

## Chapter 1

### Modulations With Sundance

I was in my Ford van heading east out of Little Rock. The setting sun reflected in my rearview mirror, and the curtain of night loomed before me. A few miles out on 1-40, I turned on my CB and flipped the channel selector until the lighted digital readout showed “19.” I depressed the “Talk” button and spoke: “Breaker 1-9, breaker 1-9 for a westbound. You got an eastbound lookin’?”

After a pause I repeated, “Breaker 1-9. How about it, westbound? You got a copy?”

A loud hiss of static, then a voice: “Go ahead, break. Ya got a westbound.”

“Yeah, this here is Brother Love,” I said, depressing the “Talk” button again. “I be headed eastbound and down. How’s it lookin’ back towards Music City [Nashville]?”

“Yeah, Brother Love, this here’s Candy Man. We just come out of Choo-choo Town [Chattanooga] and we be headed for Big D [Dallas]. You be lookin’ good all the way to the chicken coop [weigh station] this side of Memphis. Ya got a clean shot. So mash your motor. I’m tellin’ ya, hammer down!”

“Yeah, that’s a big 10-4, Candy Man. We appreciate the modulation. Ain’t no smokey bear nowhere. You be lookin’ good back to the Rock.”

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“Brother Love, I got 30,000 pounds of Hersheys on my back and be headed down that big superslab. Been good jawin’ with you. You have a good one. We gone.”

“You be careful now, Candy Man. Keep the shiny side up and the greasy side down, hear? This is Brother Love, KCC-8245. We clear.”

I glanced at my speedometer. It registered 62. It wasn’t that I didn’t trust Candy Man’s bear report. But I had gotten a speeding ticket just three months before on this stretch. And I wasn’t about to take another chance.

I reached for the CB squelch knob and turned it until the loud, static hiss disappeared. I rolled along the freeway, lost in thought. Suddenly my CB crackled.

“Breaker for that Brother Love. Breaker for that Brother Love. How ‘bout it, Brother Love - you got your ears on?” drawled a syrupy thick southern voice.

I grabbed the mike and answered, “You got Brother Love, the preacher man in the super van, the golden voice of the people’s choice. Bring yourself on, breaker.”

“Wooo-weee! You layin’ down some heavy stuff now, Brother Love. This here’s Sundance, and we be headed for Music City. What’s your twenty [location]?”

“Just a short-short, Sundance, and we’ll see.” I waited for the next interstate mileage marker to appear. “Sundance, we be headed east at the 189-mile line. What’s your twenty?”

“I be at the 187-mile marker. Looks like you’re on my front door, Brother Love. You shake the trees, and I’ll rake the leaves. How ‘bout it?”

“That’s a big 10-4 roger, Sundance. We’ve got you covered up here. I got my jolly opticals peeled for smokey.”

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“Yeah. Hey, tell me about that handle. I don’t believe I’ve ever modulated with a Brother Love before.”

“Well, Sundance, my handle has a message. I feel what the world needs today more than anything else is more brother love. How ‘bout it?”

“I hear you. I hear you. Now that’s the gospel. You said it straight. What we need today is more brother love, Brother Love. By the way, you happen to be a Christian?”

“That’s a big 10-4. What’s more, you be modulating with a bodacious, genuine, bona fide, credential-carrying preacher. Hear me?”

“I hear you. You’re bending my needle off. There was a time when this here driver would have to watch his language on the CB, talking to a preacher. But no more. Things have changed! I’ve changed!”

“How’s that? Did you do a U-turn on the highway of life, Sundance?”

“I guess you could say that. Let’s go to channel 14, and I’ll tell you about it.”

“Sounds good. Channel 14 it is. Here we go!” I reached up and flipped the channel selector until the digital readout showed “14.”

“How ‘bout it, Brother Love? Still with me?” I heard Sundance’s syrupy thick southern drawl again.

“Yeah, I’m with you, amigo. Now we’ve got some privacy. Tell me the whole story.”

“Well, here goes. Two years ago I was driving for Roadway out of Houston. I was a good ol’ boy. Thought I was real cool - no situation I couldn’t handle. I lived on cigarettes, coffee, Playboy, and Bud. I was chasin’ the white

line and truckstop waitresses, makin' big money, and livin' life in the fast lane. I never darkened the door of a church. Then Jesus changed my life."

"How'd it happen, Sundance?"

"My home started to break up. Debbie, my wife, made plans to leave me and take my two little girls. I didn't blame her. I wasn't much of a father. I was a drunk and a loser and never at home. That was when I realized that my world was crumbling. Then, one night in the Starlite Motel out of Natchez, something happened. It was December 19, and I remember it as though it were yesterday. I had had a few beers in a local bar and stumbled back to my room. As I lay on the bed, I spotted one of those Bibles that the Gideons put in the motels. I had never even looked in a Bible before. But that night I opened it and began to thumb through the pages. In the book of Proverbs my eyes fell on some words that really hit me. 'There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end is the way of death.'

"That really hit me. I realized I was on a road that leads nowhere. I looked in the mirror and saw myself. I mean, I really saw myself. And I hated what I saw. I hated what I had become. I fell on my knees, and, for the first time, I tried to pray. I asked God to forgive me. I asked Him to take away my taste for beer, take away the cigarettes, the Playboys - the whole thing. I really cried that night. But God gave me peace in my heart.

"For the first time in months I slept real good and woke up the next morning with no hangover. And that for me was somethin'. I went out to my White truck and took down all the dirty pictures I had taped inside my cab. I threw away the

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six-packs and the cigs. I was beginning a new life. I was going straight.

“I could really relate to what Jesus said about the two roads. One leads to life - the narrow road. I had been on the eight-lane superslab to hell. But I am grateful God saw fit to turn me around. You’re right, preacher, it was a real U-turn on life’s highway. He put me on the straight-and-narrow way. He made me happy again. He brought Debbie and me back together again. He turned beer cans into furniture. I guess you could say that the difference in me is Jesus.”

“That’s quite a testimony, Sundance. I want to thank you for sharing it with me. Are you going to church now?”

“Yes, that’s a 10-4. I was baptized fifteen months ago with my wife. She’s a beautiful Christian lady. My two girls are in church school. Lisa is in first grade, Michele in fourth. Things have never been better. I used to dread traveling those miles alone. But no more. Jesus goes with me. Sometimes when I’m driving, I sit in the cab and talk to Him. He’s a friend that’s closer than a brother. I know He’s listening. I know He loves me. He loves you, too, preacher!”

“That’s what the Bible says, Sundance. ‘But God commended his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.’ I’m glad we have a God like that, aren’t you?”

“Amen! But you know, I feel sorry for all those lonesome gear-jammers lost on the highway of life. Pushing those eighteen-wheelers day and night. Trying to make big money or find happiness. All those boozers and brawlers and skirt chasers. That’s not where it’s at - believe me! I’ve been there. I know. I only hope that someday, sometime, God will speak

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to them as He did to me, saying, ‘Hey, driver, come unto Me. I’m the real and living Way.’ Then maybe they’ll know what it means to be on the right road that leads to life. Well, listen, Brother Love, I’ve been doing all the jawin’. I didn’t mean to monopolize the conversation.”

“Sundance, don’t you dare apologize to me. I enjoyed hearing every word.”

“Well, listen here, Brother Love, it hardly seems possible, but we’re already in West Memphis. This next exit is mine. I have to get some go-juice, you know, motion-lotion, at the 76 truckstop. But maybe we will modulate again another time. God be with you, preacher. And if I don’t ever hear from you again, maybe we can meet over yonder. What do you say?”

“I say a big 10-4, Sundance! I’ll look forward to meeting you there. No more asphalt highways in that land. All the superslabs are made of twenty-four karat gold, right?”

“Right!” he said with a chuckle. “Well, this here’s that ol’ road jockey Sundance. We wish you all those good numbers. Be careful. Vaya con Dios, Brother Love. We gone.”

“And God be with you too, brother, and give you a safe journey home. This is Brother Love, KCC-8245. We eastbound and down. We clear.”

Static. Hiss.