

Narrator: Welcome to UMC.org Profiles, where each month, we share the spiritual journey of a United Methodist.

This month on UMC.org Profiles, Buddy Williams, former Negro League pitcher.

Nearing his 90th birthday, Buddy's memories of playing baseball with the likes of Josh Gibson, Satchel Paige and Jackie Robinson are as fresh as if they had occurred yesterday. With an unyielding love for God, family and church, Buddy Williams' faith story is filled with nuggets of wisdom and life lessons that are more relevant today than they were years ago.

Buddy: ...all my people was right in North Carolina. Little ole place now called Gerrigsburg, North Carolina.

...my grandmother she was in the slave...she was a slave. And her grandmo...her mother, my grandfath...my grandmother, her mother was a slave.

I had 7 sisters. When they grew on up, from a knee-high on up, they were singin' in the choir. My oldest sister on down was taught how to play the piano. That's the way it was handed down, from the home to the church.

I never seen my daddy drink no whiskey. I never hear.... All they talk about was the good things. They just talk about the church all the time. How you're supposed to treat people. Don't think evil. Think good. You'll live a long time.

Well, my grandfather on my mother's side, he ????. He was a preacher. My daddy's brother, Uncle Andrew, he was a preacher. On Sundays you went to church. And from 9 from Sunday school on into church. And you might be...you're lucky if you got home at 2, 3 or 4 o'clock in the evening, Sunday evening.

My people was Baptist, all Baptist.

... my wife was a Maryland girl and her mother and father were Methodists. Then I followed her.

People used tell about the Baptist is better than the United Methodist. The United Methodist is better...better...better than the Jehovah Witnesses. I say, Lord, if you've got a heart and

believe in God and that's your mind, you do what God tell you to do. Good spelled g-o-o-d it don't spell G-o-d. that's God, you know.

... when I was a boy growin' up we didn't have nothin' else to do but play ball in the country.

One of my great uncles, Uncle Jim, on my grandfather...on my...on my mother's father's side, he used to play ball. He was...he was an Indian. And he used to play ball.

... Uncle Jim, taught me how. He learnt me how to throw the curve ball. He say, anything straight, anybody can hit it. But if it's crooked, you have to slow down. Just like these highways out here. When you get on a long straight stretch you can drive a 100 miles a hour. But when you get on one of these crooked roads you got to cut your speed down. All of the great players, Josh Gibson, Buck Leonard, Buck O'Neil, Jackie Robinson, they ask...used to ask me all the time, say, William, can't you throw something else beside a curve ball.

And one of my greatest pit...games I pitched in my life was at New York City over in Meadowood. I was playing with the Newark Eagles. We got the...we got the ??? Braves 2 to 1 in the 9th inning. Here is 2 men on and 2 out. Pop Wilson come up and hit a line drive, hit Leon Day on the knee. He can't pitch no more. Two men on and two out, Josh...Dick London, he was our manager, he said, William, said, what'd you think we should you do?

I said, Bring Hop Good in 'cause he's a left-hand pitcher. Let him walk Buck Leonard and let me pitch... with the bases loaded let me pitch to Josh Gibson. Well, them people in New York, they thought Josh Gibson was God the way.... And I come in laughin'. I come 'cross that third base line, the boy runs over and take my jacket. I come over. The whole 50 or 60,000 people stood up for Josh Gibson and booing and hollerin'. I'm laughin'. All I got my mind on, young Count Bassie. You know he had a good band. He's from Kansas City. He was playin' up in Harlem that night. And I know I could dance. And all I wanted to do was dance with some beautiful girl.

I shot 'im two curve balls up there and got him in the hole. And the whole crowd of 50 or 60,000 people, you could hear a pin out there when I got two strikes on 'im. And he didn'...hadn't swung. Now I got him so confused, he don't know whether I'm gonna try to knock him back off the plate or throw him another curve ball. So I threw him another one of my breakin' fast curve balls. He had to lunge and hit it. Hit it to Willy Webb the shortstop and Willy Webb throwed 'im out. Do you know? They had to escort me back over to, ah, Newark, New Jersey across that bridge. I couldn't go up to that dance that night, by getting Josh

Gibson out. I said, oh.... I said, after I got back over Newark, I wish I had let him hit a homerun now so I could ... I could at least gone up to the dance.

My wife went to Bowie State College.

All college teams wanted to play some good teams. So they wanted to play us that night...that day. So we got a game with Bowie State College. ... we beat 'em right bad, but they give us a dance and a dinner that night. Dance hall like that and I'm dancin' with a young thing, looks so good.

She had her little head hid upon my shoulder. And I could feel her little heart beatin'. I tease her about it right now. Her little heart beatin' and everything. And was tellin' her, I said, I could marry you. And I'm kiddin'. I'd had a lot of mouth and everything 'cause I had been up in New York for a little while. And I say, I'm comin' back and marry you. She couldn't believe it. I was so afraid to tell most girls that. But there was just something about her I liked. I said, I'm gonna come back and marry you. And stayed in contact with her. And 1936 I came back and married her.

I used to pitch 2 games a week for sometimes one dollar or either two dollars.

I would send all my little money home on a...in an envelope.

And she wouldn't do no travelin'. She stayed home with the little children and raised them.

When I was drafted in the Army in 1940, I had been playing baseball with different teams all over this United States ...

I was in Fort Bellville, treated like a king in the Quartermaster. Delivered food around on the post. Like a king. Like I was a general or colonel.

And after three years in Fort. Bellville they said, Well, we got to take these quartermasters and let 'em take some training. So they sent me to Camp Lee. They sent me to Camp Lee and put me in the 12th ...

I get off the bus and everything, they sent us into...the captain and first sergeant's office and they said, William, we read these papers. We see you was a professional ballplayer.

... this evening we're playing the 11 regiment and we've never beat them.

He said, William, I've heard talk of your name with the Newark Eagles. I told 'im yeah. He said, Well, I'm gonna catch you this evening. We goes out that afternoon. We plays the 11th Regiment and we had...on that post at Camp Lee we had 75, 000 there and everybody was out to see the 11th Regiment beat the 12th. And I walked up on that hill and I stopped 'em. We beat 'em by 4 to nothing.

...that same evening the 9th reg, all they did...they had an entertaining club there at the 9th Regiment. They said, William, we're gonna send you to the 9th Regiment. You're not gonna do no training. You're gonna just travel all over the United States to different posts...

...just to entertain. They had boxers. They had singers. They had quartets. They had everything. And ballplayer and even basketball player. That's all I done for one year, for 2 years. Then they say, William, all soldiers got to have some overseas duty.

... when I came out of the Army

I said, I'm gonna stay home with my wife.

... Campanella, Joe Black and Gilliam ...

Oh, they liked to worried me to death. William, we're pavin' ... we're gonna give 'em \$7,000. I said, I don't care if you give 'em \$7,000,000, I'm gonna stay home with my wife. I say I've been away from my wife and my children now for 5 years in the Army, I said, I'm gonna stay home with my wife.

My kids...my children and raisin' 'em, I never had a moment of trouble of out not a one.

My three sons, you know they're retired. Walter, 37 from Montgomery County School Board, Tommy, about 34 or 35, ?? from the Federal Government, he had about 30 or 35 with the Federal Government. My three daughters.... I got a daughter work with the Federal Government, Cary with 'em now. She ain't never made nothin' but As all her life. Dr. Sara Lee. And Jeanie, Dorothy. I call her Jeanie, her middle name. She teaches school, but.... She's been teachin' 'bout 30 years now. She got her Masters. My baby Debbie got her Bachelors. She's teaching school.

I made the right decision to stay home and raise these six children.

My wife all the time at me, say Buddy, how come you can talk to everybody? You can talk to white like you do black. I say, because I got love in my heart.

I look back and I thank God every day of my life. Lord, look what you done for me.

Narrator: Our thanks to Buddy Williams for sharing his faith story with us.

This month's profile was produced by Matt Carlisle; interview by John Coleman; editor was Lane Denson. I'm Hilly Hicks and Profiles is brought to you by UMC.org, the official online ministry of The United Methodist Church, a ministry of United Methodist Communications.