

# Don't Overlook the Miracle of JD Vance

During President Donald Trump's inauguration ceremony in Washington on Monday, he reminded everyone that God spared his life when a bullet grazed his ear during a campaign stop in Pennsylvania last summer. Trump has the scar to prove he would be dead today if he hadn't turned his head to the right at the same moment the gun was fired.

"Just a few months ago in a beautiful Pennsylvania field, an assassin's bullet ripped through my ear," Trump declared in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol. "But I felt then and believe so now that my life was saved for a reason. I was saved by God to make America great again."

As Trump delivered his address, my eyes were drawn to a woman wearing a red shirt and a gold cross. She was seated among the dignitaries behind the president, but she's not a politician or a famous billionaire. Her name is Beverly Aikins, and she is the mother of J.D. Vance, who on Monday became vice president of the United States.

Aikins' story isn't as well known as Trump's, but she is also a walking miracle. On Jan. 19, the day before her 40-year-old son was sworn into office by Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, Aikins celebrated 10 years of sobriety from drug addiction.

Her presence on the stage on Inauguration Day was a powerful reminder that Vance himself is also a walking miracle.

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When he was born in 1984 in Middletown, Ohio, his parents were already in a rocky relationship, and his dad abandoned his mother when Vance was a toddler. His mother and his maternal grandparents, James and Bonnie Vance, raised him—but the future vice president and his sister struggled because of his mother's drug habit.

After Vance graduated from high school, he went into the Marine Corps, then on to Ohio State University and finally to study law at Yale—quite an achievement for a guy who was bullied by local kids and rejected and abused by family members.

Vance chronicled his troubled early life in a memoir, “Hillbilly Elegy,” which was made into a film in 2020 starring Amy Adams as Vance's mother. Glenn Close was nominated for an Oscar for her portrayal of Vance's feisty grandmother, who pushed J.D. to study, work hard and avoid the wrong friends.

In the film, Bonnie tells her grandson in her hillbilly twang: “I coulda done better. But you, you got to decide. You want to be somebody or not?”

Vance traces his roots to Appalachian poverty. His ancestors were related to the feuding Hatfield and McCoy families. His grandfather abused his grandmother, and she tried to kill him to defend herself. Vance's mother overdosed on heroin numerous times, and she lost her nursing job because of her addiction. She jumped from one boyfriend to the next—dragging her kids with her from one unfamiliar house to the next.

Vance would sometimes hide in a closet when his mother fought with her lovers. He wrote in “Hillbilly Elegy” that the thing he hated most about his early years was jumping from one new dad to the next. “Of all the things I hated about my childhood, nothing compared to the revolving door of father figures,” Vance said.

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When you realize the odds he overcame, it's miraculous that he now holds the second-highest seat of power in the United States. When Trump selected him to be his running mate last year, Vance introduced his mother to the crowd at the Republican National Convention and told the audience her story of sobriety.

Vance said: "It'll be 10 years [of recovery] officially in January 2025 and, if President Trump is OK with it, let's have the celebration in the White House." I would love to have attended that party.

Aikins kicked her drug habit with the help of a pro-life Catholic recovery program, and today she has regained her nursing license. She now helps others who struggle with addiction. Meanwhile, Vance has been outspoken about his faith. He says his grandmother believed in Jesus and watched Billy Graham on television, but she didn't take him to church. He attended a Pentecostal church as a teenager, but after wrestling with his beliefs he became a Catholic in 2019.

Vance also has a family connection to charismatic faith. His brother, Cory Michael Bowman, leads The River Church of Cincinnati, which is connected to evangelist Rodney Howard-Browne of Tampa, Florida. Cory and his wife attended the presidential inauguration in Washington this week, and Cory posted on his Facebook page: "I'm so thankful to the Lord for all that He's done and grateful that our whole family is able to celebrate together."

The story of Vance and his mother is a refreshing reminder that God is in the business of pulling people out of poverty, sin and obscurity to heal them, empower them and use them for His bigger purpose.

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