



VI. MY INTRODUCTION TO RETAIL

Age: 18-19

It was November and the holidays were approaching. I was now employed as a salesperson for Chess King, a mens clothing retailer with locations throughout the country. It was the beginning of the disco era and the nightclub social scene was coming alive. This meant people wanted to look good and stand out when they went out. I was on the runway and ready for takeoff, and takeoff I did. I didn't know it at the time, but it would be the beginning of an entirely new career path for me. One in which I would have never considered had I not been forced to by circumstance.

Being even more ambitious now than ever before, (although I didn't think that was possible), in addition to being extremely competitive, and socially interactive, I was as happy as a kid at Disney World. I couldn't get enough. I enjoyed every minute of what I was doing. No longer needing (or wanting) to continue working as a cook, I gave everything I had to learning, studying and excelling in my new position. If I wasn't in school, I was working. I wanted to be my best and believed the sky was the limit for me.

I was working and being paid hourly, but my earnings were supplemented by commission. My drive and personality was perfectly suited for this. I produced more retail sales volume for the holidays than all of the store's salespeople, including the assistant manager combined. In the process I was making friends and learning skills that I would keep for life. There was only one problem. The holidays were over and I was all of a sudden faced with the prospects of only being able to work part-time. Was the honeymoon over?

It was not unusual for me to take time throughout the day to go in the back room and get down on my knees to thank God for His Blessings. Now I needed to pray for direction. As I considered my options to compensate for my unexpected loss of income, I was about to get another surprise. The assistant store manager had been terminated for ethical reasons. Having been employed with the company just two months and being only 18 years old, I expected someone would be brought in from another one of Chess King's locations nearby. Instead, I was offered the position. Wow! With enthusiasm and high expectation, I accepted.

I would be put on a fast track plan to learn everything I needed to know to operate a retail store. I had the sales part down and I had a stud for a Store Manager to teach me the rest. From inventory management, budget and banking, to payroll and scheduling, and everything in between, I received the equivalent of a college education from him in a matter of weeks.



That's me in my new position.

The hair is real and the girls always wanted to touch it to see if it was.
Don't laugh! It was 1974. It was a great time.

Most people look at the idea of soul mates as being a relationship that exists between couples. But I can tell you on a friendship scale it transcends far beyond that. We had a synergy, respect and trust that would be more characterized by being brothers than co-workers and that included being highly competitive with one another!

We worked together, socialized together, and produced the number one store for sales volume in the Florida District together. It seemed like every month we just got better and better. Together we became rising stars within the company. I was now a seasoned veteran (Lo!). Five months into being an assistant manager another one of those life changing events was about to take place.

My store manager was being promoted to a newer and bigger store. Great you would think. I would miss working with him, but I might also get the chance to become my store's next manager. I was the obvious choice to succeed him, so I thought. Not so fast.