joys seem too personal to give to the world. But the world has given so much to me; I have an amazing life, amazing joy, amazing blessings, and amazing grace. Many who have come into my life have done so with such humility and openness, with a desire to give and not to receive. For all of this I am grateful, and feel that I must give nothing less in return.

Still, I have hesitated at every step; I have thought to leave things, people, places, and deeds out—to make this story the perfect version of myself. I realize today that I am not perfect, and God did not make me to be so. Instead, I am a work in progress, still growing, learning, and working to become the better man that the Lord wishes me to be. I have, as of late, been the recipient of many prayers and honors; now I pray that my life will be a blessing to others and give honor to God. And so it begins here.

My entire life has been a pursuit of power. I have made a career out of discovering new forms of power and new ways to exercise it. Excelling in school, in sports, in the military, in street life, in business, I have lived many lives and been many things to many people. I have made choices, many that I am not proud of. I have made many mistakes. But those choices and mistakes have brought



me down amazing paths and my life has been a blessed journey.

From the beginning I have always been interested in two things: the limelight and gangsters. I wanted to be in business. I wanted to be the tough guy. I wanted to be a gangster. When I was growing up, men of power seemed to be either performers or street kings. So, I've always had this keen interest in entertainment and in the street life. I was an adventurous kid, and I used to watch all of these tough guy detectives, like Elliot Ness and Charlie Chan, on television. I also wanted to be the center attraction. From the age of ten I performed in the church choir and I have continued to perform throughout my life. The stage is a place I have always felt at home and in control.

But it is perhaps in those moments when I have felt *out of* control that have shaped my life the most. Poverty was an intense motivator for me. I hated not being able to control the most basic facets of my life: my next meal, the condition of the roof over my head. Growing up the poorest of the poor, I never wanted to be impoverished again. I know now that God has had his hands on me my whole life; but I felt so oppressed by the other matters of my world that I couldn't feel His merciful hands gently guiding me. I wanted to escape the destructive power of poverty forever. To do that I lived on the edge.

I should have been dead five times over, but God has kept me. I didn't realize it the first time He put a call out on my life, or the second, or even the third time, but He was keeping me for a reason. He has called me to be a living testimony and I am writing this book, not because I want to, but because it is *His* will. I have not walked the straight and narrow path of the sinless—no one but Jesus has. And my story is not one of a sinner to a saint—I am not there yet. But I have walked in so many shoes; the Lord has allowed me to see the world in so many ways; and where my burden should have killed me, the mercy of God lightened my load and has brought me to these pages to talk with you.



PREFACE



From a shanty house on the outskirts of Philly to the mansions of Atlanta, from a scrappy boy trying to grow into manhood to a man of influence seeking the face of true power—God has brought me such a mighty long way. Nothing but the grace of God could keep me through the destruction that has crossed my path. And I am here to shout the Good News of Christ, to praise His name. I come humbly before you, not to tell my own story, but to tell of the glory of God and the nature of true POWER.

PRAYER OF POWER

Most gracious and merciful Lord, please bless all those who come to this book seeking a deeper understanding.

Ease our hearts with the knowledge that if we follow in Your will, You will always make a way out of no way for us.

Find the hearts lost in the woods of poverty, inaction, and disbelief, and bring them into the light of Your truth and the ability of Your strength.

Allow my story to touch someone's heart today; allow it to be an inspiration to those seeking the true nature of power.

Amen, Amen, Amen

SECTION I

POWER OF POVERTY

When I was a little bitty boy round the age of ten
That's when Jesus came in my life and saved me from all my sin
That's when my friends started to talking, oh how they criticized
It wasn't long after that they wanted to apologize.

But you know what I said...
That's alright, I learned my lesson well
I can't please everyone, so I got to please myself
That's alright, I learned my lesson well
I can't please everyone, so I got to please myself
– Taken From *“Learned My Lesson Well”* by Melvin Couch

Chapter One: Darby Township

Growing Up in Philadelphia

Please be patient with me, as in order to tell this story about the nature and course of power in my life the right way, I must start at the very beginning; my humble beginnings.

I was born in Philadelphia on April 24, 1941, to Plant Sr. and Louella Couch, and spent the first years of my life in a small suburb of the city called Darby Township. I was what you call the knee baby, the middle of three sons: Plant Jr., myself, and Calvin.

Pop was an intimidating man who believed thoroughly to spare the rod, spoil the child. He was a strict disciplinarian, ruling his household with an iron fist. Mama was a sweet woman, who always believed in me and the greatness of my destiny. She would say to me when I was young that God was going to bless me. Her convictions were often far stronger than my own; she was always my biggest cheerleader.

My parents moved north from Georgia in 1940. My father had been a moonshiner down near Jasper County (I was destined to walk in his shoes later in life). Having gotten into a disagreement with some rival bootleggers—white boys with mean attitudes and sharp knives—Daddy found himself less a good portion of his jaw skin and decided that it might be smart to move on. Now my father wasn't afraid of his competition, but he was an intelligent businessman; he realized he couldn't make a profit if he was six feet under, and his wife, my mother, was pregnant with me at the time. Pop was concerned with creating a life for us out of the nothing that he had. But his were a strong will and spirit of determination; he held steadfast to his own convictions and ingenuity.

Pop hopped on a train with \$29 in his pocket and a loose plan. He rode the train to the end of the line, then followed the crowd that disembarked. He found himself in a little place called Darby



Township, which seemed like a good enough place to start over. Quiet, but close enough to the big city—a good location to try his hand at some new exploits. Darby Township was somewhere he could grow. Pop found a job and a \$4-a-week room that day, and within a matter of weeks he had amassed enough money to bring his expecting wife, his oldest son, and the promise of new life north to Darby Township.

At first we all lived together in that one little four-dollar-a-week room. Eventually, my father found a better job at a company called Sunship that allowed him to raise enough money to purchase the little ramshackle place I would call home until the age of fifteen. The house was “a deal”, but only because it was a wreck. The brick façade was crumbling to dust, the windows were drafty, the floors creaked, and several of the floorboards and much of the ceiling was damaged from water and damp. Every time it rained, we would have to set out buckets and pots in every room. The roof was like Swiss cheese, and it offered little protection from the elements. It was proof that we were the poorest of the poor—undoubtedly the poorest of the people living in Darby Township—but still it was home, and it offered what it could to make our lives more comfortable than the cramped space of the room in which we had previously lived.

In retrospect, I spent little time inside that house anyway. I was a child of the outdoors. My grandfather was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian, a big guy who owned a farm, rode horses, and who used to be a class-A archer. I looked up to him as a hero when I was a youngster, though I saw him seldom. My parents couldn't afford trips to see my grandfather, but I felt a kinship with him. I loved to dig in the ground, to root around in the earth; I was interested in plants and how they grow. I also had a healthy curiosity about animals and their habitats. I would often trek miles to poke around in the local streams and lakes, and though I was never really taught how to fish, I experimented and soon got so good at it that I would come home with loads of fresh bass, walleye, and pike.



At first I was too young and small to carry them all so I would drag them, sometimes dragging all of the skin off the fish before reaching home. But it was exhilarating, figuring out how to catch and grow my own food. Often, at home we had so little; I was grateful for the bits I could find for myself.

We didn't have much money, and what we had was barely enough for the essentials, so all the needed repairs to that little shack were done by my parents and, when we were older, my brothers and me. Mama and Daddy worked and worked on that house. Over the years, the roof got so full of holes it barely kept any of the rain out. Pop worked until he had enough money to buy materials, then climbed up there and tarred and mended it himself. He would comb the streets in the early hours of the morning, scavenging for bricks that could be reused to re-side the house, fixtures to replace worn out ones, wood to make general repairs—anything—and then he and Mama would set about putting back together whatever part of the house was desperately falling apart at that moment.

Then my father's job turned sour. Sunship had hired another young man, a white fellow, a few years after my father had joined the company. He was a nice enough guy who worked well, but as a new hire his seniority was nonexistent in comparison to my father's. Still, Sunship promoted this new guy to a position above my father's, and Pop, being the proud man that he was, quit. After that, being the determined and fearless man that he was, Pop filed a discrimination lawsuit against the company.

The battle with Sunship went on for over six years. Never one to roll over and play dead, my father industriously set up his own junking business. I must have been three around the time he got himself a battered pickup truck which helped him start junking full-time. Pop rummaged through the neighborhoods looking for other people's junk, sometimes selling it, sometimes bringing it home. As my big brother and I got older we tagged along. He



would ride on the outside of one side of the truck and I would ride on the other; we would scoop up any and every thing that looked like it could be of some use or value. The family job was to turn one man's trash into our own treasure.

Looking back, I marvel at the resourcefulness of my parents. We didn't have much at all when I was growing up, but we always had just enough. There were days when I didn't have anything but two slices of bread and some syrup for school lunch—and some days when I didn't even have that—but my parents gave me and my brothers a good foundation for life. Having to live without taught us about frugality and efficiency, about perseverance and hard work, and about family loyalty and the bonds of love. Watching my parents work their fingers to the bone to make a life for us, I vowed to have more, to make more, to be more. My youth set a fire blazing in my chest; I never wanted to return to poverty. As a child, I thought I was in search of money, but I was really in search of power.

At about age nine, I had my first experience with the power of money. After six years fighting Sunship, my father won his lawsuit and was awarded \$80,000. Now in the 1950s that was serious money, and with it, Pop opened up a small grocery market, built right next to the house. He still went out junking at night, but with the opening of the market we started to see a light at the end of the poverty tunnel.

Chapter Two: Into the Woods

The Runaway Years

My first taste of power occurred when I was about fifteen. My father always took my brothers and me out scavenging with him for saleable junk in his battered pickup truck. Since that truck was the only automobile at my disposal, I got it in my head that I was going to learn to drive. Now it might have been smarter to just ask Pop to teach me, but at fifteen you aren't always smart. One day, I decided to get in his truck and feel out the mechanics of driving while Pop was out running errands elsewhere. All I did was go backwards and forwards a few feet in the driveway just to get a feel for the motions. It was such an exhilarating experience, being able to manipulate that truck with just a few movements of my feet and the light pressure of my hands on the steering wheel, but I was cautious not to go too far, just a couple of feet back and a couple of feet forward. I didn't think Pop would even notice, but oh, did he!

Now, I love my father; I always have. But he was a stern man. I would even go so far as to say he was mean. He had his rules, and they were law in his house. While I have always loved the outdoors and sports, my father was not one to spend "father-son time" with me or my brothers. He was not the kind of father to take his children fishing or play ball or give fatherly advice. There was little softness or affectionate interaction between us. Every Saturday, we were to fall in line and take our castor-oil medicine. If you have ever even smelled castor oil, then you can imagine how bad that stuff tastes. It will turn your stomach. My father would buy the oil in bulk, half-gallon jugs the contents of which were so thick that the jugs had to be heated before the oil would pour out, and it was mandatory that we take our tablespoonful every week. I know now that he kept us pumped with the stuff in part because we didn't have money for medical bills if one of us got sick, but back then he just seemed like a tyrant, pouring that nasty oil down our