

9,000. My family of nine children (five boys and four girls) lived in a white four-room house on Oak Street. Living in a rural town, we enjoyed hunting and fishing, and playing around on a nearby farm. When school let out for the summer, many of us from the black community chopped cotton throughout Sunflower County.

After a hard day of work, we came home and rushed to the community swimming pool on Roosevelt Street. On Friday nights, some of the teenagers went to “The Center” – the neighborhood community center near the swimming pool, where they danced to disco music and love songs. But most evenings, many of us took a stroll to the baseball park on Garrad Road.

Around 1975, when I was 14, my friends joked that I had the filthiest mouth in Mississippi. That, in a strange way, fed my ego. I was proud and boastful, and notorious for being a show-off. To my shame, I also became a good liar. I never went to church and never read the Bible. However, when people around me talked about God, I tried to appear religious.

Although I avoided crime, drugs and alcohol, I became interested in smoking and was starting to experiment with a number of unhealthy activities. My friends often said that I was ever ready to take a dare and do something silly or extreme.

My Childhood Secret

Despite the level of attention I received for being a backyard daredevil and playing the fool, I carried a secret: I was afraid of school bullies. Unlike the bullies, I was a small kid. The only thing big on my scrawny frame was my head, and kids used to tease me about that. Because of my fear, I often ran home from school to avoid any confrontation with the bullies.

Eventually, I got tired of running, and sick of being scared. With no one to turn to for help, I took matters into my own hands. I was 12 and determined I would no longer be a coward.



Fortunately, my oldest brother, Wiley, had a collection of bodybuilding magazines.

I read those magazines religiously and began working out the best that I could. Because I didn't have the proper equipment or training, I improvised.

For barbells, I used a thin metal pipe with one gallon milk jugs on each end filled with gravel. Then I discovered Bruce Lee, and began ordering martial arts magazines, and study guides advertised in comic books. To toughen my hands, I repeatedly punched a straw broom that I had tied to a pole in the back yard. Then I strung a canvas duffel bag (filled with rags) to a tree limb and used it as a punching bag. Sometimes I would thrust my hands repeatedly into sand and then gravel, and then soak them in warm salty water. My mother thought I was crazy as I worked out each day, sometimes until my hands bled. Other kids followed football, basketball, and baseball, but I followed bodybuilding and the martial arts.

When I looked into the mirror, I could see my progress. My light brown frame was bulking up. I became stronger and faster, and even learned to break boards and bricks with my bare hands.

It wasn't long before I had a chance to test my newfound strength. I got into a fight with Harry Peyton (not his real name), the number one bully at school. Peyton was big and mean. He seemed to tower over me and my younger brother, Roy. He was light-skinned and breathed with a wheezing sound. He reminded me of the massive Kingpin in the Marvel Comics. For some strange reason he always smelled of onions.

One afternoon when school had let out, Peyton confronted me and my brother, Roy, on the campus of Carver Middle School. Roy was a year younger than me. He also was much smaller and skinnier than I had been. That day he and I had brought some homemade nunchakus, which we called “karate sticks.” They were two sticks cut from a hoe handle, and connected with a chain. We carried them inside our waist bands, just like Bruce Lee in the movies.

When Peyton looked in our direction, I knew a fight was inevitable. It was “duck or no dinner,” as my mother used to say. We had no choice. I was nervous and almost shaking.

“Y'all gonna get it,” Peyton growled as he ambled over to us to get in our faces. He reeked of onions.

“I'm gonna show y'all somethin' and kick y'all a___,” he said.

By this time, a crowd had gathered. Everyone had heard there would be a fight. One instigator, Willie Joe King, even called for others to come and watch.

Using both hands, Peyton pushed my brother and me. When he did, in near perfect sync, Roy and I turned our backs to him, grabbed our nunchakus, and snapped around with the spinning sticks aimed for his head.

Stunned, he tried to cover his face.

“K-WACK!!” The sticks made a loud sound as they struck his head.

We pounded him, bombarding him with blow after blow. He raised his arms for protection. I struck his lower body, attacking his legs. I picked him up and slammed him onto the concrete pavement. We beat him with the sticks until he screamed.

I then straddled Peyton across his midsection like a cowboy on a wild horse. I punched him repeatedly. My brother circled him — and kept striking him with the sticks.

Peyton tried to get up. He caught a flurry of blows to his face. He threw his hands up for cover. When a teacher, Mr. Stiffen, pulled me off, my brother jumped on him. When Roy was pulled away, I sprung at the bully once again. The teacher caught me in mid-air and pulled me away.

The Dark Side

All three of us were suspended that day. The principal, to whom I was no stranger, said he was especially fed up with me. He was tired of seeing me in his office. However, the suspension didn't matter to me because we had taken down the bully, and now my reputation was set.

Unfortunately, my newfound position as a fighter took a turn for the worse. To my own

surprise, I slowly became the very thing that I hated. One time I overpowered a guy just to show him how strong I was. Another time my friends and I scared a kid just for laughs.

Before the school year was out, I roughed up another kid and even struck a teacher. When she said she would take me to the principal's office, I said, “Carry your own crazy a___ to the office. I'm going home.”

I walked home and my mother brought me back to the school. After the principal scolded me, my mother cursed him out. He asked her to calm down and ultimately suspended me again. He said there was no way he would tolerate my behavior.

Everything about my life changed in July 1976. As the nation was celebrating its 200th birthday of independence from British rule, I was about to face something that I too could celebrate. One hot and humid night I went to a baseball game down the street from my home on Garrad Road. Because I was not a fan of baseball, I went to the game to see friends and have fun. Together we bought snacks and flirted with the girls. I wore a huge afro and thought I was cool. On this particular night, three small crowds had formed in the parking lot. I thought it was a fight and said to my friends, “Let's go check it out!”

'If You Died Tonight ...'

We scurried over to the crowds, but to our surprise, we saw a skinny guy named Anthony Williams preaching his heart out. He was only about 16. It all seemed strange. A guy preaching in a parking lot instead of a church? And he was a teenager, only a year older than me? I looked around at the other crowds and found two other teenagers preaching. They were Victor Mack and Michael Campbell.

“Come on, man,” a friend said. “Let's go.” A girl I was with pulled my hand. “Come on,” she said. “Let's play.” She giggled and continued pulling my hand.

I felt paralyzed, and could not move. “You guys go ahead,” I said. “I'm gonna check this out.”

I stood there with both hands stuffed deep into my pockets. I became gripped by Williams' words. He spoke clearly. He preached with authority and

with passion, but he didn't yell. He seemed very sincere. Then he asked the question that changed my life. He said, "If you died tonight, where would you spend eternity? In Heaven or in hell?"

"Man," I thought. "I don't know. But I sure don't want to die and go to hell."

He continued preaching.

"If you want to go to Heaven," Williams said, "You must come to God, repent of your sins and ask Him to forgive you. You must ask Him to come into your life and be your Lord and Savior."

He explained that we are all sinners and need to be saved: "**There is none righteous, no, not one ... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.**" (Romans 3:10, 23)

I didn't understand everything he was saying, but I felt something, and I understood enough to know that what I was hearing was important. And as he spoke about sin and the judgment of God, I became overwhelmed with a sense of guilt. I recognized my problems with sin and could clearly see I was in need of a savior. For the first time in my life, I began to feel as though a light had come on. I realized the urgency of the moment and wanted to know more about becoming a child of God – and escaping hell when I died.

Williams quoted **John 3:16**: "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.**"

He made it clear that no one has to die in sin and be separated from God forever. All a person has to do is come to God in faith and call on him to be saved.

"**For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.**" (Romans 10:13)

Williams stressed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, had come into the world as a man, and that he died for the sins of the world. He was buried for three days, and then He rose from the dead. He is willing to save all who come to Him, Williams said.

Williams urged us to make a decision that night because death could come at any time. After he had spoken for about 20 minutes, he paused. "If you have questions, you can call me at home

anytime, day or night," he said. "I'll be praying for you."

That night I began walking to my home, which was two blocks east of the baseball park. Alone, I lumbered in silence, feeling scared and worried.

Welcoming Grace

I made it home around 11 p.m. Williams' message was swirling through my head. For a brief moment

I sat at the kitchen table and drank a cold glass of grape Kool-Aid. After quenching my thirst, I took a bath. Before I went to bed, I knelt down on my knees. Something had prompted me to pray. So with my head bowed and my eyes closed, I clasped my hands together and prayed:

Dear God, Please save me. Forgive me of all my sins, and make me a child of God. I don't want to die and go to hell. Please forgive me. Help me to serve you. Come into my life. In Jesus name, Amen.

As I prayed, I felt something warm, like oil, pouring all over me. It started at the top of my head and seemed to run down over my whole body. I began weeping. A sensation of joy seemed to throb in my chest. I could not explain what was happening, but I knew that I was changed, and that God had answered my prayer. I had the sense that I was in God's presence and that He was touching me to let me know He had heard my prayer.

Immediately, I got up and called Williams and told him what had happened. He rejoiced with me and prayed. Then I ran to my parent's bedroom and told my mother that God had saved me and that I was now a child of God. When my dad came home after midnight, having worked a late shift at Ludlow, a textile factory, I told him that God had come into my life.

I was so happy I couldn't contain the joy. I eagerly told my friends what had happened and invited them to "get saved." They saw that I was different and had undergone a change. They called on God for salvation and were also saved.

The change in my life was unmistakable. Overnight I quit swearing.

Instead of wishing to do wrong, I desired only to please God. I had a new outlook on life — and of God — that made me more cognizant of my

words and behavior. If I had a negative thought or I said something that was unkind, I quickly apologized and asked God to forgive me. To my utter surprise, I had discovered God's power and His love.

That warm night in July became the night of my new birth. It was the night I found freedom from my sins. I saw the light and experienced God's amazing grace. For the first time in my life, everything became all clear. My life was out of danger and no longer under the guilt and penalty of my sins.

What About You?

Have you trusted Christ to save you? Have you asked Him to forgive you of all sins and to enter your life as your personal Lord and Savior? Have you believed on Him for eternal life? If your answer is no, then I urge you to call on Him TODAY! Ask His forgiveness. Trust in Him alone for the FREE gift of everlasting life.

After placing your faith in Christ, there are several things you should do to grow and to know him better: talk to Him in prayer and read your Bible every day; tell others about Christ and about your experience; be baptized and join a Christ-centered church.

Write me so that I may rejoice with you. I'll also send you FREE helpful literature. Write to: Dr. Roscoe Barnes III, P.O. Box 421, Centreville, Miss. 39631. Or send email to Roscoebarnes3@yahoo.com.

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Roscoe Barnes III, Ph.D., is a professional writer, prison chaplain, and independent scholar of Church History. He is the author of 14 books, and 12 Gospel tracts. He also is widely published in newspapers and magazines. He holds an earned doctorate from the University of Pretoria, South Africa; and an M.A.R. from the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pa.

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Dr. Barnes' mission in life is to help the hurting, give hope to the hopeless, and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with all who will listen.

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All Clear!

How I Found God and His FREE Gift of Everlasting Life

By Roscoe Barnes III



I was in the seventh grade when my homeroom teacher escorted me to the principal's office for the fourth or fifth time in a single school year. It was for something that no one would have expected from me. But had the principal known my background, and what led to my actions that day, he might have shown me mercy instead of the angry, strong arm of school discipline.

"I don't know what we're going to do about him," my teacher said. "He simply won't listen to anybody. I've had enough."

"I'm tired of seeing him," said the principal. They agreed that something had to be done.

On this occasion, I had tangled with a school bully at Carver Middle School. It was back in the early 1970s in Indianola, Miss., where I grew up as a black kid in a poor community.

This event, combined with a few others, would culminate in a major turning point in my life, as well as an experience that would challenge me and radically change my world view, and eventually, the entire course of my life.

Life in the Delta

Part of the Mississippi Delta, Indianola is located in the north western part of the state, between Greenville and Greenwood, about 136 miles below Memphis, Tenn. The quaint town was known for its cotton, and then later, its catfish. But it was also known as the hometown of B.B. King.

During the mid-1970s, when gasoline was 59 cents a gallon, Indianola had a population of

