

ESCAPE FROM BRUTALITY

Romanian woman Mariana Cuza has faced some of the hardest challenges imaginable.

BY JANICE TEO

Shivering and terrified, 21-year-old Mariana Cuza slid silently into the freezing waves of the River Danube.

She swallowed her terror because she knew it was now or never to escape from Communist Romania to freedom in Yugoslavia.

Death was a real possibility — thousands have died attempting that same crossing.

"I couldn't afford to feel fear. I could not waver," the 60-year-old businesswoman, who now lives in Perth, tells *Challenge News*.

Mariana lived in Romania during dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu's rule.

By the time she was 20 she'd been beaten, gang raped regularly by Ceaușescu's leaders and officers, held at gunpoint by the secret police and imprisoned for "inciting political unrest".

Mariana's worried mother prayed constantly for her. Her father was a lay pastor so Mariana had heard about God her whole life but pictured Him as harsh and cruel.

Deciding that Christianity was not for her, she focussed on getting a good education, surviving, escaping and saving her family when she was settled elsewhere.

She survived the swim across the

Danube, and was resettled in Australia in 1983.

For the next five years Mariana worked two jobs and saved enough money to bring her whole family over.

However, her happiness at being reunited with her father was short-lived; seven weeks after arriving in Australia he died on his knees while reading his Bible.

"I really got so angry at God," Mariana admits. "I turned to other spiritual teachings."

She tried Buddhism, transcendental meditation — and most bizarre of all — a belief in extra-terrestrials which involved New Age practices like astral projection and 'joining' with spirit beings.

"I joined an ashram in Melbourne. I was cuckoo for a while," she laughs.

Mariana's mother and brother Natanael, now a pastor in Perth, prayed and fasted for years "for God to get me out of Babylon. I was in spiritual darkness".

Mariana has had a challenging life. Her husband Mihai was diag-



Mariana Cuza with her husband and daughter.

nosed with multiple sclerosis four weeks before she gave birth to their daughter. He was told he only had five years, maybe less, to live.

"That made me even madder with God!" Mariana says. "I told Him 'You gave me a child but You take my husband. Punish me if You want, but leave them alone!'"

Mihai had a nervous breakdown.

After he recovered the couple decided to move to Perth for a fresh start.

"It was a very, very difficult and stressful time," Mariana shares. "I was depressed and desperate and went even more deeply into meditation."

One day a church flyer landed in her mailbox. "Come to Faith Factory

and enjoy some Tim-Tams!" it read.

None of the other religions had brought Mariana the peace she sought so "I thought 'why not try Jesus?'"

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My beef with the series Beef

BY HARRIET COOMBE

HAVE you heard of the new Netflix television series *Beef*?

I had heard it was wildly popular and thought I would check it out.

It's a dark comedy drama series by Korean director Lee Sung Jin. In the first episode, we are introduced to the titular "beef" — Danny and Amy are involved in a road rage incident. Neither will let the incident go, and the strangers quickly become enemies. Over the course of the season, their acts of revenge only escalate.

Without wanting to give too much away, the series does not end well for anyone.

After watching *Beef*, I cannot recommend it. It's incredibly graphic in parts. Having said that, I found some of the themes interesting and it got me thinking about how it may have ended differently had the characters embraced forgiveness rather than revenge.



In episode three, Danny visits a church. The church band starts to play *Oh Come to the Altar* by Elevation Worship. The words of the song speak to Danny, who has hit rock-bottom:

"Are you hurting and broken within? Overwhelmed by the weight of your sin? Jesus is calling."

"Have you come to the end of yourself? Do you thirst for a drink from the well? Jesus is calling."

"O come to the altar, the Father's arms are open wide. Forgiveness was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ."

"Leave behind your regrets and mistakes. Come today, there's no reason to wait. Jesus is calling."

"Bring your sorrows and trade them for joy. From the ashes, a new life is born. Jesus is calling..."

Danny is overwhelmed with emotion and breaks down during the song. He explains to a family member later that he "had an encounter with God". But the remaining seven episodes make it clear that while he may have had a moment with God, he didn't give his life to Him or allow God to change him.

But what if he had? What if he put his faith and trust in Jesus as his Lord and Saviour? What if he received Jesus' gift of forgiveness of his sins and chose to forgive Amy in turn? It would have been a much shorter television series but I'm sure it would have had a much happier ending!

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Youth truth

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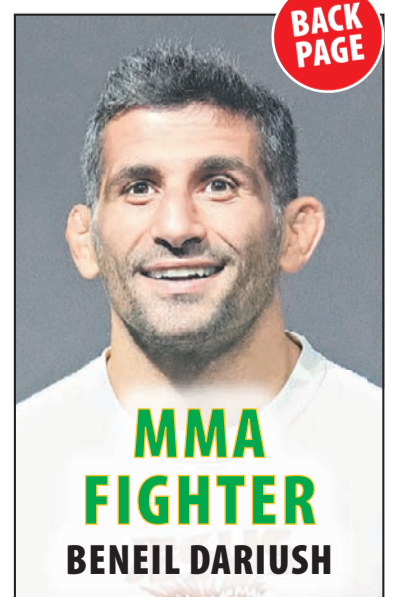


Fun for Kids

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Fame, tragedy, triumph, second chances

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

George Foreman's storied career has many facets: Olympic gold medalist, twice World Heavyweight Boxing champion, TV grill pitchman, philanthropist. But a near-death experience forever altered his life's trajectory. Sony's new biopic conveys his tragedies and triumphs, with inspiration for anyone who ever needed a second chance.

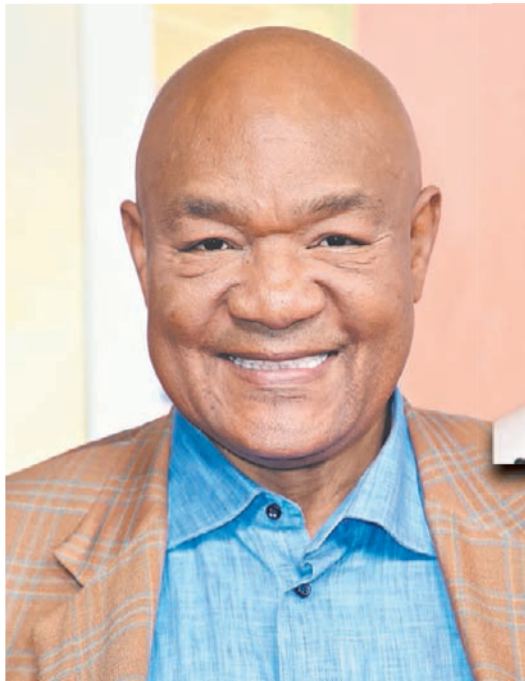
Big George Foreman stars Khris Davis as Foreman and Academy Award-winner Forest Whitaker as Foreman's trainer and mentor Doc Broadus.

Foreman quips that he received his first punch in the 1940s "when the doctor slapped my behind." His memoir says the '50s brought his first thrown punches, the '60s Olympic gold, the '70s his world heavyweight championship, the '80s his unexpected boxing return, the '90s his stunning second world heavyweight championship at age 45, and the new millennium his "King of the Grills" appellation.

Rags to riches resets

As the film vividly portrays, his life has been rags to riches resets. In his impoverished youth, an often absent, alcoholic father and sparse meals taught George to value scraps. Sometimes family dinner was one hamburger divided eight ways, lunch a mayonnaise sandwich.

He frequently skipped school, learning pugilism through street fighting. Hatred and anger fuelled his rage. "Poverty produces a feeling of hopelessness," George recalls. Mugging and theft became routine.



George Foreman at a movie preview in 2017. (Photo by David Livingston/Getty Images)

He craved love and acceptance. When riches grew, he flaunted his possessions.

Killer instinct

In the ring, George "wanted to hurt" his opponents: "I viewed them as animals to be hunted," not as humans; "they were the enemy," he recalls. "I'd say to myself, I'm going to kill him."

Foreman thought money could solve all his problems ... until it couldn't. When his beloved nephew became seriously comatose, George's name, fame and wealth couldn't cure the boy. His mother counselled, "Son, you're just going to have to pray."

"When someone tells you the only thing you can do is pray," he realised, "that's bad." George had "never really prayed before.... I didn't believe in all that religious stuff." He "mocked" Bible readers, considering Christianity "boring...an escape for poor people and little old ladies." But desperate to save his nephew, he

Actor Khris Davis, who plays the lead role, attends the world premiere of *Big George Foreman* at Regal LA Live on April 26, 2023 in Los Angeles, California. (Photo by Paul Archuleta/Getty Images)

finally prayed, asking God to take his life instead.

Near-death experience

The boy recovered. Empty and unfulfilled, George contemplated suicide. After a 1977 match, he blacked out in the dressing room and experienced "utter darkness," "the putrid smell of death," intense fear and "hopelessness."

He emerged from the brush with death believing that Jesus had suffered for him. "Jesus Christ is coming alive in me!" he suddenly shouted on the training table, astonishing his companions, using a name they "had only heard me use in profanity."

Foreman says his new faith brought joy, love, peace, contentment, and significance. Especially impressive was his newfound ability to forgive.

Forgiveness trumps revenge

George had previously considered hiring a hit man to kill Leroy, a former friend and employee who had swindled him by selling his house and treasured possessions. Now he sincerely forgave Leroy, who was



astonished. George forgave his previous enemies and asked forgiveness. He told friends and other boxers his story: Muhammad Ali, Archie Moore, Joe Frazier, Sammy Davis Jr., Marvin Gaye.

George became a pastor, speaking internationally about his life changes. His alcoholic father came to faith and stopped drinking. George founded a youth center to help troubled kids.

The film poignantly depicts that George has had his share of setbacks. His wife left him. He suffered bankruptcy from others' mismanagement, but resumed boxing to pay the bills and fund his charity.

Turning tragedy to triumph

Turning tragedy to triumph is a life theme. An image of Ali standing in victory over a defeated Foreman reminds him that his disappointing

failure – losing the heavyweight title – began his spiritual search. He and Ali became good friends. "All things work together for good to those who love God," Foreman affirms.

I suspect that anyone who's lost a spouse, or a job, or friends or money or popularity or opportunity will identify with George's story. I certainly can; I've lost them all. *Big George Foreman* should inspire folks to consider the boxer's hope-through-heartache outlook. I have a hunch that's his wish.

Rated PG-13 (USA) "for some sports violence." The movie opens in Australian cinemas on July 20, 2023.

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JAPANESE WOMAN FINDS PEACE THROUGH SONG

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

In a moment of extreme accumulated frustration, Chiaki Gadsden told her alcoholic mother during a fight: "Shut up and die!"

Chiaki's mother died that day.

"The next morning my father told me, 'Chiaki, your mother died today,'" she narrates on a Japan Kingdom Church video on YouTube. "I didn't feel anything. I just couldn't believe it. I went home and saw her body and still couldn't believe it."

Chiaki's childhood frustration and source of loneliness and abandonment was her mother's alcoholism. Her father didn't like to see his wife drunk, so he stayed away from home. Her older sister had become hardened and unfeeling, so she paid no heed to Chiaki's pleas that they help their mother.

Eventually, Chiaki became uncaring also and took drugs and became promiscuous as a coping mechanism, she says. The coping mechanism never worked very well.

Meanwhile, she grew hard-hearted and dis-



Chiaki and Marcel Gadsden

tant from everyone.

That morning Chiaki and her mother fought, as they did many days. The sinister effects of alcoholism over many years reached a boiling point and Chiaki uttered the words she later regretted: "Shut up and die!"

She pronounced the awful words, but didn't

want the horrible result. So when her mother died that day, Chiaki was staggered.

"I started to blame God: 'Why didn't you help me?'" she remembers. "I thought, what's the point of this life? No one can help. My family didn't help. God didn't help. What is this life?"

At a family meeting, Chiaki's father made a terrible announcement to everyone.

"He said my mother's death was my fault," Chiaki says.

"I was shocked that he said that," she says. "I could not understand why he would say that."

"Oh, it's my fault that my mother's dead?" Chiaki thought. "My father said so. Then it is bad for me to be here. If I'm not here, then everyone will be happy."

From that moment, Chiaki no longer sought to have relationships with people. She cut herself off. She lost all hope, all purpose.

"Everything just became darkness," she says.

Then Chiaki was invited to a gospel music festival.

"When I saw and listened to the gospel music, suddenly I felt something warm in my heart," she recalls. "I thought, wow, gospel music is amazing. Then all of a sudden, tears started to pour out. I thought to myself, Why am I crying? I thought, What is this? What is this?"

It was God the Holy Spirit working in her heart. She was so touched, she decided to join the gospel choir. "I must join this singing group," she realised. "Perhaps something will change in my life!"

As she sang, the warm feeling came over her again and again. She loved the feeling but she didn't understand where it came from.

After some rehearsals, she gathered her courage to ask: Why is gospel music so different?

"Gospel music is praise music to God," they told her. "The songs are filled with the love of God."

"Oh, it's about God," she reacted. "Up to that point my view of God was just negative. But the more I sang, the more I felt this strange power. It was through gospel music that I was able to see light in my dark life. Something happened. I got hope and joy."

"Then I realised the feeling was God."

She wanted to learn more about God and began attending church. There she met a gospel music singer in Japan who later became her husband. Today Chiaki and Marcel Gadsden lead a church that breaks stereotypes and reaches out to people who beneath the polite veneer of Japanese culture are conflicted and hurting.

"Though my life and heart was only darkness and though I had no hope, no love for people, no purpose, in the midst of all that I wanted to know God," she says. "I thought if I knew Him, my life would change. After I started believing in God, my life changed dramatically."

This article first appeared on godreports.com and is used with kind permission.

DICING WITH DEATH

Peter Yeo

BY JANICE TEO

Hepatitis at 13 years old. Two heart attacks, skin cancer, testicular cancer, anaemia. Diagnosed with leukaemia at 48, Peter Yeo was given 10 years to live but was told bluntly by his doctors he would probably die long before that.

Remarkably, the former journalist from Singapore defied the odds and lived beyond 10 years — but then at 62 was told he had idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), an incurable lung disease.

Peter had non-medical brushes with death too. In 1984 the plane he was in plunged mid-air with its wings aflame. Fortunately it landed safely and there were no casualties.

In 1997 he was flung five metres from his motorbike after a head-on collision, breaking his back, wrist and clavicle and cracking his pelvis.

Peter has danced with death so much he once quipped: “I now have no fear of death — I have become used to it. I’ve had practice.”

Instead, he tells *Challenge News*, he decided he would continue as he had always done with bad news — “I was just going to live as well as I could with whatever time I had left.

“Every year of my life, long or short, is dedicated to God.”

Now 77 and living in Seattle, the ex-newspaper editor and public relations consultant used to be as hard-nosed and foul-mouthed as they come. His excesses were legendary. He drank, he smoked, he womanised.

“I drank every day,” he shares. “If I was happy, I drank. If I was depressed, I drank.”

He admits he was a godless man even though he was brought up in church and had committed his life to Christ as a teenager.

“But I rejected God when I discovered the world of wine, women, and song,” Peter says. “I preferred the pleasures of the flesh ... it was too much of a sacrifice to return to a holy life.”

“Anyone would think I had ‘arrived’! But I felt I had no anchor and life seemed meaningless.”

Then something happened that changed Peter into a fulfilled person with an unshakeable belief in God.

In 1989 and 1991 he had surgery, and both times while under anaesthetic felt himself floating above his own body.

“I was in total darkness,” Peter says, describing the experience, “I saw a bright patch flying towards me then I was sucked into a dark tunnel. It was a scary experience but when I woke up I dismissed it as a dream.”

The second time, he saw himself at a party. “I wanted to leave, but someone said: ‘Come on, one for the road.’ I heard myself protesting that I had to get home to my family, but they kept saying: ‘One more, one more.’”

“Then I saw myself driving home but I could never get there. Instead I found myself at another party and I realised I was going through a tormenting playback of my sinful life. I knew I was dead — and heard a cold voice echoing my thoughts: ‘You are dead.’”

Somehow, Peter knew that voice was the devil. He spoke into the void: “You mean there is a God after all?” The voice replied: “Yes.”

“I was terrified. I suddenly realised God does exist and so does the devil and punishment for those who refuse to believe in God.

“My wife says that I had a look of terror on my face when I woke up.”

Peter was greatly affected by this second experience. He wondered if it was a warning from God or a hallucination.

Yet he still didn’t change his lifestyle —until another frightening encounter which occurred while he was fully conscious.

He was in his car when the same weightlessness and darkness engulfed him. “I thought ‘is this what it feels like to die’ and I panicked. I wasn’t ready. I had not changed my life after my hospital encounter, but after this one I finally pleaded with God: ‘I don’t want to die! Not yet, not yet!’”

“I needed no more convincing that there is a God — and a hell for sinners. I spoke to a Christian friend and prayed to the Lord for forgiveness. I invited Jesus Christ back into my life, and felt a great burden being lifted from me.”

That signalled a complete turnaround in Peter’s life. He began praying, reading the Bible and worshipping God.

He joined the Christian Business Men’s Committee, went back to his childhood church and served in many ministries.

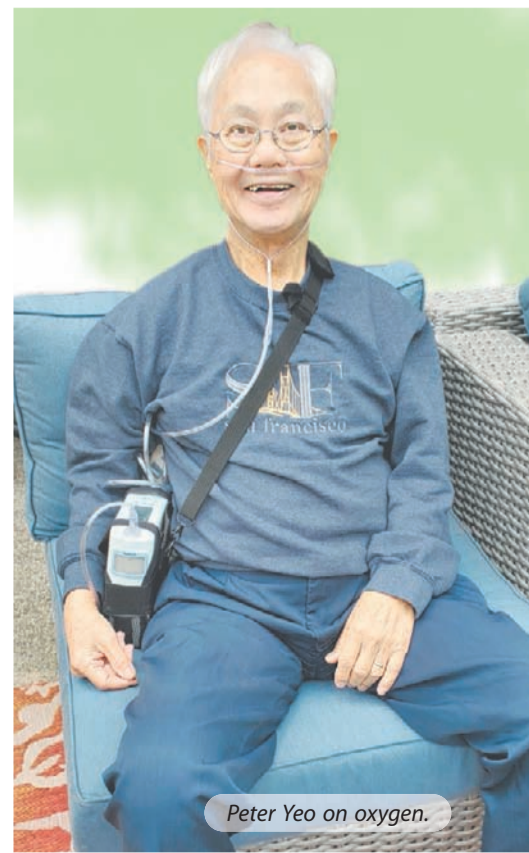
Peter is now in hospice care as his lungs have deteriorated badly. But there is no fear or sadness.

Speaking of how God changed his life, he says: “After I received Christ, my life finally had real meaning and richness as I came to understand our purpose on earth is to share the good news of the kingdom of God.

“God has taken away my worries over tomorrow. I know He hates sin and punishes sinners but He is a merciful God, prepared to forgive even the most ‘hopeless’ sinner. I am an example of that wretched person

who refused to believe in God and who now has an unshakeable faith in Him.

“Today I believe. Today, I know with certainty God lives and there is life after death: I have been there — and back.”



Peter Yeo on oxygen.

Google, help me!

BY MICHAEL ASHCRAFT

Intava typed into Google “How do you heal a crushed spirit and a broken heart?” and the search engine culled two articles. One was scientifically corroborated — take aspirin. The other seemed more difficult — repent and turn to Jesus.

Born in San Francisco, Intava grew up in a family that immigrated from Laos to America. They worshipped Buddha and a host of other gods. In fact, everything had a god. If you wanted your locker at school to be watched over, you prayed to the locker god.

If you need a parking spot, there’s a god for that.

Because she grew up in America, she became familiar with the Ten Commandments. She decided to combine them with the Buddhist rules.

“I did the Christian rules. I did the Buddhist rules,” Intava (22) says on her channel, The Peace Board. “I thought I was a good person. I’m totally going to Heaven. The Buddhist rules were so similar to the Ten Commandments. I’m not breaking my moral code for anyone.”

But then she fell into bad company and started breaking the Ten Commandments.

“I got hurt so bad,” she admits. “But the darkness has led me to the light. I fell hard. I broke the Christian commandments. People only knew me on the outside and said, ‘Intava, no, you’re a good person.’ But on the inside, I was evil.

“You know the crude oil, the black, sticky crude oil before it becomes gasoline? I felt like I was drowning in it,” she says. “That’s what it felt like to be eaten up on the inside by your own sins. I felt so dirty and horrible. I felt there was no way out of it.”

Despairing of her sinful state, Intava prayed to all the gods she knew: the Buddhist gods, the Laotian gods, the Greek gods, the Roman gods, the Egyptian gods, the Mayan gods, the Indian gods.

“I prayed to all of them. I wanted some kind of comfort from them. It was so hard,” she says. “I was just looking for a friend that understood the inside of me. I dug everywhere to find something that helped.”

Intava fell on to the floor and cried.

“I needed a Saviour. It was the stuff of fairy tales, the damsel in distress needing someone to come save her,” she says.

“I was like, ‘Please someone come save me. My sins are eating me alive. No medicine can save me from my sins.’”

After a long, arduous road, Intava turned to Google and typed in: How do you heal a crushed spirit and a broken heart?”

“One article said, ‘Take some aspirin,’” she says. The second article said, ‘Repent, go to Jesus.’”



Intava sharing on YouTube.

Intava chose aspirin. It seemed like the easier option.

“I was hoping it would help me just a bit,” she says. “The aspirin didn’t work.”

Next she tried repentance (turning away from her wrong doing). It was during Covid lockdown.

“God does not [just] hear what comes from your mouth, He hears what comes from your heart,” she says.

When she cried out to Jesus, she felt the darkness in the room.

It was midnight and very, very dark.

But as she prayed, repenting, suddenly the room brightened inexplicably. It wasn’t an electric light. It was a supernatural light.

“It was like the Big Bang exploded in that room. It was like the sun exploded in that room,” she said. “My forehead was down on the ground and my eyes were closed. But I peeked a little bit. I was like, Oh no, this is the holy amazing righteous God in the room!”

“And I was the opposite. I am this evil little pipsqueak. I thought I was going to die at that moment.”

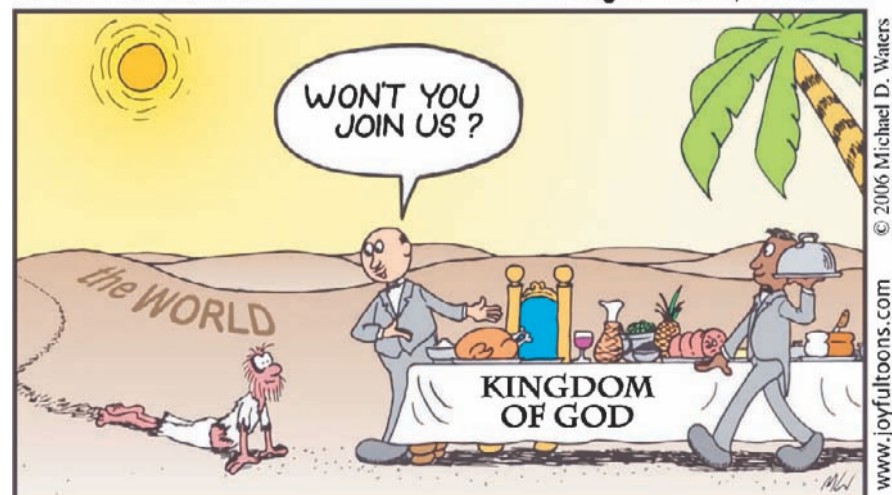
When Intava peeked, she saw the hem of Jesus’ robe. “It was beautiful, the brightest, whitest light ever, glowing as if the hem of his robe had a light of its own, as if it was woven of threads of light,” she says.

So there you have it: repentance over aspirin, just as the Lord’s mercy triumphs over judgment.

“He lifted me up out of that crude oil, and I could breathe for the first time in my life,” she relates. “Jesus came. I called so many gods and they didn’t come. When I called Jesus, He came. All the demons fled. All the thick darkness is gone. I felt like I had so much on my shoulders, and it was gone.”

DESERT OASIS

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. — ISAIAH 55:2 NIV

A medic talks mutations

Mutations in human cells, or mitochondria, don't behave in real life the way they do in comics. You don't become invincible or turn into Wolverine or Captain America if your cells go rogue.

Quite the opposite in fact, says Queensland doctor Bettina Fung. "Mutations cause disastrous consequences, resulting in physical and psychological suffering...they have produced degeneration, disease, misery, and suffering."

Bettina, who emigrated from Hong Kong to Australia with her parents after graduating in 2021, says our mitochondria (membrane-bound organelles inside our cells) are affected by a wide range of diseases.

"The grim reality is that mutations lead to dysfunction, which occurs in varying degrees in the brain, kidneys, muscles, heart, eyes, ears, and elsewhere."¹

As a doctor Bettina is naturally drawn to diseases, their causes and their treatment. But there is also a spiritual reason for her interest.

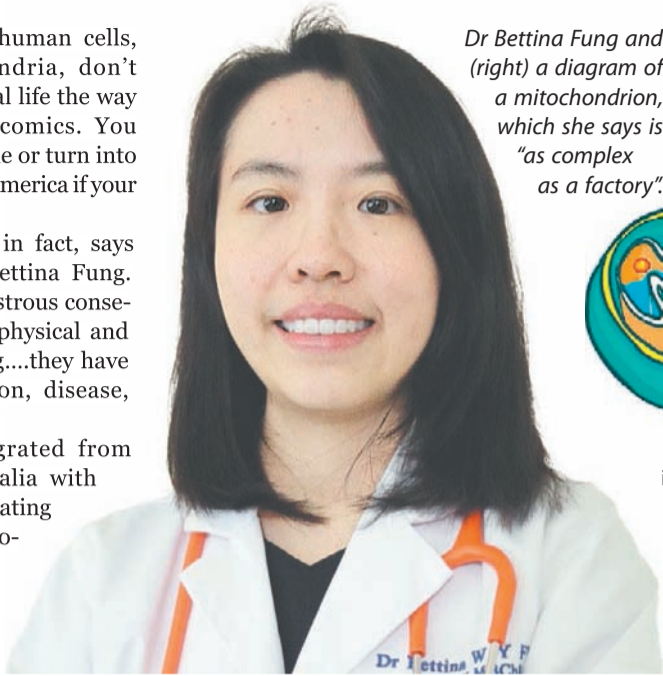
A born-again Christian, she believes in the Biblical account of creation — namely that God created the world in six days — and says that everything in biology proves the work of a Divine Designer.

"Six-day creation is perfectly logical to me since I believe God has the power to create the world in even a fraction of a second," she told *Creation Magazine*.

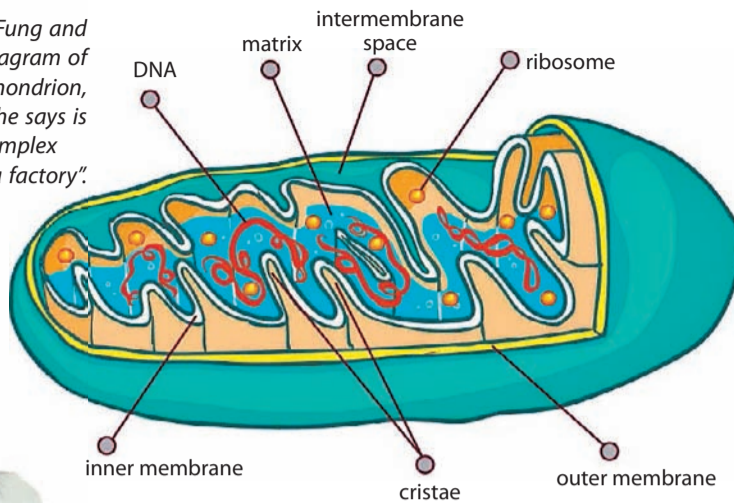
"Since my youth, it has been crystal clear to me that there is a Creator behind all the things we now see—every creature on earth or in the sky or sea; the air we breathe which keeps us alive; the water that comes from the sky that hydrates us; the food that grows from soil that satisfies us."

But the wonders outside are nothing compared to the inside of the human body.

"Studying medicine in Hong Kong further strengthened my faith and my belief that creation is the truth," Bettina shares. "I had medical professors who were great Christians and taught us about the well-designed mitochondria."



Dr Bettina Fung and (right) a diagram of a mitochondrion, which she says is "as complex as a factory".



from simpler to more complex via mutations adding new functions.

"Mutations are accidental changes to the existing DNA code, the inherited information that each generation receives from the preceding one. We do see mutations happening from time to time, but they lead to diseases and death—they don't produce new structures or cellular pathways or 'super humans' with endless energy," Bettina explains.

"Mutations just lead to diseases, not improvement."

"The mutation causing a particular disease can be inherited as an autosomal (non-sex-linked) recessive gene, which means there is a 25 per cent chance that an offspring will inherit the disease. Where the gene is dominant, the chance is 50 per cent."

"Mitochondria have their own DNA. A disease-causing mutation in that will have a 100 per cent chance of being inherited (from an affected mother; sons do not pass it on)."

"Some mitochondrial diseases have a variable age of onset. These include Kearns-Sayre syndrome (KSS), Leigh's disease, and MELAS (characterized by mitochondrial encephalomyopathy, lactic acidosis and stroke-like episodes). These diseases are caused directly by mitochondrial mutations."

"The symptoms of mitochondrial disease...may range from poor growth or developmental delay to hearing impairment, seizures, stroke, heart failure, diabetes."⁴

Tragically, mitochondrial diseases are currently incurable. Only supportive treatment with symptomatic relief can be provided.

"To sum up, a random change (mutation) in the genetics of mitochondria causes disastrous consequences, resulting in physical and psychological suffering. Other than in comic books, mutations have not created more powerful or indestructible human beings."

"Rather, they have produced degeneration, disease, misery, and suffering in this real, fallen world (Genesis 3, Romans 8:20–22)."

Bettina feels strongly it is of "paramount importance" that Christians understand the power of six-day creation and that they accept it as historical fact rather than myth.

"It is important to be equipped with answers, too. We can help others see through the evolutionary attempts to explain how this intricate

“ Mutations just lead to diseases, not improvement. ”

A mitochondrion, she explains, is "as complex as a factory" but condensed into the tiny size of 0.5–3 μm (about the same size as a small bacterium— invisible to the naked eye).

"Each one works to produce energy (in the form of adenosine triphosphate—ATP) from sugar and oxygen, utilising an amazing miniature electric motor."²

"It is like a power plant that supports our lives as well as the lives of many other creatures, including plants."

Bettina says mitochondrial numbers are precisely regulated in each cell according to need. "They can also travel within a cell along special 'railway tracks' (cytoskeletal microtubules)."³

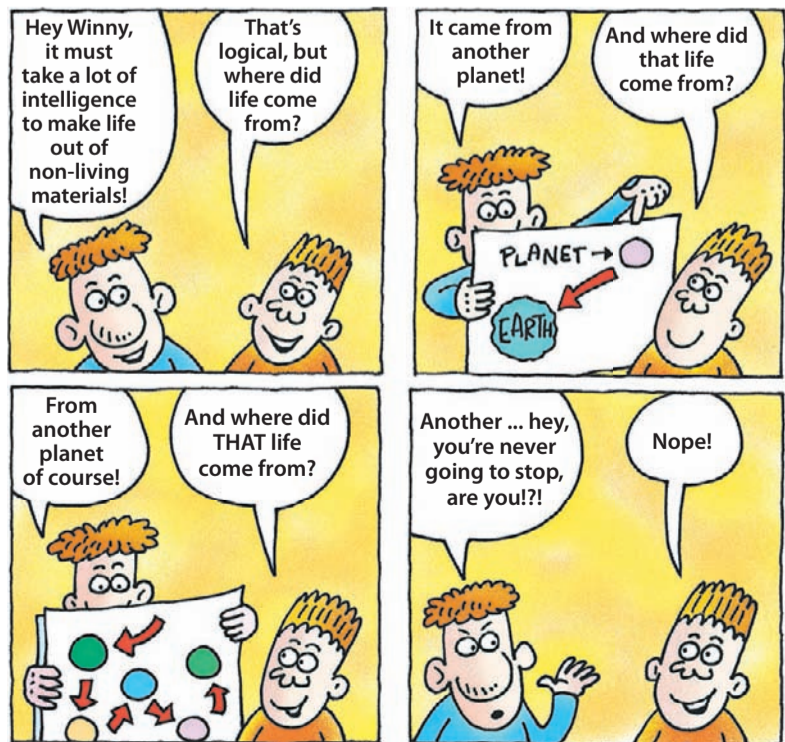
This level of precision and sophistication in the cells' structure and mechanism make it "self-evident that they could only be so ingeniously designed by a super-intelligent Creator."

"When we see a well-made Rolex watch or a motorcar, we know that each had to be designed by intelligent and specialised designers. The mitochondria are much more complex than a Rolex watch!"

She also takes aim at evolution, which champions the theory that living things are supposed to proceed

Dar and Winny

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Believe it or not

BY CREATION MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Turtles fossilized while mating!

BY DAVID CATCHPOOLE

'EXCITEMENT' doesn't even begin to describe it. The announcement of the world's first-ever discovery of copulating vertebrates fossilized "in flagrante delicto"^{2,3} was a news editor's dream.⁴

Note that it wasn't just one aquatic turtle pair, but nine of them.⁵

As lead researcher Walter Joyce told *Discovery News*, "the chances of both partners dying at the same time is highly unlikely and the chances of both partners being preserved afterwards even less likely."⁵

On the other hand, these pairs of turtles are much better understood as a legacy of rapid burial in the global Flood of Noah's day, as the Bible recounts.

First, note their having been described as very well preserved: "incredible fossil specimens"⁵; "truly exceptional fossils"⁴

Second, note that these turtles, identified as *Allaeochelys crassesculpta*, "would have looked very similar to ... the pig-nosed turtle (*Carettochelys insculpta*) ... just much smaller."⁴ In other words, despite supposedly 47 million years having elapsed since the fossilization of these turtle pairs,⁶ they're just the same as turtles today—no evolution.

Third, despite paleontologists' protestations that "it is rare for any animal to die and be fossilized while engaged in a behaviour"⁵ their own documentation is replete with such examples.⁵

The evidence for the year-long planetary cataclysm Genesis describes is all around us and under our feet. ●

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YOUTH TRUTH

MODEL FEELS LIFE IS 'BEYOND FIXING'

Lea DiNonno was a successful fashion model, posing for street billboards and walking on runways for famous designers. On the outside it looked as though she had it all. On the inside though, she felt empty. She hit rock bottom one night, after waking up gripped with fear from experiencing a night terror. It was then that her life was transformed forever.

In a YouTube video, Lea said she had always believed in God and had grown up attending church with her family. But alongside that, she was also exposed to other types of spirituality as her family explored New Age ideas and other philosophies and religions.

"I presumed that there was a spiritual world," Lea explains. "Spirituality was a real thing. There was a God, a source, something over all things like a Creator. I never really had that pegged down to what exactly that was."

As she grew older, Lea continued to go to church but she also continued to research New Age spirituality.

"I had a partial understanding of the reality of God and who He is and the reality of Christ and who He is, but when things maybe took too long when I would pray for them, I would always divert back to more of the New Age spirituality, because that afforded me quicker results," she admits. "I started getting deep into meditation and practising how to get in touch with spirits and angels and deep into understanding shamanism (a religious practice involving interacting with a spirit world through altered states of consciousness)."

Lea also believed she had some New Age 'abilities' and started pursuing mediumship.

"I even started to develop a clientele because I developed more and more of the spiritual giftings. I was able to start to speak and hear from spirit guides, which at the time I thought were angels and I realise now are demonic spirits," she shares.

Around the same time Lea also started her modelling career.

"I was pretty successful in it, and I was in some well-known shows and I did a lot of runway for some really well-known designers," Lea explains.

She said some of the photo shoots required her to wear limited clothing.

"I worked a lot for high fashion like French lingerie designers and swimwear and a lot of high fashion



Lea DiNonno left modelling behind and now runs Philia Ministries.

“I got totally desensitised to sharing my body with the world.”

stuff that was see-through, short and cut open," Lea says.

"I got totally desensitised to sharing my body with the world... You get addicted to the attention, you become exalted as an idol. Everybody wants to be like you and wants your

life, even though inside of me there was a void."

Lea was also involved in a toxic romantic relationship.

"This relationship ended up being extremely abusive," she recalls. "I was abused on almost every level."

When the relationship ended, Lea found herself alone. She had developed night terrors and after a particular bad night, she woke up crying and sweating.

"I just didn't know what to do," she remembers. She knelt on the floor and cried out to God.

"I said, 'I don't know if you're still listening, I don't know if you can still hear me, but if you can, I think I've got past the point of fixing. I think I've broken my life past the point of fixing.' And I felt just a hint of the presence of the Almighty God of the universe. I felt the weight of holiness. And I cried, under the weight of my sin, because in the presence of a holy God – even just the hint of His presence – sin feels so weighty, and I really understood sin. For the first time in my whole life. It felt disgusting, and I said, 'I need You. I can't do this by myself. I'm so sorry.'"

Lea said her life was changed from that moment on.

"Nothing was ever the same again after that. Some of it was slow and some was quick. But over the course of the years I got convicted of [was

challenged about] one thing after the next thing after the next thing and needless to say He has transformed my whole life.

"It has been hard," she admits. "I'm not going to tell you that I got filled with God the Holy Spirit and saved, and everything went great. There was a lot of tearing down. He had to tear the whole building down and build it back up on the rock.

"He had to do it. And I praise Him for it because He has given me peace and He has given me joy. He has given me a song in my heart and He has freed me. Once I started reading His Word (the Bible) and seeking Him with everything I had, He exposed the lies and revealed the truth. I started praying, 'Cleanse me of anything that breaks your heart.'"

Lea marvels at the changes in her life since becoming a Christian.

"I just want to love God with all my heart, soul and mind, love others and aim to walk like my Saviour, Yeshua, which is Jesus's Hebrew name."

Lea and her husband James now run Philia Ministries, which has a popular YouTube channel.

Struggling alone with pornography

BY JENNIFER M

I am 18 years old, with an independent nature and sometimes shy persona. I grew up all my life in the church. When the newly formed contemporary worship team invited me to play the drums, I finally found my place in the church. Life was pretty good, but I felt empty. Later in high school, the emptiness grew and my curiosity grew to

find something, anything to satisfy me. First I turned to petty things, like stealing cigarettes from my abusive uncle. But that wasn't strong enough to distract me from life and fill that emptiness. As a computer geek, I could access a lot of things that the average person would have no clue about how to do. I found what I wanted, and I got what I wanted. Pornography.

Before you knew it, I was addicted. This disease was not a replacement for sex in my life ... in fact, I was a virgin and still am. It was simply something to fill up the emptiness I felt in my life. When I was sad, when I had a bad day, I could simply go into my room, shut the doors, and feel better again. And it was free. It was harmless. No one would know. Every time I turned to the internet, what I lusted after would eventually not be enough. Like drug addicts going after harder and harder drugs, I had to go after harder sources of fulfilment. It never ended until God stepped in.



Stock photo

I don't really know when, or why, or how (besides the much-needed intervention of God), but one day I came to the sudden realisation about how screwed up my life was. My father used to smoke, and he quit smoking COLD. No patches, no gradual cut down. That's what I knew I had to do. I discovered that God was the only thing that could heal my emptiness. I deleted EVERYTHING off my computer. All the web pages, all the

videos, all the passwords, everything that would lead me back down the path that had labelled me a disgusting person. Harmless curiosity so easily turned to addiction.

Soon after, I went on a Christian retreat. I was excited, but I didn't expect

the life-changing effect it would have on me. That weekend I rededicated my life to Jesus Christ. This means that I said to God once again: I want to live for You, totally and completely. I want to be a new creation, transformed by the love You have shown

me. I know that I have done many wrong things, and even the righteous things that I do are not worthy of You. But I also know that God saved us because of His mercy, not because of things we had done. So from that day on, I made a commitment to God, saying that what

He thinks would be more important than what the world thinks or I think, and that all that I do will be for His glory, things that He wants me to do.

The love that I experienced at the retreat was the thing that won me over. I knew that God loved me... but this much?! I was surrounded by people I didn't know that were serving me left and right, praying for me, giving me advice, and expressing the love they had for me. But why did they love me, a complete stranger? The Bible says that "we love because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). They loved me because they felt God's love

for them. And now that I feel God's love for me, I want to share it with the world as well! After that weekend, Jesus was shining in my face and in my actions. Every day I have found reason to praise God... there was no emptiness left in me. No anger. No loneliness. No sadness. No fear. In Psalms 119:62 it says, "At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws."

That's how I feel right now. I feel like rising in the middle of the night, just to praise God and worship Him for the change that He's brought in me and my friends. You can never be too young or too old to change because of God.

Today. Today give yourself up to God – fully and completely. You have nothing to lose, and eternal life to gain. Paul says in Romans 6:23, "For the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." Take that offer and run. Run to God because you are His and always will be. When the whole world has turned away from you, He will be there, because He is, was, and is to come. And He loves you.

This article was first published on EveryStudent.com and is used with kind permission



Lea DiNonno in her modelling days.

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YOUTH TRUTH

I MADE A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL



Victoria Batiste was five years old when she first started hearing strange voices. At the time her parents were often drunk or high, verbally abusive and sometimes violent. The strange voices that only she could hear told her she was special. And they led her on a journey exploring the supernatural and eventually to making a deal with the devil.

In an interview with CBN, Victoria says her father misused the Bible to justify his harsh brand of punishment.

She remembers him, “slamming me on the ground and choking me, telling me, ‘If thine arm offends me, cut it off.’ Like basically he was saying that ‘I’ll just cut you off and leave you behind.’”

She was constantly told she wasn’t good enough, which caused Victoria’s self-esteem to plummet.

In order to cope with the real world, she would escape to a made up world where everything was perfect and she

was in control. “It was always about me,” Victoria says. “People loving on me, people taking good care of me.”

Then voices only she could hear would encourage her, telling her she was special, “and that I’m not like other people and I can never be accepted,” Victoria recalls.

As Victoria explored the origins of the voices, she began practicing witchcraft. For her it was serious business.

“It wasn’t play because I knew that stuff was real. Deeper and deeper, I would go into it. Like I would... astral project, that’s where you project your soul out of your body and you travel in the spirit realm. That’s where I felt like I had power.”

As a teenager, Victoria started using opioids in order to further cope with the pain

and heaviness inside her.

Then one night she was arguing with her mother when she heard a familiar voice: “If you just give your life to the devil, then everything will be okay.”

Victoria remembers saying, “Okay,” and then her hands flew to her mother’s neck. “[I] almost choked my mom to death that night,” Victoria says. “Couldn’t tell you why I stopped choking my mom. I just know I did.”

Victoria’s life began to spiral even further. She fell pregnant and miscarried several times and felt tormented by the voices that once comforted her. “They would torment me in the middle of the night. I couldn’t move. I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t see anything. It was like I was being choked to death. And my heart at that time was just broken. There was nothing but death on the inside of me.”

When Victoria was 18, a family friend gave her a Bible and she promised to read it every day. It took a year for what she was reading to sink in. She was three-and-a-half months pregnant and crashing with her dad, who was staying at a hotel. She couldn’t sleep and thoughts about the Bible were swirling around her head.

“My dad wakes up and he’s like, ‘What’s wrong?’” Victoria remembers. “And I was like, ‘I gotta do something different, man. I don’t want to be like this, and I don’t want my kid growing up in this. The last words that my dad told me before he kicked me out of the hotel room was, ‘Jesus can’t

save nobody.’ And I was at a point in my life where I just didn’t believe that no more.”

Wandering around the streets with nowhere to go, Victoria heard a new voice. It told her: “Go to the church.”

Victoria began to cry and at that point she told the devil: “I’m not doing this anymore.” “In that moment I felt like that’s when I destroyed my contract with him,” she says.

When she arrived at the church, she collapsed in front of the building and sobbed. When people started arriving for the service, they asked if she was okay.

“I said, ‘No. I’m 19 years old. I’m three-and-a-half months pregnant and I don’t have anywhere to go,’” Victoria says.

She says she realised the new voice was God’s voice.

“And I surrendered. That was it. ‘Okay God, this is it. Do you want me to serve you? Do you want me to give my life to you? Here I am.’”

The people outside the church invited her in; there Victoria gave her life to Christ. After that her addictions, the demonic influences and the lies she believed about God and herself began to fall away. “I started to realise that He was a loving God and He was a Father and He was there all along.”

She prayed: “I’m ready to do whatever You want me to do. Because what I did before was not working.”

Victoria spent time at a retreat for victims of domestic abuse where her faith grew and she gave birth to a son named Nehemiah. She is now studying social work.

“When I have an issue, I run to God and I say, ‘Lord, What do we need to do?’” Victoria shares. “I am saved. I am healed.”

The darkness is gone

BY ZACK LIBERTO

I was raised in the Christian faith, but somewhere around high school, I fell away. Like many, I slipped even further away in college. When I wasn’t playing baseball, I was partying ... and it got worse with time.

I developed an addiction to prescription amphetamines and eventually found myself bound by other drugs.

My self-care was non-existent and I was falling into all sorts of sins: lying, cheating, stealing, coveting, and cursing, to name a few. All of these were committed at the expense of my relationships with my family and friends. I was a total and complete slave to sin.

Then, on a sleepless night in the summer of 2019, God moved. Lying in bed, I was overwhelmed by His presence. It’s hard to put into words; it was just pure love and revelation that He was real. All at once, I knew that He was with me and that He would help me.

Overwhelmed by the weight of my many sins, I went to the bathroom, fell to my knees, and called the name of Jesus Christ.

As I asked Him to be my Saviour, I felt the weight of my sin, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and guilt disappear from my shoulders. The shift was mind-blowing ... I could not stop crying! I was free!

As I laid there crying, a robe hanging on the bathroom door suddenly struck me as a symbol of Jesus on the cross.

As the reality of His sacrifice hit me, everything changed — my mindset, my worldview, everything. Romans 12:2 tells us to “*be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind*” and that’s exactly what happened.

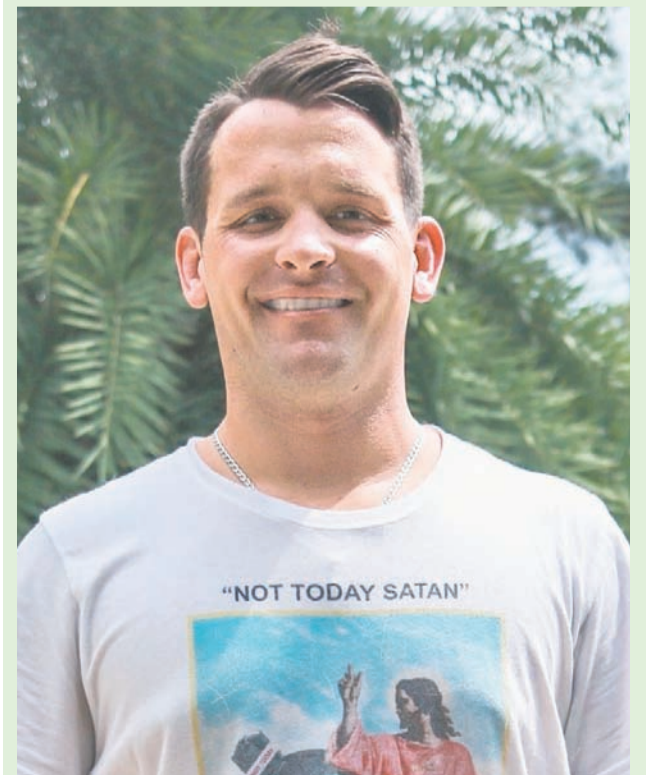
The darkness in my life was replaced by the light and miraculously, I was no longer consumed or owned by sin. I became a new creation!

Just as 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “*The old has died and the new has come.*” The old Zack is long gone.

I’ve stumbled a few times since then, but each time, God has stuck right by me. Despite my failings, He’s helped me continue to grow in knowledge and relationship with Him.

And because of His faithfulness, I can rest in the promise that “*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 1:6). God is good!

As told to and edited by Adira Polite and originally published on Then God Moved



Zack Liberto

“It was like I was being choked to death.”

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“The only love that won’t disappoint you is one that can’t change, that can’t be lost, that is not based on the ups and downs of life - or of how well you live. It is something that not even death can take away from you. God’s love is the only thing like that.” - Timothy Keller



Beneil Dariush of Iran punches Mateusz Gamrot of Poland in a lightweight fight during the UFC 280 event at Etihad Arena on October 22, 2022 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. (Photo by Chris Unger/Zuffa LLC/Getty Images)

TOUGH GUY FINDS TRUE GRIT

Mixed martial artist Beneil Dariush is currently ranked No.4 in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) lightweight rankings but eight years ago he was pursuing a different sport.

Beneil and his family moved from their farm in Iran to America when he was nine. At 18 he began training in Brazilian jiu-jitsu and earned his black belt in five years. He became a no-gi world champion as a blue, purple, and brown belt.

He explains in an interview with Run N Tell on YouTube that he moved to UFC when he was 25 after his mother confided in him that the family was struggling financially.

"It's okay mom, I got it," Beneil told his mother.

"Then I went into my room and I sat down and I was like, 'Why did I say that? What am I gonna do?'"

Beneil considered quitting fighting and getting a 9-5 job but he hated the idea.

"I was in such a bad place, I actually started to pray," he recalls.

Beneil had been raised attending an Aramaic church at Easter and Christmas but he says it was more of a "cultural thing".

"So I just was like, 'Alright God, if You're real, if You're up there, give me something.' A week or two later, I got a call for a professional fight in Brazil."

The only problem was that it was

a professional MMA fight and at that point, Beneil had only trained in jiu-jitsu.

But when he was offered the opportunity to fight MMA, he says, "I didn't want to sound like a wimp," and agreed.

Beneil began training immediately for the fight, which was in six weeks.

Against the odds, he won the fight and the pay cheque that went with it. He remembers handing it over to his mother with pride until he realised his winnings wouldn't last forever. There were payments to be made every month.

"I went back into my room and I prayed again and I was just like, 'Alright, You did it once, but I need another one. I don't know if You're really up there. I need to know if that was really You.'"

Then he had a call from a friend, asking if Beneil could train with him. He agreed and after their first session, the friend insisted on paying Beneil.

"All of a sudden I was working with him three or four times a week. I got another coaching job somewhere else — they just kept offering me jobs to teach and all while still fighting."

Beneil was making enough money

to survive which was bolstered every now and again by his fight wins. He says he started to feel guilty that it seemed as though he received everything he prayed for and wondered what God wanted from him in return.

He remembered an old wrestling coach he had who was also a pastor, Josh Holiday, and gave him a call.

Josh invited him to come to church and Beneil showed up the next weekend — dressed in his Sunday best.

"[Josh] was wearing just jeans and a T-shirt and I was like, 'Okay I may have made a mistake here!' But I sat through the service.

I was very uncomfortable. The music wasn't something I was used to, the message wasn't something I was used to... but then I showed up again the next week and the next week and the next week and as I was showing up something was happening. I kept hearing about Jesus and the sacrifice and the cross. So I picked up my Bible and I started reading it."

Beneil read the entire Bible from front to back. He says he "started to understand the cross". When he finished reading it, he started again.

"At the same time I gave my life to the Lord," he shares.

Beneil now says he recognises that

“**I don't fight out of hate anymore.**”

his talents come from God.

"The whole purpose of my career is to point to my Lord and Saviour Jesus," he says in an interview with Brian Sumner. "People forget fighting isn't just violence. It doesn't necessarily mean violence if two people stop for a fight — it all depends on their intentions ... I believe fighting is the ultimate form of competition ... I don't fight out of hate anymore, I don't fight out of anger anymore — I focus on being disciplined. I focus on what is my motivation and what is my goal. The goal is to glorify God."

Recently a video of Beneil went viral regarding his comments about Iranian protestors.

The demonstrations started in September when a woman was

arrested for allegedly ignoring the government's requirements to wear hijabs or head coverings. She died in custody three days later.

"My people in Iran, I know you are struggling," he said in an in-cage interview. "I know you are fighting for freedom. I want you guys to know we're praying for you and we love you."

He went on to say, "There is true freedom — a freedom that no one can take from you — in the name of Jesus Christ, the son of God. Don't ever forget that. If you remember one thing I say, remember that."

Some news outlets referred to his final comments as "bizarre", but for Beneil, his faith is the foundation of his life.

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