

"A beautiful, raw testimony of the radical grace of Christ." —Kevin Palau

Herman Mendoza



SHIFTING SHADOWS

How a New York Drug Lord Found Freedom
in the Last Place He Expected

“In *Shifting Shadows*, you will read an amazing story of the grace of God at work that will encourage you to keep on keeping on.”

—Luis Bush, missions strategist and author
of *The Yes Effect*

“A beautiful, raw testimony of the radical grace of Christ in Herman’s life and how God continues to save others through Pastor Mendoza and his ministry. I am blessed to know him!”

—Kevin Palau, president and CEO
of the Luis Palau Association

“To spend five minutes with Herman Mendoza now, it would be challenging to imagine him spending five years in federal prison for dealing illicit drugs. Since our paths crossed, I have witnessed his efforts in reaching young people for Christ and his commitment to impact our society with his testimony. In *Shifting Shadows*, we can grasp the essence of God’s unwavering grace.”

—Allan Houston, former two-time NBA All-Star
and assistant general manager of the New York Knicks

“Herman Mendoza’s testimony is an amazing story of how the grace and love of Jesus transformed his life, bringing him from a life of crime and prison into gospel ministry, healing his marriage, and making his family whole.”

—Dr. George O. Wood, chairman
of the World Assemblies of God Fellowship

“Usually people don’t admit to their frailties, failures, and lives of wickedness, but in *Shifting Shadows*, Herman Mendoza tells it all. From a busted drug dealer to a prominent and faithful servant of God, he bares his soul. It is a poignant and captivating story with redeeming value for a worldwide audience.”

—Raymond Joseph, author and former ambassador of Haiti
to the United States

“Herman’s story is a powerful example of the way God restores the years that the locusts have eaten. Through Christ and the power of the gospel, we see love, redemption, and freedom born out of greed, emptiness, and bondage. In a culture riddled with addictions, this is an uplifting story worthy of our attention.”

—Candy Marballi, president and CEO of the Prayer Covenant

“This raw, utterly engaging narrative of Pastor Mendoza’s journey demonstrates how God takes the torn pieces of life and creates a beautiful tapestry of His love and mercy to reveal His glory!”

—Nick Brino, local sales manager of Salem Media Group, DC

“Caution: If you start reading this book at 10 P.M., you might not get much sleep that night. I had set aside only a short period to read this book, but I became so engrossed in the ups and downs of Herman’s life story that I ended up pushing my schedule back. This memoir crosses all cultures and shows how God’s grace can rescue a lost soul regardless of how hard he or she hits rock bottom.”

—Joel Freeman, PhD, director and producer of *Return to Glory*;
former NBA chaplain

“It is so exciting to read this testimony of the extremity and the availability of God’s grace. Jesus is not only in the cathedral, He is in the classroom, the hospital room, the courtroom, and the prison cell. Pastor Mendoza is a trophy of God’s grace, and I am blessed to be a witness of his transformed life. I hope this book will convince you that hope is just a prayer away!”

—Reverend Pete Richardson, lead pastor of Grace Ministries,
Promise Church

“*Shifting Shadows* exemplifies the work of grace in a life that has tasted both the giddy heights of sin and the lowest depths of desperation. Once I began to read, I was hooked and could not put it down. Herman Mendoza’s account is riveting from start to finish.”

—Reverend Lloyd Pulley, senior pastor of Calvary Chapel,
Old Bridge, New Jersey

“I highly recommend *Shifting Shadows*. Herman Mendoza has a thrilling story that speaks boldly to the urban issues of today.”

—Dimas Salaberrios, author of *Street God*

“This book is amazing and heartfelt from beginning to end. My utmost respect for Herman Mendoza. To be able to put his past behind him and give back to those who need it is truly an act of a hero.”

—Miguelina Puello, retired NYPD sergeant and adjunct professor

SHIFTING SHADOWS

*How a New York Drug Lord Found Freedom
in the Last Place He Expected*

Herman Mendoza



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

© 2020 by Herman A. Mendoza

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

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—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

ISBN 978-0-7642-3616-7

ISBN 978-0-7642-3617-4 (Spanish edition)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Control Number: 2019055367

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations identified ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. ESV Text Edition: 2016

Scripture quotations identified KJV are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations identified NKJV are from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations identified TLB are from The Living Bible, copyright © 1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

This book recounts events in the life of Herman Mendoza according to the author's recollection and information from the author's perspective. While all the stories are true, some names, dialogue, and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.

Cover design by Dan Pitts

Cover photo by Edwin Rodriguez/Kiss Digital

Photo on page 242 by Ramysh Bangali

Author represented by WordServe Literary

20 21 22 23 24 25 26 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



I dedicate this book to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
This book was written to bring glory to you, my Lord,
and as a testimony of your transforming power.

*In memory of my loving parents,
Fernando and María Mendoza.*

CONTENTS

Foreword by Wess Stafford	11
A Note from Herman	13
Prologue	15
1. The Corona Boys	17
2. A Bite of the Apple	20
3. Renegade Demons	27
4. A Change of Scene	37
5. Old Habits Die Hard	45
6. Back in the Big Apple	51
7. Four Funerals and a Brush-Off	53
8. Mr. GQ	56
9. A Real Bad Apple	62
10. Can't Smile without You	65
11. A Home of Our Own	70
12. Baby, Oh Baby	73
13. A Slippery Slope	79
14. Cocaine and Crime	82
15. Rollin' in It	85
16. The Poconos	89
17. The Mistress	93
18. No Way, Not Me	96
19. 505	103
20. Busted	106
21. Deal	111
22. Sent to Prison	114
23. Shock	116

24. Six-Month Promise	122
25. A Dog Returns to Its Vomit	126
26. Minding My Own Beeswax	129
27. The Takedown	134
28. Busted Again	138
29. On the Run	144
30. The Trophy	150
31. Born Again	157
32. 5-North	169
33. Pastors in Chains	173
34. All In	178
35. Alexandra Pays a Visit	182
36. Moving On	188
37. Allenwood	193
38. A Test of Faith	200
39. No Turning Back	204
40. Freshman Year	208
41. Missions	213
42. A New Direction	220
43. Promise Ministries International	224
44. Going Global	228
45. The Shadow of Death	231
46. Mami Goes Home	233
47. The Present	241
Acknowledgments	245
About the Author	249

Every good and perfect gift
is from above,
coming down from the Father
of the heavenly lights,
who does not change
like shifting shadows.

JAMES 1:17

FOREWORD

Wherever you are on your journey, reading this book is a side trip worth taking. Maybe you picked this up in desperation—you're hanging on by a thread, trying to save your very life. Or maybe you're just appeasing someone who seems to actually care about you and thinks Herman's story might help make sense of your mess. Whatever the condition of your heart and life as you begin this book, I encourage you to read it to the end. It's part cautionary tale and part testament to hope and grace—I couldn't turn the pages fast enough!

No matter the twists and tangles in your life's tapestry, don't give up. Like my friend Herman, you might be looking at the wrong side. Someday you may discover that on the other side of the fabric God has been creating a beautiful picture all along—no pain wasted, no teardrop unseen. It may all come together beautifully when you realize those knots and snarls were integral to the profound richness of your purpose. You might one day say, "Oh, *that's* why!"

I know from my own suffering that this may make no sense to you *now*. You might be thinking, *How could any good come of my messed-up life? How can this possibly turn around? Scars this deep can't heal, much less become something of beauty, purpose, or even healing to others . . . can they?*

On the other hand, you might have your act totally together. Things are going great. If so, I'm happy for you. But read this book to arm yourself for the possibility of everything changing in a

whirlwind of devastation. Prepare your heart for the climb back up out of the abyss. Herman's odyssey can inspire you to have renewed hope and restored faith that *anything* can be redeemed.

Perhaps you have a friend or loved one who is in the midst of deep despair, caught in a downward spiral that can only end in destruction. Sharing Herman's book might encourage them: "Here, read this—it's by a guy who sank so low, just taking the next breath was a victory." As is often said, where there's life, there's still hope. You'll believe it after reading this dramatic account of Herman's life.

This is a true, powerful, and engaging narrative with a potentially life-changing message. There is a reason you are now holding it in your hands. I know, love, and respect Herman Mendoza. Or at least I thought I knew him before reading his whole gritty saga. Now I know it to be even more true that he is the real deal—a man of strong faith with a sincere heart to honor God and help others. For years now he has traveled tirelessly across the world championing the cause of children. Children! Who would have thought such a transformation was even possible? Frank Warren is said to have written, "It's the children the world almost breaks who grow up to save it." Herman was just such a child. But he is now a full-fledged warrior for the weak and vulnerable, the poorest of the poor who suffer the most but cannot speak up for themselves. How did that happen? You owe it to yourself to read Herman's remarkable story of unlikely grace. Your eyes may well be opened to the shadows of grace in your own life story.

What a wonderful God we have—he is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the source of every mercy, and the one who so wonderfully comforts and strengthens us in our hardships and trials. And why does he do this? So that when others are troubled, needing our sympathy and encouragement, we can pass on to them this same help and comfort God has given us.

2 Corinthians 1:3–4 TLB

—Dr. Wess Stafford, president emeritus,
Compassion International

A NOTE FROM HERMAN

The story you are about to read is my testimony. My intentions are not to glamorize sin or justify the poor decisions I made in my past—I take full responsibility for my actions. Instead, I simply want to share about the hope and transforming power that can be found through Jesus Christ. I've tried to write about events, locations, and conversations to the best of my memory. Some of the names and locations have been changed to protect individuals' privacy. My hope is that this book will help you navigate through your life journey and into a relationship with the one who saved my soul: Jesus.

PROLOGUE

Mr. Goldstein was everything I hated. Tall and skinny, he had “Grade A nerd” written all over him. His New Jersey accent and his gravelly voice grated on my nerves. But the thing I hated the most about him was that he was the kind of teacher who thought he had everyone pegged.

Mr. Goldstein looked at me like I was a nobody—like I wouldn’t amount to anything. But he was wrong. Sure, I was in fifth grade and hadn’t hit my growth spurt yet, but I had my own crew. Kids listened to me. I was a somebody, and someday soon I was gonna make him realize it.

When he left the classroom, I took the opportunity to dazzle the other kids with my spot-on impression of the human orangutan. I made my voice real deep, and I let my arms dangle as if the appendages were too long for me to control.

“Listen here, class.” I clapped my hands as if to get their attention. “Back when I was a kid, we had to eat dung just like the Aztecs, just to survive the winter.”

I didn’t hear the door open or Mr. Goldstein stride over to me with his stealthy ninja steps. When I noticed the other kids looking up at him, it was too late. My archnemesis squared his narrow shoulders and reached out an impossibly long arm to grab me.

“What did you just say?”

His raspy voice sounded choked . . . like maybe he was going to cry. I wanted to think it was because I'd knocked him down a notch or two in front of the class, but his voice often sounded like that; it was another one of the things that irritated me about him. I tilted my chin up and laughed in his face.

"You didn't hear me the first time? You want me to do it again?"

A few of the other kids snickered.

He shook me before shoving me back down in my chair.

Forget you! I wanted to scream. I'd had enough of him too. I took a swing at his jaw. I may have been only ten, but I was arguably the most influential student in P.S. 019, our school. He had no idea who he was dealing with.

Mr. Goldstein's face reddened and his eyes narrowed. He swatted at me, but I slapped his hand away. It irked me that I had to kowtow to him just because he wore a stupid, ugly tie and had a degree. Who was he to tell me what to do?

I took another swing. He stopped it with one hand, then grabbed my neck with the other and slammed my face against the desk. My nose started pouring out blood. Injured but not broken.

Holding me there, with my face smashed against graffitied wood, he growled, "The way you're going, Herman, you're not going to amount to anything. You'll wind up in gangs, or jail, and you will die!"

THE CORONA BOYS

“What do I gotta do?” I asked, swinging my pocketknife between my thumb and forefinger.

I was in the running to join the Corona Boys, and I wanted in bad. The first gang I’d started, Devils Inc., disbanded before I’d even made it to sixth grade. Now that I was in junior high, I wanted to join an established gang. There were loads in the area, but two really stood out from the rest: the Corona Boys and the Lefrak City Crew. Joining either gang would have been okay, but the Corona Boys were in my territory in Queens, New York, and I was the loyal type.

“You can cool it, Herm. We know who you are. You’re down for anything, right?”

I nodded. Just once. No need to look too eager.

“All right. You’re in.”

One of the boys tossed me a black-and-white bandana. I couldn’t believe it. It was way easier than I’d expected.

I was a Corona Boy.

That meant, no matter what happened, we had each other’s backs.

“A. R.!” One of the guys called me as he tore across the schoolyard.

A. R., short for “A-Rocker,” was my street name because of my break-dancing skills. I could hear scuffling ahead of us, but

the visual evidence of the fight was blocked from view by a line of spectators. I sprinted after him.

Pushing through the screaming throng, I stumbled into the open area by the basketball courts. The Lefrak City Crew was laying into one of our guys. I jumped into the fray, fists flying.

I swung at one of the smaller guys in the enemy gang. My first target was still older and taller than me but looked like he had no idea what to do with his hands.

I felt my knuckles connect with the soft flesh of his cheek before hitting bone. *That should throw him off balance.* I went for the gut. If I winded him, I could take him down. Kids were cheering. My body was pumping adrenaline. It was great!

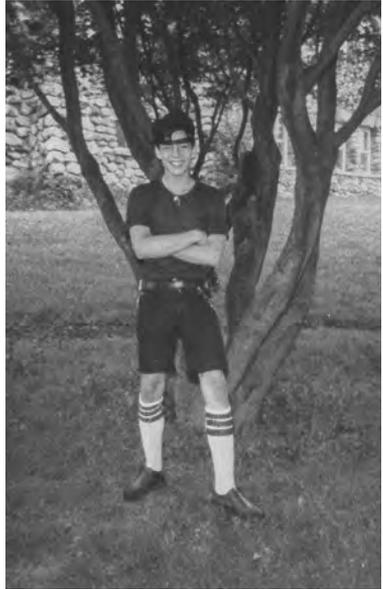
“Ooph!”

My fist sank into his abdomen; he didn’t have time to steel himself against the blow. The air left his lungs in a powerful blast, and he crumpled.

I wanted to take a second to rejoice in my victory, but two guys dragged me from behind and threw me on the ground. My nerves ignited as the skin on my shoulders scraped pavement. I scrambled to my feet and jogged backward away from them, fists at the ready.

A quick sweep of the schoolyard told me this wasn’t going to be some quick, thirty-second throw down with a clear winner. This was mayhem. An all-out gang war. Kids screamed and chanted names from both sides.

The school’s security guards swept past the mass of shouting students. Their whistles blared as they tried to come between a



Me in my early teenage years

few of us, but we were not backing down. Teachers and students started screaming, “Call the police!”

But it still didn’t stop us.

Blood ran down my face. I tried to make a fist, but my knuckles were bruised and swollen. My lungs felt like they were on fire every time I breathed, but I wouldn’t give up.

And then I heard sirens. I had to get out of there if I didn’t want to get nabbed.

I took off, scrambling to lose myself in the crowd of students that had stayed to watch.

As soon as the cops arrived everything halted. They hauled a bunch of the Lefrak City Crew and a few of our guys away.

I heard they sent them to disciplinary detention at the local precinct. I was glad I wasn’t there, sitting on a hard metal bench, waiting for my parents to show up and administer a worse beating than I’d just received. Instead, I was a free man, walking down 102nd Street, a little shaken but proud of my escape.