

She Ain't Playin'

NBA superstar Dwyane Wade's mother has been to hell and back—and now she's making hell tremble with a deliverance ministry that sets the captives free

When Jolinda Wade steps behind the pulpit, devils tremble. That's because Wade, the mother of NBA superstar Dwyane Wade, has built a kingdom reputation for casting them out.

But it wasn't always that way—she once invited them in.

The 55-year-old deliverance minister used to run to the devil's devices to escape the pain of life. In fact, she spent most of Dwyane's childhood and college years high—and many of them homeless.

She was addicted to heroin, cocaine and alcohol. She sold crack on the streets of Chicago. She slept in abandoned buildings. She served several terms behind bars. And she was a fugitive for more than four years after failing to report back to prison from work release.

Wade's is a story of redemption and forgiveness that is bringing healing to the lives of many who also followed the path of addiction, divorce and destruction. Wade regrets her mistakes, but she's on a mission to rescue hurting people from the devil's grip and help them restore their lives for the glory of God. She knows how to beat the devils that tried to destroy her family. A fully restored Wade is now busy making demon-busting, God-fearing disciples.

"My life fell apart when Dwyane was 4 months old and I divorced his father," Wade told a congregation of 10,000 at The Faith Center in Sunrise, Fla., this summer. "I was a walking dead woman. My story is in the Bible—they just use different names. God's grace and mercy followed me on the streets. That's the only reason I'm here. All I did was make a

decision to say yes to the Lord. Your yes is powerful, baby!"

Running From Life

Wade grew up in the church, but she never truly dedicated her life to the Lord. One of her earliest memories of her dad was a statement he made about her to her mother: "She needs to be put away." If that didn't scar her badly enough, she also faced ridicule from her peers.

Her classmates nicknamed her "Horse Knees" because she had skinny legs. Longing to be pretty and popular but being met only with rejection, the A-student with a bright future took a drink of peppermint schnapps in eighth grade and started down the wide path to destruction.

"One drink took over my life," she says. "I kept drinking in high school, and after the breakup with Dwyane's dad I became addicted to heroin, cocaine, alcohol and cigarettes. I had all four of those devils beating me down.

"I was selling drugs out of my apartment and letting people  do drugs there. Didn't nobody know that a little kid named Dwyane Wade Jr. was who he was."

Dwyane's older sister, Tragil, took on the responsibility of raising Dwyane. But by the time Dwyane turned 8, Tragil decided he should live across town with his father, a former Army sergeant. Without Dwyane, a heartbroken Wade spiraled further downward.

Rock bottom came when she tapped into a free supply of drugs by volunteering to be a tester, which is someone who tests street drugs to make sure they are pure before the dealers sell them. If the drugs are bad, the tester dies. Wade didn't die, but she came close when she injected what she thought was heroin and it turned out to be LSD.

After going to live with his father, Dwyane didn't see his

mother for two years. Their reunion came while she was locked up in Cook County Jail in 1994 for possession of crack cocaine with intent to sell. Dwyane, 10, cried after the visit because he could talk to his mother only through a glass panel over a telephone.

In an interview with ESPN, Dwyane described what life was like living with a drug-addicted mother: "I would be talking to her, and she would just doze off and pick back up the conversation two minutes later, and keep going in and out and in and out. I've seen the needles laying around the house. I've seen my mother shoot up before. I've seen a lot of things my mother didn't even know I'd seen as a kid."

Tragil tried to put her mother through rehab several times, but she always fell back into drugs—and back onto the streets. "The life she lived, you never knew if you were going to see her the next day," Tragil says. "I remember getting a call from someone who said they found a woman dead from overdose in an abandoned building across the street from the church. I cried because I just knew it was her. All I could think about was how I was going to bury her because I had no money."

A Self-Directed Funeral

Although Wade had overdosed many times, it wasn't her body in that abandoned building. When Tragil finally found her mother, she told Wade she couldn't take it anymore. But Wade wasn't done fighting her demons yet.

As Tragil sees it, her mother had to get beyond rock bottom. She had to get tired enough to surrender to the Lord. That day finally came on Oct. 14, 2001. It was the answer to decades of prayers by Wade's parents and children.

"Tragil came to the abandoned house I was at and told me to get in the car," Wade says. "I was dope sick, but I didn't let her know. She told me she was scared something was going to happen to me. I didn't know how badly I was hurting my

children. So I went to church, and the preacher called my name and told me to read 2 Timothy 3:5.

“It said, ‘Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof.’ I heard the Lord telling me through that Scripture that the party was over. I had to die so the Christ in me could live.”

Wade left Chicago to stay with a friend in Indiana. She told her pastor and Tragil that she had to go to a funeral: her own. She quit the drugs cold turkey, and God delivered her from all her addictions with little more than a runny nose. The last to go was cigarettes.

Tragil was skeptical that her mother would remain on the straight and narrow, but when the fugitive Wade decided to turn herself in to Chicago police, the family knew she was serious. At that time Dwyane was a sophomore at Marquette University. When he came home for Christmas, he found his mother clean and sober, and joy filled his heart—until his mother told him she was about to go back to prison.

“I was hurt because I felt like I was just getting my mom back, and now she had to leave again,” Dwyane told ESPN.

But Wade felt strongly that she had to pay past dues before moving on in her new life. On Jan. 2, 2002, Wade went back to prison to serve her 14-month sentence. A heartbroken Dwyane wrote his mother a letter while she was in prison, telling her she was his hero. That gave Wade the strength to continue on the road to redemption. Like Joseph, she started a ministry behind bars, helping women and getting to know Christ in an intimate way.

“When you’re locked up, and it’s just you and Christ, you get to know Him,” Wade says. “God taught me the power of binding and loosing when I was behind the walls. He had me write down warfare prayers. I lived a life of fasting behind the walls. I learned to be a warrior. I built up a bulldog mentality. I

hate the devil, and I found out he don't like me."

Redemption Song

Wade was released from prison on March 5, 2003. Clean, sober and free from the devils that bound her, she set out to rebuild her family. Three days after her release from the penitentiary, she saw Dwyane play basketball for the first time in five years. And it wasn't just any game. It was the final home game of Dwyane's Marquette career—with the Conference USA title on the line. Dwyane led his team to the championship, then turned his attention to his mother.

Wade has reconciled with her four children and the father who hurt her so badly as a child. In fact, her father and Tragil attend her church—a church building Dwyane spent \$7 million to give his mother. Wade was ordained in the Baptist church in January 2007 but launched her own nondenominational church, Temple of Praise Binding and Loosing Ministries International, in Chicago later that same year. On May 18, 2008, Wade preached her first service in the building.

"I respect my mother so much, from the life that she used to live and to see her today in the life that she lives. I'm so proud of her," Dwyane told the Associated Press before his mother's first church service. "Everybody thinks I'm the miraculous story in the family. I think she is. I think what I've done means I've been very blessed, but she's been more than blessed. She's been anointed."

Hundreds gather to worship at Temple of Praise Binding and Loosing Ministries and soak in Wade's bold, insightful, charismatic preaching that sets the captives free. Wade's outreaches focus on feeding and clothing the helpless across Chicago's inner city. "To see people listen to her and want to become a part of what she is doing is amazing to us still because she had to fight a lot of demons," Dwyane told ESPN.

Wade likes to say that Dwyane believes in the God in his mama—and so does Tragil. Wade didn't let her kids down this time around. She's been clean for nearly a decade and preaches a message of mercy, grace and deliverance every Sunday on the South Side of Chicago.

Tragil works side-by-side with her mother. "When the parents get in line, the children's destiny changes," Tragil says. "My calling is to teach the masses."

Making an Impact

Though street-savvy, Wade realizes that her son's fame could cause some to seek relationship with her for the wrong reasons. That's why she has surrounded herself with close friends and mentors who are actively serving the Lord, such as Florida pastors Paula White and Henry Fernandez, and Lucille O'Neal, Shaquille O'Neal's mother. These newfound brothers and sisters in Christ testify to Wade's passion for the lost.

Fernandez, bishop of The Faith Center Ministries in Sunrise, Fla., met Wade on the set of TBN. Fernandez invited Wade to preach in his church on July 25—National Parents' Day—because he believes she is a living testimony that a mother with a bad past can become a good parent and raise successful children.

"Jolinda has a testimony," Fernandez says. "She is called to a group of people I can't reach. I can't talk to a drug dealer. How do I counsel someone who's been in prison? When people hear Jolinda's testimony, they feel like there is hope for them. Jolinda already hit bottom. She has nothing to lose.

"There's no need for her to act like she's a superstar minister. She's effective in ministry because she gives Jesus Christ the spotlight."

Wade has made quite an impression on her fellow NBA mothers. They see the gift of God in her and have befriended the fledgling preacher. Paulette Smith, a gospel singer and mother

of Atlanta Hawks 2005 NBA Slam Dunk Champion Josh Smith, says Wade is living out John 7:38. "Jolinda is allowing God to use her as a stream of living water that delivers others," she says. "That's what makes her so special."

Christine Johnson, the mother of NBA great Magic Johnson, has watched Wade grow in the Lord for nearly eight years. "Jolinda is on fire for Christ, and she loves people," Johnson says. "People are drawn to that love, and she's making an impact in the kingdom."

One of Wade's closest friends is O'Neal. Their sons won an NBA championship together, and the women still stay in touch. O'Neal was herself a rebellious teen, a single mother and a divorcee. "Jolinda isn't trying to impress anybody. She just lets her light shine so people can see Christ," O'Neal says. "Jolinda doesn't sugarcoat anything. What you see is what you get. She's real."

Wade may give new meaning to the word "real." In fact, her preaching may be beyond real. Some may even call it raw. She exposes much of her story in a book called *Divine Grace Behind the Walls*. In it, she talks about the pain, shame and guilt of her past. She mentions being angry with God for letting her ruin her life. And she highlights the saving grace of Christ.

"You can be real with the Lord, and He will still love you," Wade says. "I should be dead. I should be out of my mind. I believe God let me live to give other people hope."

"Maybe they are not like I was. Maybe it's their brother or their aunt, but they are caught in a bad place. I'm here to tell people not to give up. My kids never gave up on me. They prayed for me. You've got to believe in the power of prayer. I'm living proof. Everywhere I go, hell trembles."

Jennifer LeClaire is a minister living in Hallandale Beach, Fla., and the author of several books, including *The Heart of the Prophetic and Doubtless*.

Watch Jolinda Wade share details of her drug abuse, life as a fugitive and her dramatic redemption at *wade*.