

## Dr. Ben S. Carson, M.D: An American Icon

Written by Patricia Turnier

Sunday, 21 February 2010 19:23

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Dr. Benjamin Solomon Carson Sr., M.D was born in Michigan in 1951 to a young mother in inner-city Detroit. He and his older brother, Curtis, grew up amid poverty, crime, and violence. His parents divorced when Dr. Carson was very young. He and his brother were raised by their mother. After his parents' divorce, Carson lost confidence in himself and believed his classmates, who would insult him by calling him names. He internalized those insults and began developing a violent temper. His mother challenged him and his brother to strive for excellence. Thanks to his mother's powerful faith in him, he regained confidence and educated himself by reading two books per week. He had to provide regular reports of his readings to his mother. She had a third-grade education, but a Ph.D in Life. She constantly motivated Carson by telling him, "Bennie, if you know how to read, you can know and learn practically anything you want. The doors of the world are open to anybody who can read. And my boys are going to be successful in life because they're going to be the best readers in the school." His mother regularly checked his work and his brother's. She challenged them to excel by reading and turning off the television. Carson's grades at school gradually improved. Dr. Carson shared the thoughts he had at the tender age of eight: "I loved listening to stories in church, and it seemed that missionaries were the noblest people in the world. They made these great sacrifices. Wow, could there be anything greater than that? ». Dr. Carson's incredible achievements are remarkable, and in spite of a difficult start in life, he succeeded against all odds.



Carson's discipline, perseverance, hard work and deep religious faith paid off. He rose from being the last student in his class to the top. He never came down again. Dr. Carson completed a degree in psychology at Yale University and graduated from the University of Michigan School of Medicine. He later completed his internship in general surgery and his residency in neurological surgery at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. In 1982, Carson was named chief resident and fellow in neurological surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital. He later served as a senior registrar in neurosurgery at the Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Queen Elizabeth II Medical Center in Western Australia. By 1984, after spending a year in this country, he returned to Hopkins to become the nation's youngest chief of pediatric neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins Children's Center, as well as co-director of neurosurgical oncology and assistant professor of oncology and neurological surgery, at age 33. In 1987, Dr. Carson gained international recognition for having led an important medical team, which successfully separated German twins conjoined at the back of the head during a 22-hour surgery. This was an historical breakthrough. In 1997, Dr. Ben Carson and his team went to South Africa to separate conjoined twins Luka and Joseph Banda, infant boys from Zambia. Both boys survived, and neither one suffered severe brain damage. The Bandas were the first set of Type II craniopagus twins (joined at the tops of their heads) to be successfully surgically separated. The operation lasted 28 hours. Dr. Carson has also advanced brain surgery to help control seizures in infants and has demonstrated vast success with adults suffering from trigeminal neuralgia (TN). The condition causes such severe facial pain that it is called the "suicide disease", since many adults choose to end their lives rather than live with this level of anguish.

In 2004, Dr. Carson was appointed by President George W. Bush to serve on the President's Council on Bioethics. Dr. Carson is currently the longstanding Director of Pediatric Neurosurgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital Children's Center ( [www.hopkinschildrens.org](http://www.hopkinschildrens.org) ). He is known to give maximum attention to every case. He still conducts over 300 surgeries per year. He has expertise in traumatic brain injuries, brain and spinal cord tumors, achondroplasia, neurological and congenital disorders, craniosynostosis, epilepsy and trigeminal neuralgia. Dr. Carson's contributions brought notoriety to the Johns Hopkins Hospital Children's Center in the field of pediatric neurosurgery. He has published colossal works in the medical field and has authored over 100 neurosurgical publications, along with four best-selling books. These books have been translated into several languages.

Dr. Carson is a member of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society, the Horatio Alger Society of Distinguished Americans and many other prestigious organizations. Dr. Carson has been awarded more than 50 honorary doctorate degrees and dozens of national merit citations. In February 2008, he received the Ford's Theatre Lincoln Medal and in June 2008, the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President George W. Bush. He became the first

African-American physician in U.S. history to receive the Medal of Freedom from a president. 25 physicians obtained this Medal in the U.S. history. It is the highest civilian honor in the country. This award was created by former President Harry Truman in 1945. President John F. Kennedy in 1963 expanded the categories of this honor. Established by Executive Order 11085 in 1963, this medal is awarded by the President to any person who has made an especially meritorious contribution to (1) the security or national interests of the United States, or (2) world peace, or (3) cultural or other significant public or private endeavors. Both CNN and Time magazine named Dr. Carson among the 20 foremost physicians and scientists. He is a Library of Congress "Living Legend". In 2006, he was the recipient of Spingarn Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the NAACP.

Dr. Carson has many interests beyond the [medical field](#). He wears many hats: he is an author, motivational speaker (for school systems, civic groups, corporations, the President's National Prayer Breakfast), a philanthropist, a healer, and a leader, among other roles. In 2003, he even made a cameo appearance in the movie "Stuck on you", a film about conjoined twins played by Matt Damon and Greg Kinnear. Giving a chance to young people for education is also a very important issue to Dr. Carson. In 1994, he and his wife founded The Carson Scholars Fund (<http://carsonscholars.org/>) for children in grades 4 through 12 with high GPAs (3.75 and above). The deserving children must also have demonstrated strong community involvement. Dr. Carson is interested in maximizing the intellectual potential of every child by providing them with opportunities. As part of the Carson Scholars Fund, they place special very enticing reading rooms in schools and other places to encourage and reward students for reading. He and his wife have donated millions of dollars out of their own pockets and created charities to help young scholars. Dr. Carson co-founded Angels of the OR, to help the uninsured and underinsured to have access to neurosurgery. The

[physician](#)'s charitable organization, Benevolent Endowment Network Fund (the BEN Fund), had also been providing financial support for children in need of neurosurgery. Dr. Carson is known to speak to everyone politely, kindly, respectfully and with dignity, regardless of their ethnicity, class or religion. His unaffected and unpretentious manner endears him to many. He does not take all the credit for himself, stating instead that he is guided by a higher power: "God gave me the talent to do my work". So many people are moved by

[this physician's story](#) and accomplishments that a play about his life is performed annually in front of thousands of students in Maryland. The 7th of February 2009, a TV movie on TNT was also aired about Dr. Carson's life entitled: "Gifted hands: The Ben Carson story". His character is portrayed by the Oscar winning actor, Cuba Gooding Jr., who also produced the movie. Kimberly Elise played the role of the physician's mother. Dr. Carson is a humanist and a living legend. He is considered one of the world's most significant mentors and he is the crème de la crème.

To read our in-depth interview with Dr. Carson, click on this link: <http://www.megadiversities.com/entrevues/62-a-candid-interview-with-dr-ben-s-carson-md-an-american-icon.html>

### **Personal:**

Marital Status: Married to Candy Carson since 1975. They met at Yale University in 1975. Dr. Carson's wife is a triple major who took courses in music, psychology and pre-med. Candy Carson holds an M.B.A. degree and is an accomplished musician. They are devout evangelical Christians and members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Dr. Carson and his wife have three sons.

### **Notable quotes from Dr. Carson:**

"Everybody, no matter who they are, has problems in life. And we'll continue to have problems in life. You get to decide whether those problems become something that weaken you or something that strengthen you."

"Anyone who refuses to test his limits, anyone unwilling to move out of her comfort zone, is destined to live life inside the envelope."

"I don't believe God gave us such wonderfully complex brains to simply look at somebody else's compass or drift aimlessly through life without purpose or direction."

"God asks all of us to give him a tenth of our best, however much we have."

"We need to make it clear to people what it means to live by godly principles – loving your fellow man, caring for your neighbor, and living a life of service by developing your God-given talents to the point that you become invaluable to the people around you."

"My mother instilled in me a deep respect for the potential of the human brain, and that respect has deepened over the years to an attitude I can only describe as awe."

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-8NRSfk\\_a8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-8NRSfk_a8)

### **Education and training:**

- 1965-1969 : Southwestern High School (Detroit, Michigan)

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- 1969-1973 : B.A., Yale University
- 1973-1977 : M.D., University of Michigan (School of Medicine)

### **Licenses:**

- 1978 : Diplomate-National Board of Medical Examiners
- 1983 : Maryland State Medical License
- 1983 : Medical License-Western Australia

### **Board Certification:**

1982, 1988 : American Board of Neurological Surgery-Certified

1997 : American Board of Pediatric Neurological Surgery

Additional Certification: Microsurgical Techniques, The Johns Hopkins University, School of Medicine

### **Selected previous educational and academic experience:**

1968 : Research Laboratory Assistant (Wayne State University, Michigan)

1976-1977 : Physical Diagnosis instructor (School of Medicine, University of Michigan)

1981 : Senior Neurosurgical Resident, The Baltimore City Hospitals (Baltimore, Maryland)

1979-1983 : Fellow in Neurosurgery (School of Medicine, Johns Hopkins University)

1983-1984 : Senior Registrar in Neurosurgery (Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, Queen Elizabeth II, Medical Center, Western Australia)

### **Previous professional experience:**

1984-1991 : Assistant professor of neurological surgery (Director division of pediatric neurosurgery)

1984-1991 : Assistant professor of oncology (Co-Director of section of neurosurgical oncology, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Maryland)

1987-1996 : Assistant professor of pediatrics (Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Maryland)

1991-1999 : Associate professor of neurological surgery, Oncology, Plastic surgery and Pediatrics (Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions, Maryland)

### **Current Appointments:**

1984-Present : Director Division of Pediatric Neurosurgery

Johns Hopkins Hospital Children's Center

Baltimore, Maryland

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1991-Present : Co-Director of The Johns Hopkins Cleft and Craniofacial Center  
Johns Hopkins Hospital Children's Center  
Baltimore, Maryland

June 1999-Present : Professor of Neurological Surgery  
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine  
Baltimore, Maryland

June 1999-Present : Professor of Oncology  
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine  
Baltimore, Maryland

June 1999-Present : Professor of Plastic Surgery  
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine  
Baltimore, Maryland

June 1999-Present : Professor of Pediatrics  
Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine  
Baltimore, Maryland

### **A Selection of Dr. Carson's Honorary Degrees:**

- 1988 : Doctor of Science Degree, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
- 1994 : Doctor of Science Degree, Spalding University, Louisville, Kentucky
- 2000 : Doctor of Science Degree, Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania
- 2004 : Doctor of Science, University of District of Columbia, Washington, DC
- 2004 : Doctor of Humane Letters, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA
- 2004 : Doctor of Laws, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic, Medicine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- 2007 : Doctor of Science, Columbia University, New York, New York
- 2007 : Doctor of Science, St-Louis University, St-Louis, Missouri

### **Selected Awards:**

1982 : Cum Laude Award  
The Radiological Society of North America  
Awarded for Exhibit at the 68th Annual  
Scientific Assembly : Brain Tumor  
Research-Imaging and Therapy  
Chicago, Illinois

1987 : Memorial Award : For Outstanding  
Service to Underprivileged Children

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The Continental Societies, Inc.  
Baltimore Chapter-Baltimore, Maryland

1988 : Clinical Practitioner of the Year Award  
National Medical Association, Region II

1991 : Benjamin E. Mays Memorial Award  
North Carolina State University

1992 : Mission Award  
Maryland Public Television  
Baltimore, Maryland

1994 : Martin Luther King, Jr. Award  
for Community Service  
Johns Hopkins Hospital  
Baltimore, Maryland

1996 : Think Big Award  
by Clara M. Pitts Elementary School  
Atlanta, Georgia

2007 : Ford Foundation Freedom Scholar Award  
Charles H. Wright Museum of African  
American History  
Detroit, Michigan

2008 : Presidential Medal of Freedom

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### **Selected Publications:**

### **Movie**

*Gifted Hands* on DVD since the 8th of September 2009 ( [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [.ca](http://www.amazon.ca) )

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jehtJPhmaKo>

**Dr. Carson's four best-selling books :**

- (1992) Think Big, Zondervan Publishing Co. ISBN 0-310-21459-9
- (2000) The Big Picture, Zondervan Publishing Co. ISBN 0-310-23834-X
- (2008) Take The Risk, Zondervan Publishing Co. This book was endorsed by George Lucas, director, producer and screenwriter for films including the epic Star Wars saga and Indiana Jones franchise. ISBN 0-310-25973-8
- (1990) Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story, Zondervan Publishing Co. ISBN 0-310-21469-6

**A selection of Dr. Carson's articles and abstracts:**

- Carson BS, Anderson J, Grossman S, Hilton J, White C, Colvin OM, Clark A. Grochow L, Kahn A, Murray K : An Improved Rabbit Brain Tumor Model Amenable to Diagnostic Radiographic Procedures. *Neurosurgery*, vol. 11, No. 5, 603-608, 1982
- Carson BS, Anderson J, Grossman S, Hilton J, White C, Murray K, Colvin OM : Radiographic Imaging of a Rabbit Brain Tumor Model. *Investigative Radiology*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1982
- Maria B, Zinreich J, Freeman J, Carson BS, Rosenbaum A : Dandy-Walker Syndrome Revisited. *Annals of Neurology*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 389, 1985.
- Vining EPG, Carson BS, Freeman J, Long D : Bilateral Epileptic Abnormalities : A Unilateral Cure. *Epilepsia*, 28 : 591, 1987.
- Carson BS, Brem H : Neurosurgery Update. *JAMA*, Vol. 263, No. 19, May 16, 1990
- Thilo EH, Park-Moore B, Berman ER, Carson BS : Oxygen Saturation by Pulse Oximetry in Health Infants at an Altitude of 1610 m (5280 ft). What is Normal? *Am J Dis Child*, 145 (10) : 1137-1140, 1991
- Carson BS, Washington H : Health Care Reform – A Paradigm Shift. *Harvard Journal of Minority Public Health*, Vol 2 (1), 1996.
- Boatman D, Freeman J, Vining E, Pusifer M, Miglioretti D, Minahan R, Carson BS, Brandt J, McKhann G : Language Recovery after Left Hemispherectomy in Children with Late Onset Seizures. *Annals of Neurology*, 46 (4) : 579-585, 1999
- Hourani R, Horska A, Albayram S, Brant LJ, Melhem E, Cohen KJ, Burger PC, Weingart JD, Carson BS, Wharam MD, Barker PB : Proton Magnetic Resonance Spectroscopic Imaging to Differentiate between Nonneoplastic Lesions and Brain Tumors in Children. *J Magn Reson Imaging*, 23(2) : 99-107, 2006
- Lee J, Jallo GI, Guarnieri M, Carson BS, Penno MB : A Novel Brainstem Tumor Model : Guide Screw Technology with Functional, Radiological, and Histopathological Characterization. *Neurosurg Focus*, 18 (6A): E11, 2005
- Lee J, Jalo GI, Penno MB, Gabrielson KL, Young GD, Johnson RM, Gillis EM, Rampersaud C, Carson BS, Guarnieri M : Intracranial Drug-Delivery Scaffolds :



**Biocompatibility Evaluation of Sucrose Acetate Isobutyrate Gels, Toxicol Appl Pharmacol, 2006**

- Bagley CA, Pindrik JA, Bookland MJ, Camara-Quintana JQ, Carson BS : Cervicomedullary Decompression for Foramen Magnum Stenosis in Achondroplasia. J Neurosurg, 104 (3 Suppl) : 166-72, 2006
- Jallo GI, Volkov A, Wong C, Carson BS Sr, Penno MB : A Novel Brainstem Tumor Model : Functional and Histopathological Characterization. Childs Nerv Syst, [ Epub ahead of print], 2006
- Jallo GI, Becker M, Liu YJ, Carson BS Sr, Penno MB : A Novel Brainstem Tumor Model : Functional and Histopathological Characterization. Childs Nerv Syst, [Epub ahead of print], 2006
- Ahn ES, Bookland M, Carson BS, Weingart JD, Jallo GI : The Strata Programmable Valve for Shunt-Dependent Hydrocephalus : The Pediatric Experience at a Single Institution. Childs Nerv Syst, [ Epub ahead of print], 2006
- McGirt M, Attenello F, Chaichana KL, Weingart JD, Carson BS, Jallo GI : Duraplasty versus Cranial Decompression Alone Reduces Treatment Failure for Pediatric Chiari 1 Patients with Tonsil Herniation Caudal to C1 but Does Not Effect Outcome in Patients with Tonsil Herniation Rostral to C1, Accepted for presentation, CNS Annual Meeting Oral Platforms, San Diego, CA, 2007
- McGirt M, Attenello F, Chaichana KL, Weingart J, Carson BS, Jallo GI : Clinical and Radiological Predictors of Treatment Failure after Suboccipital Decompression for Pediatric Chiari 1 Malformation : Analysis of 279 Consecutive Cases. Accepted for presentation, CNS Annual Meeting Oral Platforms, San Diego, CA, 2007.
- McGirt M, Woodworth GF, Chaichana KL, Attenello F, Carson BS, Jallo GI : Ventricular Dilation Is Not a Reliable Measure of Acute Shunt Failure in Children Having Undergone Multiple Shunt Revisions. Accepted for presentation, CNS Annual Meeting Oral Platforms, San Diego, CA, 2007
- Schkrohowsky JG, Hoernschemeyer DG, Carson BS, Ain MC : Early Presentation of Spinal Stenosis in Achondroplasia. J Pediatr Orthop, 27 (2) : 119-122, 2007
- Scuibba DM, Noggle JC, Marupudi NI, Bagley CA, Bookland MJ, Carson BS Sr, Ain MC, Jallo GI : Spinal Stenosis Surgery in Pediatric Patients with Achondroplasia. J Neurosurg, 106 (5 Suppl) : 372-8, 2007

**Selected Major Lectures:**

- Neuroanatomy and Neurophysiology : Australian Association of ICU Nurses. Perth, Western Australia, April, 1984
- Unusual Pediatric Glioma. Presented at the International Symposium on Pediatric Neuro-oncology, Toba, Japan, November, 1985
- The Surgical Management of Cervico-Medullary Compression in Achondroplastic Patients. Presented at the First International Conference on Human Achondroplasia. Rome, Italy, November, 1986. (Invited Speaker)
- Educational and Scientific Excellence. Presented to Rotary International. Hamilton,

Bermuda, November, 1988

- Medical Success and Social Responsibility. Presented on Martin Luther King Day at Washington University School of Medicine, St-Louis, Missouri, January, 1989
- Minority Health Care in America. National Black Health Study Group, Annual National Health Symposium, Las Vegas, Nevada, December, 1991
- Affirmative Action Panelist. Just The Beginning Foundation Convention/Damon J. Keith Law Collection of African-American Legal History, Detroit, Michigan, September, 1998
- Aspects of Pediatric Epilepsy Surgery. Grand Rounds, Department of Pediatrics, University of Mississippi Medical Center, School of Medicine, Jackson, Mississippi, June, 2000
- Pediatric Epilepsy. Annual Meeting of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, San Antonio, Texas, September, 2000
- Craniosynostosis : Controversies in Treatment. Annual Meeting of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September, 2002
- Symptom Resolution with Cervicomedullary Decompression for Chiari Malformations. Annual Meeting of the Congress of Neurological Surgeons, Denver, Colorado, October, 2003.
- Never Give Up. Trigeminal Neuralgia. Annual Conference of the Trigeminal Neuralgia Association, Jefferson University Hospital, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October, 2005
- Craniopagus : Lessons Learned. Stanford Neurosurgery Grand Rounds, Stanford University Medical center, Stanford, California, March, 2006
- Management of Craniosynostosis. Montgomery/Prince Georges Pediatric Society Meeting. Rockville, Maryland, May, 2006
- Becoming An Adult : Taking Charge of Your Life and Your Care. Hydrocephalus Association Meeting, Baltimore, Maryland, May, 2006
- Bioethics Today. The S. Rexford Kennamer M.D. Distinguished Lecture Series, University of Alabama, Montgomery, Alabama, February, 2007.

### **Selected National Electronic Media Appearances:**

- ABC Nightline, 2002
- NBC Nightly News, 2002
- Charlie Rose Show, 2002
- Good Morning America, 2002
- Stuck on You, Movie cameo appearance, 2003
- Tavis Smiley Show, 2005

### **Selective Major National Print Media Articles:**

- Time

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- Newsweek
- Ebony
- Jet
- Black Enterprise
- People
- Child
- Reader's Digest
- Ladies Home Journal
- Fortune
- Ebony Man
- Life
- US News & World Report
- Investors Business Daily
- Philanthropy Roundtable