

Gimmie Shelter: Running George and the High Price of Philadelphia Freedom

This isn't just a memoir. It's a survival manual for the soul.

Growing up on the rough streets of Philadelphia in the 1960s and '70s made me tough. My father, the local criminal element, the Philadelphia police, and the Roman Catholic Church seemed to join forces against me. That put me on a violent trajectory.

The culture of control and intimidation forced me to build an impenetrable shell around myself just to survive. And survive I did. But survival came at a huge cost.

It felt like I had lost my soul. I felt abandoned, betrayed, rejected—and yes, even turned against—by God. I was angry. Hurt. Disconnected from God, or whatever higher power might be out there.

I turned my back. Denounced Him. Then served notice: we're through. I'm going it alone.

I was seeking truth, meaning, and identity. But at the same time, I was ignoring or rejecting the guidance being offered to me. Violence, fear, and anxiety became my only companions. And those companions kept leading me back into juvenile detention centers.

Inside, I was a target too. I was assaulted by inmates and by police officers.

After one severe beating—first by a Philly cop, then by other inmates—my face was swollen, broken, and battered. When the guards brought us into the courtroom, I looked down so my mom wouldn't see my face.

But she did.

She let out a scream: “No!!!” Then all the other moms joined her. “No!!!”

I remember feeling so proud of my mom. I told myself, *Go get 'em, Mom.*

The judge shut the court down and ordered us back to our cells.

Love won that day.

The screams of my mother echoed all the way to the highest levels of the halls of justice. My case became one of the first taken on by the Philadelphia Juvenile Law Center, advocating for fair and decent treatment for youth in custody. What started in Philly grew into a powerful movement—one that reached the U.S. Congress. It's still going strong today.

But my life still felt small. It was tightly bound in ego and expectations. The shell I had started creating as a child was now indestructible. But it had also become my prison.

It kept me safe from vulnerability, but it also kept me from love.

And then, one day, it all caught up with me. I was surrounded. My dad died by suicide. My mom died of a heart attack. My marriage died from neglect.

It was more than I could bear.

I crashed—emotionally and spiritually. I fell into the darkest place I had ever known. I didn't think I would live through it.

One night, I lay on the floor with a .45-caliber pistol pressed to my temple, ready to face heaven, hell, or oblivion.

Then something shifted. I released my stranglehold on who I thought I was—or should have been. And I said, "Please help me."

Incredibly, the shell around me cracked open. The brightest light came in. It wrapped itself around me. And I knew, no matter what came next, I was going to be okay.

I laid down the pistol. Laid down hopelessness. Laid down despair.

That moment was a rebirth.

I found myself on a different path. I could look back and see that all those "chance connections" in my life weren't chance at all. They had moved me forward.

I call them my guides. My mentors. Even my angels. Each one gave me insight or understanding I needed to grow.

Now, after more than six decades, I know it's my turn to put on those wings, be brave, be vulnerable, and share my story.

This is a labor of love. A gift I hope to share with the world.

In *Gimmie Shelter*, I detail the horrors of a life that brought me to my knees—but also the redemption and reawakening that led me to a sense of purpose. I hope *Gimmie Shelter* will serve as a guiding light to others who have become lost.