

## Musical Memories Podcast: Brenda Brown

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[00:01] Intro music

[00:12, narration] **Greer McAllister:** I sat down with Brenda Brown, a truly incredible woman. In her life, she has been an assistant pastor, a black belt in karate, and a godmother to eighty-two children. I'm curious about her life, so I ask if she has a favorite song she would like to listen to.

[00:32] **Brenda Brown:** Let's see, let me see. Not really.

[00:38] **G:** Anything from...

[00:40] **B:** No special songs. I write songs, but I don't...

[00:43] **G:** Oh, yeah?

[00:45] **B:** I found one of them, where did I put it? I'll show it to you. Did I put it back in my bible?

[00:52, narration] **G:** She pulls out a large bible and begins flipping page by page until she finds the lyrics to a song she wrote for her pastor.

[01:02] **G:** This is beautiful!

[01:05] **B:** And she was crying when I sang it to her. I say, why are you crying? She says, your song just touched me and the way you just put songs together just for me and the way you word it just for me.

[01:16] **G:** Brenda was an assistant pastor for seven years.

[01:20] **B:** You passed up a job for five, six hundred dollars a week, to work for not even a hundred dollars a week, and you don't get chump change at the end of the month? I said, mother, I have money. It's not for the money. It's for the joy of seeing the kids so excited and helping them learn new things. That means more to me than the money. I like to enjoy my life. Like I'm a traveler. I've been halfway around the world, but I have enjoyed myself. I've stayed in the best hotels, went to the best restaurants, had limousine service the whole time I'm there. I treat myself extra special because it's me. Nobody's going to treat me better than I treat myself, so I treat myself good.

[01:58] **G:** That's beautiful.

[02:00, narration] **G:** In talking with Brenda, I learned that her generosity extends to everyone in her life, especially her godchildren.

[02:08] **B:** I didn't even know I had eighty-two godchildren. I thought I didn't even have thirty children. My pastor said, Brenda, are you in lala land? You're not counting? What you mean? I only have thirty kids yet. Girl, you crazy. You have more than thirty kids already, Brenda. Do me a favor. Before you take any more children, go to each church where all your children are from, and take a count from each church. I got to twenty, then I got to thirty, I got to forty, then I got to fifty! I said, what the hell is this? Then I got to sixty, then I got to seventy, then I got to eighty! Oh my god, why didn't you stop me Jesus? I'm your best buddy! Why didn't you stop me? I made sure they made it through medical school, dental school, and everything else. Lawyer school, all of that. They're doctors, lawyers, school teachers, they're in all different fields.

[03:17, narration] **G:** Brenda supported all of her godchildren immensely, but she had a particular fondness for the boys. She describes how she bought them suits for special occasions and taught them how to treat their girlfriends well.

[03:30] **B:** I take them to a men's shop to buy them suits. I think the suits are supposed to be loose on them and them look like gentlemen, not stuffed up kids stuffed in something too small for them. I want them to look nice and completely clean.

[03:45] Music

[03:57, narration] **G:** I wanted to know more about Brenda's family aside from her godchildren. I asked her to tell me about her siblings.

[04:07] **B:** Five girls, seven boys.

[04:09] **G:** Wow, that's a lot!

[04:10] **B:** Twelve.

[04:11] **G:** Twelve! Wow, and where did you grow up?

[04:14] **B:** Right here in New York.

[04:15] **G:** Nice.

[04:16] **B:** Yeah, in New York. But we were a close-knit family. We've been that way all our lives, as far as traveling, and helping each other do different things. We've been doing it all our lives like that. It just come natural. Don't even think about what we're doing, we just do it. Because my mother raised us to be close together and never let friends or family or nobody interfere with y'all relationships. It's very important that brothers and sisters have a certain closeness among themselves.

[04:45, narration] **G:** Her mother had a great influence on her and her siblings, as well as the adults they would become.

[04:51] **B:** My mother said that cleanliness is next to godliness. And she raised us to be clean.

[04:58, narration] **G:** Brenda tells me how her mother taught them to keep a very clean house. She also says that her mother advocated that her children have a relationship with the two sons from their fathers previous marriage.

[05:11] **B:** It's very important that brothers and sisters be close and do things. My father had two sons before he married my mother. And we didn't owe them nothing, we had a chance to meet both of them. They both are dead now, but we got to meet them. They came, we socialized together, we got together. She says, look at y'all. If I didn't tell your father, because he had two sons before we got married, that you need to meet your brothers, y'all would never have met them.

[05:37, narration] **G:** She recalls how her parents cultivated a strong family bond, but remembers a time as a child when she asked her mother about the origins of her parents' relationship.

[05:49] **B:** How come you married Daddy from a poor family if you was born in a rich family? Brenda, you can't help who you fall in love with, that's what she said. You don't judge people by if they're rich or poor. Me and your father just didn't make it and we agreed on so many things and I just fell in love with him. That's not what's important. It's what's in my heart that's important. I love your father.

[06:12, narration] **G:** Brenda begins explaining to me her family history, expanding on her parents' backgrounds.

[06:20] **B:** So, my grandfather was very rich. He married an Italian lady— I'm sorry, Irish lady. He married an Irish lady. That's how they were a mixed family.

[06:34, narration] **G:** Because her mother belonged to a mixed race family, Brenda tells me about the measures they had to take to exist in a prejudiced world.

[06:42] **B:** The children had guards going to school, guards going to church, guards going shopping. They were protected all their lives.

[06:49, narration] **G:** This piece of their family history influenced Brenda greatly. She says she learned a lot from her mother: values, life lessons, but also her tastes.

[07:02] **B:** I have rich taste buds. It's not my fault, it's my mother's fault! My mother had extraordinary taste. I know how to save money, invest money, and everything. I know how to take care of myself.

[07:15, narration] **G:** Before the end of our interview, I handed back the lyrics of the song she wrote for her pastor. She told me she doesn't have the melody anymore, so I asked if she would read it aloud for me.

[07:29] *Amazing Grace*

[07:30] **B:** Thank you lord for my pastor, who lives the life that she preaches about. Thank you lord for my pastor who teaches God's word. Thank you lord for my pastor, who installed and guide us. According to you, God's word, which is in such a way. Thank you lord for our pastor, who takes time out for us, children and adults, in time of need. Thank you lord for our pastor who teaches us God's word and used to love by. Thank you lord for our pastor who understands what you have for us. We love you! Love, Evangelist Brenda Brown.