

20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY EDITION



*The remarkable  
surgeon who gives  
children a second  
chance at life*

# GIFTED HANDS

— THE BEN CARSON STORY —

*With a Letter to the Reader from Ben's Mother*

BEN CARSON, M.D. with CECIL MURPHEY

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**GIFTED HANDS**  
**THE BEN CARSON STORY**

**BEN CARSON, M.D.** *with* CECIL MURPHEY

 ZONDERVAN®

This book  
is dedicated to my mother,  
SONYA CARSON,  
who basically sacrificed her life  
to make certain that my brother and I  
got a head start.

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## *A Letter from Sonya Carson*

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Dear Reader,

As the mother of Ben and his brother, Curtis, I had a lot of challenges. Being one of twenty-four children, getting married at age thirteen, and later having to get a divorce after finding out my husband was a bigamist were just a few of them. But God helped me every step of the way, even when I didn't notice.

Fortunately, I could see what happens to people on welfare and decided I would try my best to make sure it would not happen to my boys. By working several jobs at a time, I figured we could still have enough to eat and have a roof over our heads. While other families would go to the movies or to amusement parks for entertainment, we would go to nearby farms and pick strawberries or other fresh produce, offering to pick four bushels for the farmer if he'd let us keep one. When we got home, I would can the food so we would have a supply to carry us through the winter.

Many times I found myself quoting a poem called "Yourself to Blame" (by Mayme White Miller) to the boys that kept me going through those hard times. I often quoted one line in particular to them: "You're the captain of your ship":

If things go bad for you —  
And make you a bit ashamed,  
Often you will find out that

You have yourself to blame ...  
Swiftly we ran to mischief  
And then the bad luck came.  
Why do we fault others?  
We have ourselves to blame ...

Whatever happens to us,  
Here are the words to say,  
“Had it not been for so-and-so  
Things wouldn’t have gone that way.”

And if you are short of friends,  
I’ll tell you what to do —  
Make an examination,  
You’ll find that fault’s in you ...

You’re the captain of your ship,  
So agree with the same —  
If you travel downward,  
You have yourself to blame.

Remember this as you go through life. The person who has the most to do with what happens to you is *you*! *You* make the choices; *you* decide whether you’re going to give up or ante up when the going gets tough. Ultimately, it’s *you* who decides whether you will be a success or not, by doing what is legally necessary to get you where you want to go. *You* are the captain of your own ship. If you don’t succeed, you only have yourself to blame.

*Sonya Carson*

## *Introduction*

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*by Candy Carson*

**M***ore blood! Stat!”*

The silence of the OR was smashed by the amazingly quiet command. The twins had received 50 units of blood, but their bleeding still hadn't stopped!

“There's no more type-specific blood,” the reply came. “We've used it all.”

As a result of this announcement, a quiet panic erupted through the room. Every ounce of type AB\* negative blood had been drained from the Johns Hopkins Hospital blood bank. Yet the 7-month-old twin patients who had been joined at the back of their heads since birth needed more blood or they would die without ever having a chance to recuperate. This was their only opportunity, their only chance, at normal lives.

Their mother, Theresa Binder, had searched throughout the medical world and found only one team who was willing to even attempt to separate her twin boys *and* preserve both lives. Other surgeons told her it couldn't be done—that one of the boys would have to be sacrificed. *Allow one of her darlings to die?* Theresa couldn't even bear the thought. Although they were joined at the head, even at 7 months of age each had his own personality—one playing while the other slept or ate. No, she absolutely couldn't do it! After months of searching she discovered the Johns Hopkins team.

Many of the 70-member team began offering to donate their own blood, realizing the urgency of the situation.

The 17 hours of laborious, tedious, painstaking operating on such tiny patients had progressed well, all things considered. The babies had been successfully anesthetized after only a few hours, a complex procedure because of their shared blood vessels. The preparation for cardiovascular bypass hadn't taken much longer than expected (the five months of planning and numerous dress rehearsals had paid off). Getting to the site of the twins' juncture wasn't particularly difficult for the young, though seasoned, neurosurgeons either. But, as a result of the cardiovascular bypass procedures, the blood lost its clotting properties. Therefore, every place in the infants' heads that could bleed did bleed!

Fortunately, within a short time the city blood bank was able to locate the exact number of units of blood needed to continue the surgery. Using every skill, trick, and device known in their specialities, the surgeons were able to stop the bleeding within a couple of hours. The operation continued. Finally, the plastic surgeons sewed the last skin flaps to close the wounds, and the 22-hour surgical ordeal was over. The Siamese twins—Patrick and Benjamin—were separate for the first time in their lives!

The exhausted primary neurosurgeon who had devised the plan for the operation was a ghetto kid from the streets of Detroit.

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\* Blood type changed for privacy.

## CHAPTER 1

### *“Goodbye, Daddy”*

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**A**nd your daddy isn't going to live with us anymore.”

“Why not?” I asked again, choking back the tears. I just could not accept the strange finality of my mother's words. “I love my dad!”

“He loves you too, Bennie ... but he has to go away. For good.”

“But why? I don't want him to go. I want him to stay here with us.”

“He's got to go —”

“Did I do something to make him want to leave us?”

“Oh, no, Bennie. Absolutely not. Your daddy loves you.”

I burst into tears. “Then make him come back.”

“I can't. I just can't.” Her strong arms held me close, trying to comfort me, to help me stop crying. Gradually my sobs died away, and I calmed down. But as soon as she loosened her hug and let me go, my questions started again.

“Your Daddy did — “ Mother paused, and, young as I was, I knew she was trying to find the right words to make me understand what I didn't want to grasp. “Bennie, your daddy did some bad things. Real bad things.”

I swiped my hand across my eyes. “You can forgive him then. Don't let him go.”