

Your Honor,  
Your Honor,  
Your Honor

A white line-art illustration of a pair of scales of justice, positioned to the right of the main title text.

*A Journey Through Grief to  
Restorative Justice*



*A Memoir*

**JUDGE LEONIA J. LLOYD**

WANDA WEAVER, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



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JUDGE LEONIA J. LLOYD

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**ONE**

1945–1967



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## CHAPTER 1

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# *Back to Where It Began*

### INSEPARABLE



It seemed to be a typical morning in my courtroom, until I heard voices screaming through the walls of the criminal exam courtroom next door. Next, I heard sounds of large objects crashing. Not only was this highly unusual, but it was my sister's courtroom. I began to panic.

I rose from my seat on the bench and focused on my court officer, screaming, "Go next door, and help my sister!" My officer immediately ran out the door. The people seated in my courtroom were in a frozen state of disbelief as they looked at a panicking judge. However, I could not focus on them; I was worried about my sister, Leona. What was going on in her courtroom?

Was it a brawl? Was she all right? For a few seconds, a scary thought flew through my brain about an incident that had happened a

few months earlier in my own courtroom: a violent physical altercation had nearly broken out following a murder examination hearing. I'd had to hit the panic button on the bench, which immediately summoned ten extra police officers to my courtroom.

Was something like that happening next door? Often, tempers flare in criminal courtrooms because of the nature of the cases heard in them. I could not hide my concern from the people in my courtroom. I stood up and told the people in my courtroom that my sister was next door and that I had to go check on her and would be right back. I thought; *I cannot, let anything happen to her.*

Heads in my courtroom nodded in agreement, and one voice yelled, "Go ahead, Judge!"

At that moment, my court officer reentered the courtroom and yelled out, "Judge Lloyd!"

I turned around, stepped back toward my seat on the bench, and said in a nervous and strained voice, "Yes?"

He said, "Everything is all right. There are about ten officers in there now. Your sister is fine."

I stopped trembling, and my racing heart calmed down as I slowly sat down in my chair. Even the audience in my courtroom looked relieved.

My reaction to that event was second nature to me. From the crib to the courtroom, my sister and I were extremely close and protective of each other. Wearing a black robe was not going to change that.

## ◆ **One Heartbeat**

Leona and I were the best-kept secret in the world. We were inside our mother's womb, as close as two peas in a pod, except Leona was lying upside down. But no one knew we existed as a duo.

Our mother, who was a petite lady, only five feet three inches tall and barely a size 7, had no idea she was expecting twins, because her doctor had heard only one heartbeat. This was in the days before the use of ultrasound.

Our tiny mother grew as large as a house during her pregnancy. Our father, Leon, along with everybody else, was certain the baby was going to be a boy. The boy was to be named Leon. The baby shower was planned for a boy, as well as the nursery decor. But as fate would have it, a boy was not born.

On August 6, 1949, in the delivery room, the startled doctor pulled Leona out feet first and exclaimed, “Wait—oh my God, there’s another one!” Within three minutes, I was taken out headfirst. This was a surprise to the doctor, who revealed to our father, “All through her prenatal care, I only heard one heartbeat.”

Even though the two little bundles of joy were a shock to our father, the news was an even bigger shock to our mother when she woke up in her room and was told by our father that she had two girls instead of one baby boy. Dumbfounded, our mother said, “What did you say? Two girls? Oh my, guess I’ve got to think up two names.”

But with this twist of fate, he quickly announced to her that he had already named us. My mother looked at him, a little thrown off, and asked, “What did you name them?”

“Leonia and Leona,” he proudly answered. This surprised but tickled our mother because he had named us after himself.

Our mom settled into being a registered nurse, her trained profession; a wife; and a mother after our birth. She thought she could juggle three balls in the air. She balanced a career and marriage



*Leonia and Leonia at 6 months old*

while taking care of two babies who babbled in a language only, we understood. Our father and mother worked out the shifts to take care of us, but it was too much of a strain on her. She broke out in a stress-related rash over her entire body. Her doctor recommended she stop working, stay home, and take care of her two newborns. Even though she was opposed to the idea of quitting her job, our mother agreed it was the only way to stop her nervous condition, so she gave in and did not go back to work as a nurse. To her it was a temporary setback.

Little did our father know, life was going to throw him a curveball and cause that temporary change to become permanent.

For the next five years, we grew up under the watchful eyes of our parents.

In the fall of 1954, at age five, we attended Courville Elementary School for kindergarten. Every morning, after dressing us, our mother walked us to school, and she returned for us when it was time to come home.

However, one day we were shaken out of our normal routine. Suddenly, we were taken out of our kindergarten class early and brought home; we did not know why.



*Our Mother with us in  
1954 at 5 years old*

Upon arriving at our house, we saw an ambulance with flashing red lights waiting near our open front door. Strange men dressed in white uniforms swooshed out the front door, pushing a stretcher. Running up to the stretcher, we could see our mother lying on it. She looked afraid. Crying hysterically, we grabbed her outstretched hand and screamed, “Mama! Mama, where are you going? What’s wrong?”

“Don’t cry. Mama’s going to be all right, but I do not feel well. My head hurts, so I am going to the hospital for a little while. Stop crying. I am going to be okay. I want you to mind your father and

your auntie, okay?” Tears washed over her face. We watched, as the men placed her in the big red ambulance.

As Leona and I looked up, our eyes met the haunting gazes of our father and aunt. Our aunt was trying to get us to stop crying, but we could not stop. Those men had just taken our mother away. We wanted our mother to stay and could not understand what was happening or why. Our father came over to us to say he was going to the hospital with our mother, and we were to stay with our aunt. We promised to be good girls while he was gone, but there was a quiet panic in our father’s eyes as tears cascaded over his cheeks. He kissed us and left.

Our mother remained in the hospital for three months, through the Christmas holidays. We were too little to visit her, but we were determined to communicate with her, so every day we colored pictures for her and insisted that our father take them to her. Every night, when our father returned home, he smiled at us and said, “Yes, I gave your mother your pictures.” Even at the age of five, we were determined to stay connected to her. A trait of strong determination was forming at an early age within us. When our father reported to us how our mother was doing every day, we were okay.

As we got older, we learned that our mother had suffered a subarachnoid hemorrhage of the brain, a serious condition that cause a lot of people to die. She said back then that the usual treatment was to bore holes in the skull and insert a tube to drain excess fluid from the brain. This was done to limit the amount of possible damage to the brain as well as to prevent death. However, our mother made our father promise he would not let them surgically enter her head. She said, “If you do, I won’t be the same.”

I can only imagine the pressure our father was under, but he felt compelled to honor our mother’s wishes. After all, she was a registered nurse and knew a whole lot more about the body than our father did, but that did not make it any easier.

Our mother's health took a turn for the worse, and the doctors tried to convince our father that surgery was the only option besides death for her, but our father said no. No matter what they said to scare him, they could not, get our father to break the promise he made to our mother. He prayed in the hospital chapel that night about his decision.

Our father visited her every night. She was hospitalized for a long time. Sitting by her bed, he was not sure if she could hear him as he talked to her; she just lay there, motionless. Many days passed, but one miraculous day, when he walked in, she was awake. Our father was ecstatic. However, he quickly discovered she did not know who he was, and she did not know she had twin girls. Our mother remembered nothing about her past life. It was obvious to him that her brain had been affected.

Following the doctors' suggestions, our father brought in pictures of us, as well as our drawings, to try to bring back her memory. During his daily visits, our father would tell her stories of her life to help her remember. This continued during the time she was hospitalized, as well as, after her day of her release. The doctor advised my father not to return to the previous place she had lived before her hospital stay, because something from her past caused her to worry. He did not want her to remember whatever caused that fear and worry.

Therefore, while our mother was still hospitalized, our father arranged to buy a newly built house in southwest Detroit and move everything from the old home to the new home, and that was where she was taken as soon as she was released from the hospital.

How our father juggled all those balls in the air was a question we often thought about when we got older. It was our father who combed and braided our hair, dressed us for school every day, and made sure we had our daily meals. It was our father who reassured us every evening and said nightly prayers with us as he put us to bed upon his return from the hospital. On top of all that, he moved us all into our new home, where my sister and I grew up. That is how

we spelled l-o-v-e. The depth of our father's love was a lesson to us that with love, you can climb mountains that you previously thought were impossible to climb.



*Our new Childhood Home that our father moved us to after our mother got out of the hospital*

We were overwhelmed with joy when Daddy finally brought our mother home, which was around February 1955. We were just glad she was back. Everything was normal to Leona and me. We had no idea that this was like a new beginning for our mother. As little girls, we were oblivious to the depth of her brain injury.

In fact, our parents worked together to make sure our lives fell into comfortable daily routines. They shielded us from the harsh realities they were handling.

As two skinny little tomboys growing up, we went fishing and skating with our father, but with our mother, we were always studying or learning how to cook something in the kitchen. Those cooking lessons paid off when we grew up and started living on our own.

Our parents never missed seeing us in school performances. From the stage, we always searched for their smiling faces in the audience.

We dressed alike until we finished high school, but that was our choice. Even though we dressed alike, my mother instilled in us that we were two distinct individuals.

“Don't select or not select something because the other one has chosen the same outfit. You pick what you like. If your clothes are different, that is fine, and if they are alike, that is fine too because you're picking what you like,” she said. She drilled independent

thinking into us, which prepared us for other criticisms later in life that had to do with any decisions we made independently or jointly.

### ◆ **Learning the Bond of Unification**

Our mother taught us to always have each other's back. Once, in the fifth grade, a girl on the school bus tried to pick a fight with Leona.

As soon as we came home and reported what had happened on the bus, our mother asked, "Did you stand up there and protect each other?"

We said yes.

"Good. If not, I would whip your behinds," she replied.

Our mother's lesson on the bond of unity was one we used all our lives. We stood up for each other against anyone who dared to try to bring harm against the other—and I mean anyone. Remember the courtroom scene in the beginning of the book?

### ◆ **The Meaning of Sisterhood**

Even though we had a united front outside the house, it was a different story inside the house. As twins, we argued over stupid stuff, just as all sisters and brothers do. If I felt strongly about an object belonging to me, the argument would often result in a tug-of-war and then a hitting match. Whenever any hitting started, our mother would break up the fight and tell us to stop it before we both got a whipping from her.

We were about eight or nine years old when Leona and I got into a particularly loud, heated argument—over what I could not tell you, but at the time, it was important to us. When the verbal arguing changed into a hitting match, our mother decided to end the fight in a different way. That day, our mother decided to teach us a valuable

life lesson about the importance of being sisters and the bond we shared. Instead of coming into the room and breaking up the fight, as she usually did, she decided to use reverse psychology. Our mother walked into the room and stood there with her arms folded as we passed licks back and forth.

She said in a loud, booming voice, “That’s right—hit each other! Go on and kill each other.”

After hearing that, we immediately stopped hitting each other. That did not sound like the mother we knew, but we were still primed to continue the fight.

Leona and I stared at each other, still mad, but something clicked inside us. I no longer wanted to hit her, and she no longer tried to strike me. Our mother had used the word *kill*, and that word had never crossed our minds. We stopped, went to our individual twin beds, sat down, and said nothing. But our mother did not stop; she wanted to drive her point home. She stood between our twin beds with folded arms and teary eyes as she stared at us.

“One day your father and I will die, and all you will have is each other, but if you kill each other now, you will have no one.” With those words, she turned and walked out of the room.

We sat on our beds quietly. All I could think about was that I did not want to kill my sister.

After about five minutes, I said, “I don’t want to kill you.”

“I don’t want to kill you either,” Leona said, and she came over to my bed and hugged me. “I’m sorry.”

“Me too,” I responded.

From that day forward, arguments still happened from time to time, because sisters are not going to agree on everything, but one thing that did change after that day was the hitting. Never again did we raise our hands against each other. After all, Leona was not just

my twin sister; she was my best friend. We shared a bond that time revealed could not be broken.

### ◆ **Hard Lessons of Life**

Summertime is a period of playful, lazy days for a lot of kids, but it was not in our household. Every year, when school was out for summer vacation, our mother had other vacation plans for us: she would go through a ritualized cleaning frenzy that she pulled Leona and me into like a tsunami. This occurred from the third grade through high school. We were forced to scrub and wipe down windowsills and blinds as well as the walls and the floors. This process was extra hard because our parents smoked a lot of cigarettes, and our mother wanted to be sure we got rid of any evidence of smoke or nicotine residue in the house when we cleaned. The result of the work had to be a spotless room; anything less would have to be recleaned. Lastly, we had to help our father repaint the rooms in the house right before the fall school semester began. Yes, these were the same walls we had previously washed and scrubbed at the beginning of summer vacation. Can you spell *child abuse*?

In our minds, this felt like child slavery because while we were working our bodies to the bone, all our friends were outside playing. But we were obligated to do the work, or we would have hell to pay. We realized later in life that our mother was teaching us the lessons of hard work and discipline. Demonstrating to us, that this type of manual labor could be our future, if we did not continue our education. With an education, we would have more choices in life.

She showed us we had a choice: we had to either do the hard work and obtain a college education after high school graduation or be prepared to immediately get a manual-labor job.

Leona and I never shied away from any type of hard work, because our mother had made us tough. We felt there was nothing wrong

with manual labor, if that was what you wanted to do. However, we wanted more choices for employment, and if manual labor was the only type of work we would be qualified to do after finishing high school, then we were definitely going to college because we wanted to broaden our choices for employment.

My mother's lesson to us about hard work, education, and choices was one we both passed on as teachers and judges. We wanted young people to have more choices in life when they finished high school. We also wanted defendants who appeared in front of us and were on probation to know there were more opportunities for them out there as well. Whether they selected job training for certification for employment opportunities, apprenticeship programs that created a pathway to skilled jobs, or college, we wanted them to keep growing and exploring what was out there for them. But we told both groups they would have to work hard to attain those goals, because nothing was going to be handed to them.

### ◆ **Never Giving Up (Quitting Is Not an Option)**

Even though Leona and I had our share of arguments with each other, there were times when we had to team up with each other against our parents, especially in the case of something we really wanted.

One of those times occurred at the ripe age of ten. Leona and I wanted to play instruments in school, but my parents did not want us lugging some beat-up old instruments home. We decided to ask our parents to get us a piano, and we begged and pleaded.

Our mother made her case that pianos were expensive, and they did not have that kind of money. She said, "Besides that, you two will be interested in it for a year, and then I won't be able to drag you to the piano to practice, and guess what? Your father and I will still

have to make payments on a piano that will be sitting with cobwebs on it. So, the answer is no!”

That was when Leona and I discovered, if you really want something, you do not take the first *no* as a final answer. We had to fight for what we felt was right, even though it was against our parents. We had to use our brains and the power of persuasion.

Leona had a rebuttal. “What if we could find a used piano that didn’t cost much? Then would you get us the piano?”

“And where are you going to find a used piano?”

“The want ads,” Leona answered.

Our mother rolled her eyes at Leona. We knew what that meant, so we continued pleading since we had countered her argument.

“Find it first, and show it to me, and then we’ll decide,” our mother said.

Leona and I combed the Wednesday and Sunday want ads every week for a few months, and then bingo—we hit the jackpot! We found a used piano for twenty-five dollars. We ran to our mother with the ad.

“You found a piano for twenty-five dollars? It must be a piece of junk,” she retorted.

“Well, can we go look at it?”

Our parents had a discussion and then placed a call and made an appointment for the next day to see the piano. Leona and I had won round one.

The next day, we went to view the condition of the piano. It was an old antique piano that had been painted a drab gray. The lady who owned it reassured us it was playable but said it needed tuning.

Glaring at us with a smirk on her face, our mother said, “You don’t want this piano, do you?”

“Yes!” was our resounding answer.

She looked at us and said firmly, “If we get this piano, you have to take piano lessons and practice on it every day. I mean it. I’d better hear those keys singing, or you will forfeit your weekly allowance for every week that you miss a day playing during that week.”

We jumped up and down with excitement and said, “We won’t miss a day.”

After the piano arrived, it was tuned, and we started our weekly piano lessons. We did not know our piano lessons would be a little over a mile away in a city named River Rouge, and we had to walk there and back every week. On a good day, it was at least a brisk thirty-minute walk, but the lessons started at specific times. Rain, sleet, or snow, there would be no excuses or missed lessons. We bundled up, put our boots on, and walked.

One day there was a snow blizzard so thick we could not see a foot in front of us. There were already six to seven inches of heavy snow on the ground, and it was colder than the North Pole, but our mother would not listen to any excuses or make any exceptions to her iron-clad rule. Even the TV weatherman said, “If you don’t have to go out, don’t.”

Our mother looked at us, handed us extra scarves, and said, “Put these around your necks for extra warmth, but you are going.”

Leona and I could not believe she was sending us out into the cold, snowy beyond-belief blizzard, but she was. Once we arrived, we had to thaw out our hands first before we could touch the piano keys. I shiver to this day when I think about how cold we were, but we pushed through.

Leona and I kept each other company as we walked. This went on for five years, until we completed the last John Thompson piano lesson book. What a feeling of accomplishment. Our teacher, Mrs. Royal, congratulated us and told us, “Most kids don’t stick with it long enough to get this far.”

At fifteen, we stopped taking lessons because we had finished what we had started. Those five years indirectly taught us the meaning of fighting for what you want and believe in and the importance of having the commitment, strength, and endurance to see it through. We learned that your word means everything, and you do not give up just because a task becomes hard and obstacles are put in your way. You push on through. These lessons served us well as we grew up and fought for other meaningful things that were worth fighting for. *Quitting* was not in our vocabulary.

With timing being everything, we had now picked up a new interest: listening and dancing to Motown music.