

James Wright

Interviewed by Denzell Beasley & Joseph Dupuis

“My name is James Wright. My nickname is Jimmy. I was born in Wilcox County, Alabama in 1939. It was out in the country. It was kind of poor, but we had plenty because I was raised on a farm. I lived with my mother, Sally Mae Wright, and my father, James Wright, Sr. My grandparents lived with us too. My grandfather was Zack Williams, he was a great man. He was in World War I. And my grandmother was Mollie Williams. I had four sisters and four brothers. Their names were Willie Mae, Essie Mae, Vicky, Daisy, Henry, Sammy, Ricky, and Billy.

Yes, I liked school very much. We had to walk to school. First I went to Bayer's Chapel for elementary school. I learned well there, and I liked all the classes I had. We all did good in the programs. Then I went to Tate Academy for junior high, and I went to Camden Academy for high school. They were Christian schools. I remember my favorite teacher in elementary school was Miss Watts.

We always had something to do when we got home from school. We came home and we had to work on the farm. Yep, we had chores to do. We had to make sure there was plenty of wood and water. We had to chop wood, pick cotton — everything! That's all we did was go to school and work.

My parents weren't strict, but they believed in the right thing. So, if you did something wrong, they'd whoop you bad.

When I was your age, I played everything; I loved sports. I did all kinds of sports like football and basketball, and in high school I ran track. I did all of the track and field sports: the hundred yard dash, 440 relay, low jump, and high jump. You name it, I did it! I used to be about the fastest thing in Alabama. My coach was Mr. Gordon, and I had him for everything.

When I was young, my best friends were Buddy and Joe, and my brother Bill. Then there was 'Click,' that was my cousin Eddie Williams. And, there was 'Peter Rabbit,' that was my other cousin, Clifford Williams. There were a whole bunch of them, and most of us were all first cousins. But my main best friend was Buddy Moye. We all played basketball, football, we went bowling, *and* we fished.

There wasn't anything special to do around there, so we didn't stay out late. We had to be home at 9 o'clock anyhow, that was the curfew.

The scariest thing that ever happened to me was when my younger brother Bill got killed. He was riding on the back of a truck and got thrown off. It was terrible. And sometimes we had really big thunderstorms and tornadoes, but luckily nothing that tore the house down!

I guess that the funniest thing that ever happened to me was when my cousin Eddie and I were riding a jackass. I was about twelve years old at the time. We were on a road that was beside a deep gully, and all of a sudden the jackass just jumped over the edge and took us with him. I will never forget that! I guess we were lucky because when he jumped off we could have been killed. But he did it, and *it was really funny*. It still makes me laugh when I think about it now because we were so surprised!

I admire a lot of people that taught me things while I was growing up. My Aunt Connie taught us all how to fish. Eddie's Mama raised us at different times, and she taught us a lot, too. Then there was Rip Fast, he was a White man who took care of 'Click' and I when we were young. He used to take us hunting and he taught us how to shoot a gun *and* a bow and arrow, and he taught us how to cook, too.

Yes, I love to drive. I can drive anything! I got my license when I was 16 years old. Learned how to drive on the farm driving different trucks, tractors, and everything like that. My first driving experience was when my grandfather had his motorcar and I drove it — I was 14 years old

I didn't finish high school, but I went to 11th grade, and I got a good education, don't let anybody fool you! Later I went to college here at Labouré Jr. College. I went there in 1979 and 1980 and studied cooking. Got the papers on it and everything!

In the 1960's I lived with my grandparents in Wilcox County — the same place, where I was born and raised up. My most vivid memory of that time was when Martin Luther King and the people was marching in Alabama, but I wasn't there then, I was in Florida. That was the biggest thing that I remember, lot of people got shot and killed, and everything.

Well, the biggest change in my life after I got out of school was working and taking care of myself. I was a carpenter. I learned carpentry when I worked in Pensacola, Florida for a homebuilder. And I've worked all over— in Florida, Alabama, New York, and Massachusetts. It was my dream to leave Alabama, and I did. I wanted to leave and find a home, have a family, and get a job, and I did. Every job I ever had, I worked good on it. I had a good record on every one of them, and I never got laid off a job — never.

My greatest accomplishment when I first got here to Boston, I was working at Brigham's Ice cream. You might not know it, but there were a lot of them here. I made frappes, sundaes, milkshakes, ice cream sodas, tuna salad sandwich, ham salad sandwich and grilled cheese tomato. I made everything! Yes, cooking is my thing, I love cooking.

Well I had two wives so far, and I'm working on a third one right now. My first wife was Maggie Wright. We had two children, a son and a daughter. Their names are James Wright III and Tasha Wright. They're grown up now. Then, my second wife was Jean Wright. We just got divorced about four weeks ago, so now I'm happy! One of the happiest moments in my life was when I got single again. I worked hard and I got a good salary, so every month when I get my check, I go shopping, and I buy what *I* want. Next thing I'm going to buy is a car!

I look forward to the simple things. I like to cook my own breakfast —things like that. I learned a lot from my grandmother. She cooked a hundred years. She was in the kitchen with me and I learned a lot from her that I'll never forget. I've been cooking 69 years, and I'm hoping to go to 100 myself. God has been taking care of me so far, so he'll lead me on. I hope that I can do that.

I'm in good shape now, and I go to the doctor every six months. I don't drink, and I can box and fight too. I'm hoping to run again, I had a stroke in this leg but it's getting better. I ran a little bit yesterday. I didn't tell anybody, but I ran. I don't have to tell anyone what I do now, so I hope I can hit that ground again soon.

If I have any advice it's just try to make it if you can. Try to do the right thing. I don't care how you do it, just do it right, and ask God to help you.”