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HONEY LAKE PLANTATION RESORT & SPA—




Destination Paradise, No Passport Required.


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PARADISE,
NO PASSPORT
REQUIRED

HONEY LAKE PLANTATION RESORT & SPA—

 *"Adam was placed in Paradise in perfect estate, and in the company of God's angels; God walked and did talk with him. He heard the voice, and beheld the presence of God."* ~John Jewel



 Teresa and Bob Williamson
PHOTO BY Jon Barry



I selected this quotation of John Jewel to preface this article, because I believe it applies beautifully to the story I am about to share. It is the story of how one man endured hell on earth in the form of a terrible childhood, an even worse period as a young adult, and a near death experience before making the discovery that it is never too late to turn your life around. This man didn't do it alone, however. He found the help he needed in The Bible and his strength in Jesus Christ.

Bob Williamson's story is a true rags to riches one. From sleeping on the streets of New Orleans and Atlanta to becoming a self-made millionaire (several times over), his story demonstrates that one can overcome just about anything to find success, with the right motivation. His motivation came from Scripture.

Where once his only concern was how he was going to get his next fix of heroin or methamphetamine, he is now the owner and operator of Honey Lake Plantation Resort and Spa, in Greenville, Florida. As in Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream", the path of true love (or happiness, in this case) did never run smooth. He may be on the top of the world today, but his path to the pinnacle was unpaved and full of pot holes.

Bob Williamson's childhood and early years were dark and his family life was dysfunctional. To say he had a rough childhood would be an understatement. Trouble



Honey Lake Chapel was, as were all of the other buildings on the plantation, designed by Bob Williamson.

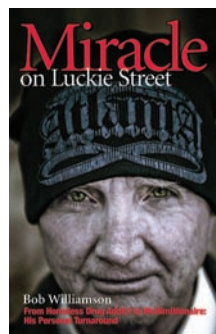
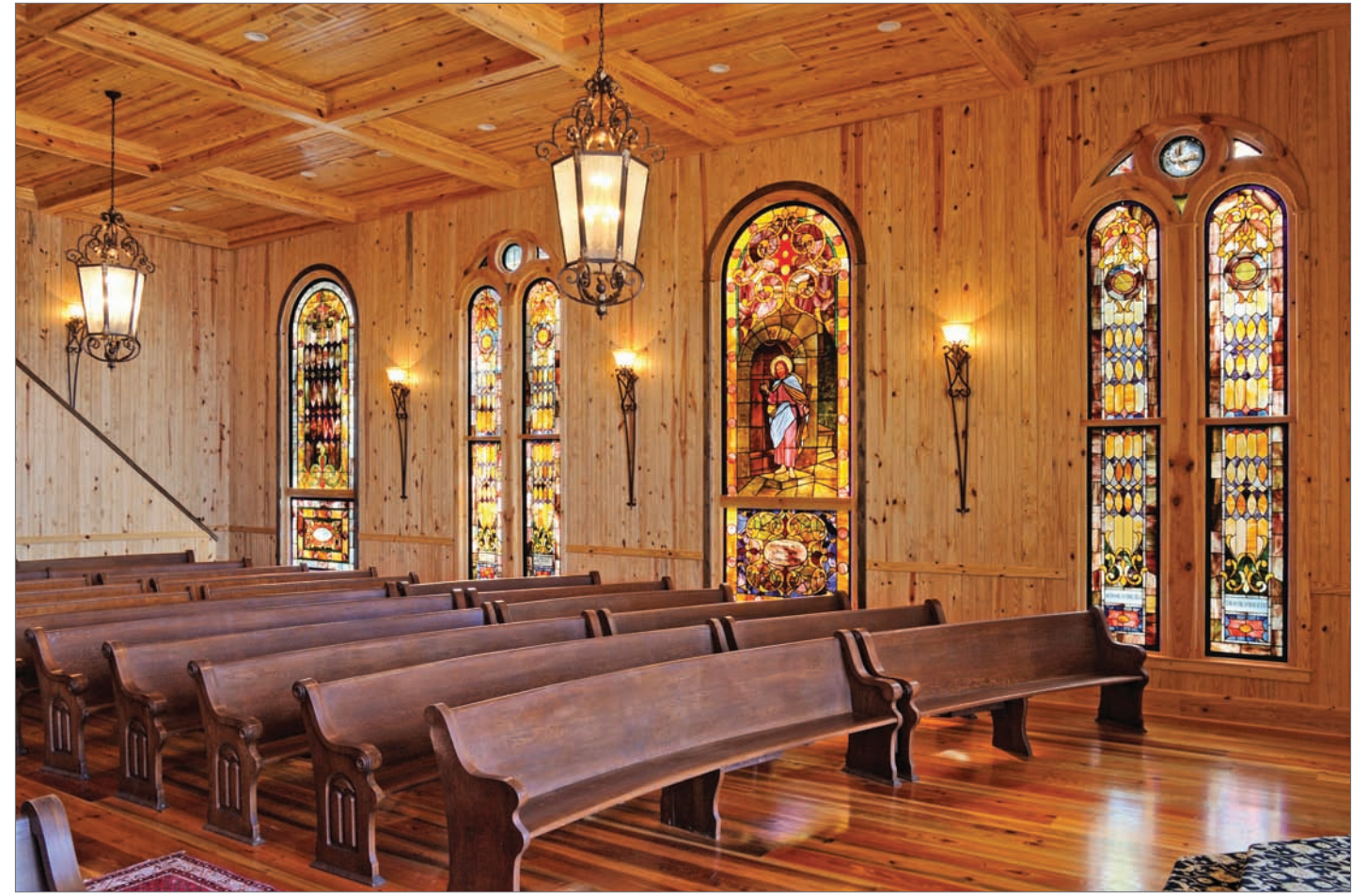


PHOTO BY Ken Ross

didn't seem to follow him; instead, he went looking for it and according to Williamson, himself, he never failed to find it.

In his autobiography, *Miracle on Luckie Street*, Williamson recounts the hardships (many of them of his own making) of his life and the journey that brought him to where he is today. He will very honestly and candidly admit that he was once a drug addict, alcoholic, and the kind of person one would not want to encounter in a dark alley.

Most would never guess that this articulate, well-dressed, polite individual would have ever slept on a park bench or stolen from others to feed his demons—his addiction to drugs. "I was a terrible person," he told me as I sat across from him in the elegant dining room of Honey Lake's magnificent Gathering Hall. "I have said many times that I was like a man possessed by the Devil. I was full of rage and full of hate."



ABOVE: View of Honey Lake from the Pansy Poe cottage.

RIGHT: Honey Lake has excellent facilities for corporate meetings.



The pews and windows in the chapel date back to the 1800s.





"I always carried a 357 Magnum with me and had even considered killing myself with it," he said. In his book, he details the events that led him to that lowest of places and also explains what finally raised him above it. He had never believed in God, but sometimes God has a funny way of introducing himself.

After a serious and nearly fatal car accident, Williamson spent a long recovery time at Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta. "I was there a very long time and couldn't get up to walk around, so I was bored and restless. I loved to read and I kept asking the nurses to bring me things to read."

One of the books brought to him was The Bible. "I will never forget this one nurse, because not only did she bring me a Bible to read, she brought me her own personal Bible." This is where his life took a major turn and his relationship with God began.

"I tried to read the Old Testament, but just didn't like it," he confessed. "I found it to be boring and hard to understand, but I noticed in the New Testament that certain passages had been underlined by Lydia, (the woman who had loaned me her Bible). I began to read those passages first and it all started to make great sense to me."

Jesus was nothing like I'd imagined; he was compassionate and kind and not condescending even to those who'd made serious mistakes like I'd made. The words of Jesus Christ were speaking to me personally and for the first time in my life, I saw things in a positive light."

Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" became Williamson's mantra and the main ingredient for his recipe for success. "I got a low level job at a paint company and I came to the realization that without a college education to help me advance, the only way to work my way up was to work harder and smarter than everyone else."

He was the first one to arrive at work in the morning and the last one to leave at the end of the day. He always had his eye on improving things and continually found ways for his employers to save money and increase efficiency. His hard work and dedication did not go unnoticed by his superiors and soon he was working his way up within the company. He even applied what he had learned in his career with the paint company to create a new type of paint,

which led him to establish his first successful business.

Not to rest on those laurels, he sold that company and went on to found and sell several others. Each more successful than the last. It seemed he had the Midas touch and he was beginning to enjoy the financial success and the power that goes along with it. He sold one of the 11 successful companies that he founded, Horizon Software International, for \$75 million.


Money and power are two things Williamson knows an awful lot about. "Money and power can be just as addictive as alcohol and drugs and can be just as detrimental," he said. "I had to learn that they are shallow and fleeting and that the only way to find true happiness is through a personal relationship with Christ".

The struggles he endured to get to where he is today are



LEFT: The Bride's Room in the lodge is perfect for bridal showers, teas, or romantic dinners.
TOP: A view of the beautiful lobby at Honey Lake Lodge.



 The main building at Honey Lake houses meeting rooms, dining rooms, offices, and even a plantation shop where visitors may purchase hunting attire, incidentals, and even artwork.

detailed in the book and it is truly a riveting story. From the outside looking in....as Williamson sits in the opulent lodge at Honey Lake that he has built, it might be hard to imagine that he knows anything about hardship. Those hardships, however, are what help him appreciate his success all the more.

“I know how fortunate I am and I also know what I have had to go through to get here. It makes you more aware of how precious life is and how beautiful the world that God has created really is.”

Fast-forwarding through Williamson’s remarkable business successes, he retired with his wife Teresa, to whom he has been happily married for 41 years, to the Florida Keys. An avid fisherman and outdoorsman, it seemed the ideal spot for him to relax and enjoy the fruits of his labors. Once again, God had a different idea.

“I was diagnosed with skin cancer,” Williamson said. “My doctor at the time said the best thing that I could do was to move away and spend less time in the sun. We loved it in the Keys and didn’t really want to leave, but made the

decision to start looking for a new place to live.”

The Williamsons decided to purchase a plantation in South Georgia as a retreat for themselves and their family. The search was arduous. “We looked at 24 different properties,” he said. “They were all very beautiful, but none of them were exactly what we were looking for.”

Williamson had all but given up on finding his “paradise”, when he received a call from a friend about a large tract of land in Madison County, Florida just across the state line. He was hesitant to even make the trip to look at it, but relented.

His wife, Teresa, explained that the property was devoid of structures and in need of work, but that it was very beautiful. “Bob didn’t reveal that he was enthusiastic about the property at first, but he asked me if I liked it and when I said I did, he put a contract on it the very next day. I knew right then, this was the place of his dreams.”

They purchased the property, which had once been a part of the holdings of the late Elisabeth “Pansy” Ireland Poe. The Williamsons lovingly restored the boathouse



TOP: The pool is adjacent to the spa and fitness facilities.
BOTTOM: Luxury accommodations are available in the lodge.





BELOW: Casual dining room located in the Lodge. The restaurant is open to the public. RIGHT: The formal dining area in the Lodge is perfect for wedding receptions and other gatherings.

cottage that Mrs. Poe had erected there as a day house for hunts on the property. As a delightful surprise to the Williamsons, in the basement of the cottage was a 40-foot mural of local Native Americans that Mrs. Poe had commissioned J. Clinton Shepherd to paint for the boathouse's back wall. It is rendered in the same style as those found in the Main House at Pebble Hill Plantation.

The mural is considered to be one of Florida's mid-century aesthetic treasures, and now graces the Grand Ballroom of the Gathering Hall at Honey Lake Resort and Spa. It fits so perfectly there, it is as if the Gathering Hall was built to accommodate the mural.

Williamson purchased Honey Lake in 2008 and had originally planned for it to be a private family estate. As work on the plantation progressed, he came to the decision that it was far too beautiful not to be shared with the public. This is where my quote from John Jewel comes in. "Adam was placed in Paradise in perfect estate, and in the company of God's angels; God walked and did talk with him. He heard the voice, and beheld the presence of God."

Williamson believes that we do not really own anything in this life; we are merely God's managers and caretakers of His estate for a little while. He felt that Honey Lake was such a lovely place that it would make an excellent site for weddings. His son, Jon, liked the idea and together they decided to expand on the concept to include spiritual/



corporate retreats, social events, and leisure activities like quail hunting and fishing to their offerings. From that idea grew Honey Lake Plantation Resort and Spa. If anything has ever snowballed, it is Honey Lake.

If Honey Lake is Paradise, then Williamson is Adam. The Garden of Eden was Paradise. It was lush and green and teeming with God's creatures. It was His gift to Adam and He wanted it to be cultivated, appreciated, and enjoyed. Perhaps, the Garden of Eden was the world's first resort.

While some might define a resort in paradise as a tropical island with palm trees, sugary-white sand, and the scent of suntan lotion wafting about on sea breezes, others would envision the peace and quiet of a forest, with spring fed lakes, the scent of pine needles and honeysuckle and instead of the sound of waves crashing against the shore, there would be the chirping of song birds and the rhythmic

tapping of a busy woodpecker filling the air. This is the paradise of Honey Lake.

"It is peaceful here," Williamson said. "There are no sounds of traffic or sirens—just the sounds of nature." Most of the traffic is the scurrying about of the curious fox squirrels that seem to be everywhere.

The tranquility and natural beauty make Honey Lake the perfect spot for weddings and brides may choose from a seemingly endless selection of gorgeous outdoor settings under giant oaks, or inside venues such as the elegant white ballroom in the Gathering Hall, or in the charming chapel overlooking the lake. The beautiful stained glass windows and the handcrafted pine pews in the chapel were taken from a local historic church, which lends it the warmth of a bygone era. Even the antique bell in the bell tower is from the same historic church.

"Every time I hear that bell ring," Teresa Williamson said,



The Trophy Room is very popular with guests for private parties and appeals to those with a taste for the outdoors.

"I know that another happy couple has just begun their life together and it makes me smile."

Honey Lake also offers countless options for receptions, parties, business meetings, spiritual retreats, family reunions, and other special events. There are backdrops from the most rustic and simple to the most luxurious and grand.

"We are constantly making improvements," said Williamson. "We want to provide the best facilities and best service possible and take pride in everything that we do." He does not sit about in a lawn chair by the resort's swimming pool all day; instead he takes an active role in the daily operations of the business.

He knows all about hard work and has told his wife that he has no plans to ever retire. "I have to keep busy and will always find something to do with my time," he said. "I love to hunt and fish and take pleasure in riding my horse around the property. That is what I do to relax and to enjoy the blessings that have been granted




The cottages at Honey Lake are beautifully appointed for the ultimate comfort of guests. They are each named for trees native to the area.

One of the cottage bedrooms at Honey Lake. Trolly's and Southern Heritage Fine Furnishings in Thomasville were used to decorate the cottages and other facilities at Honey Lake. Each cottage offers a beautiful view of the lake from the quaint front porch.



OPPOSITE PAGE: State of the art fitness equipment is available for use by Honey Lake guests, as well as saunas, and separate areas for men and women.

The kitchen provides all of the appointments to allow guests to enjoy a home away from home atmosphere during their stay at Honey Lake.



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some local favorites with a twist. Nothing on the menu is ordinary and it is all expertly prepared and artfully presented by the resort's executive chef Bill Mann.

The accommodations at Honey Lake are exquisite. There are individually and beautifully appointed cottages, quaintly named for different types of native trees: The Five Pines and Two Oaks. There is a rustic hunting lodge with six bedrooms and a huge trophy room. Guests may also choose to stay in the Pansy Poe Cottage on the banks of the 80-acre pristine Honey Lake. The entire back of the cottage is glass, offering panoramic views of the lakes and woods surrounding it.

The 24 room Equestrian Lodge is now open and offers guests even more variety in accommodations, with all the creature comforts and special touches one would expect from a five star resort.

It is obvious that Williamson is extremely proud of what has been accomplished at Honey Lake in such a short amount of time and he has had a hand in every inch of its development. He designed the lodge, the cottages, the chapel, and other buildings on the property. He knows every part of the more than 4,800 acres of pine woods and oak hammocks and the 28 miles of roads and trails that traverse them.

"I really see Honey Lake as a spiritual retreat above all else," he said. "It is a place for people to come and relax, enjoy nature, and renew their spirit. Sometimes we really need to make the effort to reflect on our lives and know that God looks at us, not as we see ourselves, but as how he sees us perfected in Heaven."

"In truth, I feel closer to God out here in these woods than anywhere else," he said. "This is His most beautiful church." Which reminded me of another of my favorite quotes, this one by Emily Dickinson: "Some keep the Sabbath going to Church, I keep it staying at home, with a bobolink for a chorister, and an orchard for a dome."

A daily devotional is part of Williamson's routine and he has his own website: <http://www.wordsfortheday.com/> that offers his observations and thoughts on a variety of subjects that relate to the world we live in and always provides a thought provoking and insightful essay on the day's subject matter.

Williamson is a well-known and widely respected motivational speaker and conducts a prison ministry, as well. Everything he does has the hand of God in it. "I have been extremely blessed," he said. "When you die you can't take anything with you, but the good that you have done in the name of God."

That is an amazing and inspiring outlook on life by a man who was once diagnosed as an incurable sociopath without a conscience, incapable of love, and was often told that he would "never amount to anything" or "would end up dead in an alley".

To learn more about Bob Williamson and Honey Lake Plantation Resort and Spa, visit their website: <http://www.honeylakeplantation.com/index.php> or call 850-948-9911.

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