

Prologue of a True Survivor

If you are reading this prologue, then I have transcended to my Heavenly home. Most of you already know my gift of writing stories and plays. So instead of the traditional obituary, I want to tell you a story - my personal story – the story of my human life on Earth, consisting of accomplishments and tribulations – but mostly stories of Faith, perseverance, and victory. I am a true testament and living witness of God’s miracles and the ideology that God creates a path for us even when we attempt to control our own destiny.

I am Edith Bethea Watkins, born December 21, 1940, in Red Springs, North Carolina, to the late Benjamin McCoy and Fannie B. Duncan. As a young child, I attended St. James AME Zion Church in Red Springs where I confessed the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. It was at this community church that I started developing a true understanding and love for God that fueled my spiritual growth and strong desire for continuous learning. I participated in many youth conventions and activities while attending Saint James AMEZ. During these younger years, my sisters, two cousins and I formed a singing group called “The Junior Queens of Harmony.” Boy did people love to hear us sing. My youngest sister, Jean, had the highest and softest voice that you could ever hear. I always carried the tenor part, which I complained about at first, but later realized that tenor was the foundation of the group’s harmony.

I completed grade school at Peterson High in North Carolina where I was a notable academic scholar, tennis and basketball player. I must say, I was quite the athlete. I graduated from Peterson with honors and was awarded a scholarship to attend Livingstone College, a Christian-based, private, historically black college in Salisbury, North Carolina. Believe it or not, I initially wanted to join a parish and become a nun, so attending a religious college like Livingstone was a dream come true. At Livingstone, I was initiated as an Ivy with Alpha Kappa Alpha,

Sorority, Inc. Our bond of sisterhood and community service created my passion for teaching and assisting others. This experience was the beginning of a newfound interest in becoming an educator. I completed my studies at Livingstone College with a bachelor’s degree in Education then taught elementary school for several years in Rowland, North Carolina.



While teaching, I met marine biologist, Donnie Wall Watkins. On July 19, 1964, we were married, and from that union, had two wonderful daughters, Tarsha Donecia Watkins-Jones and Micha Darnise Harris. In 1970, our family relocated to Washington, DC where I continued my teaching career at Katie C. Lewis Elementary school in the District of Columbia. I was an educator for over 16 years in the DC Public School System, with an avid love for helping those with learning and life challenges. I always taught students who were left behind and overlooked. I strived to redirect their negative circumstances to foster positive outcomes for their futures. My school Principals always gave me the children who were the most difficult to teach. I absolutely loved it! There was something special about cultivating and inspiring young people to believe in themselves despite all odds. I never wanted my students to feel embarrassed about their background or where they came from. I believed that in order to feed the mind, I must first feed the heart and then fill the voids of life’s basic needs. I stored toiletries, personal hygiene products, and food in my classroom so that my students would have access to these necessities without feeling shame. This small gesture created an immense trust between us demonstrating my undying devotion for them as students, and my commitment to helping them learn. My years at Katie C. Lewis were by far, some of the most rewarding times of my life.



On August 31, 1976, my public-school teaching career ended abruptly as I retired due to a disability. My years of picking cotton and tobacco in all weathering conditions took a toll on my muscles. I developed polymyositis, crippling me for several years. Despite the prognosis, I eventually walked again. Even though I was not teaching directly in the classroom, I became the neighborhood teacher and tutor. Although I did not have a formal adult literacy program, I took my personal

time to teach several adults and teenagers how to read. I wanted everyone to feel special and to recognize their own abilities to navigate the world independently. To working parents and families, I was the neighborhood grandmother who helped their children with their homework and even had them over for dinner. I redirected and repurposed my time to impact the lives of other people and to give my gift of love to them as God gave his gift of love to me.



In the Washington, DC area I spent part of my spiritual journey at Contee AMEZ Church and later Maple Springs Baptist Church, where along with my sisters and two cousins we formed another singing group called “The Five Sisters.”

I continued to receive my spiritual feeding from Maple Springs where I started the first Liturgical Dance Ministry. I was known for playwriting and directing Black History Programs, Community Plays, and Christmas Celebrations. I also served in numerous positions to include three choirs, the Usher Board, Sunday School teacher, Assistant Director of C.A.M.

Youth Chorale, Youth Leader and Deaconess Ministry. My service to the community and the church were nothing compared to God’s demonstration of love for me. For all of the blessings that God bestowed upon my life, I owed Him my time and my abilities to serve. For every step I took, I was reminded that these legs were not supposed to walk again. Every time I looked at my daughters, I was reminded that I was given a timeline on life. As I approached that timeline, I remained hopeful and was reminded that God always has the final word.

Man said that I would not and could not live to give birth to my youngest daughter, but I did...he said that I would never walk again, but for another 40 years, I did...after at least six “codes” in the hospital, he said that I would never breathe again, but I did...and he said that I would NOT live with my most recently diagnosed disease after January of 2019, but just like everything else ...I DID! I used to wonder why my pathway was always the most challenging – why everyone’s straight highway was always my hill. Now that my Jesus has carried and lifted me from the sandy shores into the pearly gates of Heaven, I understand that my experiences serve to inspire those who feel like giving up. I understand that my miraculous journey demonstrates the visible works of God to those who do not believe. And most importantly, I understand that I faced such levels of adversity because I was “chosen” by God because He knew I could handle it. Wow – I finally got the message and it is amazing!



I made it home with my dad, Benjamin McCoy and my mother Fannie B. Duncan. I am also here with James Bethea, Sr., who we call “Brother,” and my sisters Vivian E. Bess and Gloria Jean Jordan. The five singing sisters are now back together again. Tarsha and Micha, I made it back to Donnie and we cannot wait to see you again – Thank you, God for choosing me, and thank you God for bringing me home.

You will hear the rest of my story when you get your wings, but in the interim, I leave to cherish my two daughters, Tarsha Donecia (Rory) Watkins-Jones and Micha Darnise Harris; three grandchildren – Keenan William Ellerbe, Jr., Keelani TaMicha Ellerbe, and Donnie Aaron Harris; one great grandson, Kai Einnod Ellerbe; two nephews – Alfredo Bess, Jr. and James Bethea, Jr.; one Aunt – Bertha Johnson; one goddaughter – Dawn McDonald (Dion) Lee; (Special Friends) Martha Outlaw, Blanche Harris, Joyce Collier, Maceon Lewis, Minnetta Coles and Sherlene McIntosh; and a host of other family members, church members and friends.

“In my Father 's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”

(John 14:2 - New International Version)