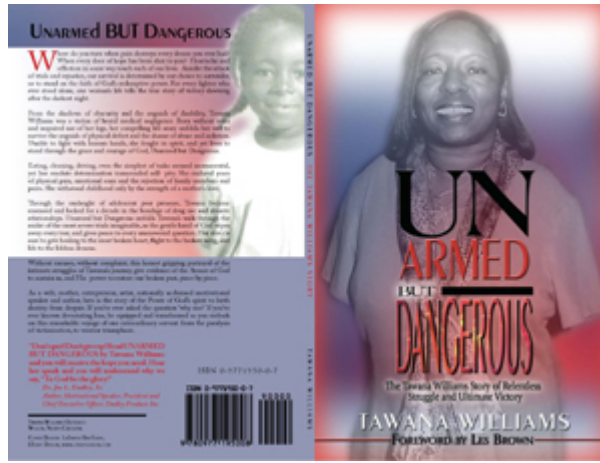




Breathe Again Magazine had the privilege to interview Tawana Williams for **BAM! The Radio Show Podcast**. Her story was so powerful we decided to share the interview with not just our radio listeners but our magazine readers as well. She blessed me tremendously as she is the epitome of strength. Enjoy the interview.



**Tawana Williams** shares her remarkable story with Breathe Again Magazine readers. Born without arms, she has a powerful and uplifting message for people of all walks of life. **BAM Cleveland's** interview with Tawana delves into the heart of this compelling story of triumph, perseverance and determination.

**BAM:** My guest today is Tawana Williams, author of **Unarmed But Dangerous**. This book tells the story of Tawana being born without arms, surviving the trauma of gang rape, abortion, her addiction to crack cocaine and the miraculous birth of her daughter. The message that she is spreading is to look beyond your circumstances and accept God's gift of freedom without limitations. Welcome to the show, Tawana.

**Tawana:** Thank you so much, Nicole. It's a pleasure to be a part of what you're doing here.

**BAM:** You are now officially one of my heroes. I'm just letting you know that now, okay?

**Tawana:** Thank you, sweetie. What an honor.

**BAM:** You are more than welcome. Now, let's just get right into it. You were born with no arms. How did that happen?

**Tawana:** Well, it goes back to 1963 when my Mom was carrying me. In about her third month of pregnancy she had been experiencing fainting spells and dizziness and so she went to her doctor, which was the only Black doctor here in Wilson, North Carolina. He gave her some pills off of his shelf and my Mom believed in her doctor and trusted in her doctor and a few months later I was born without arms. And we found out that the drug that he had given my Mom was

thalidomide. And they were giving that drug to people all over the world and babies were born without legs and arms, with facial disfigurements. So, I'm blessed to just be born without arms. I am so blessed to be here today.

**BAM:** You are. And even in school, your Mom didn't want you to be teased, so she wanted to send you to a special school. Is that correct?



*"My Grandma told me age of four, "Tee, you must not have needed arms because God didn't give them to you."*

**Tawana:** Absolutely.

**BAM:** But you wanted to go regular school.

**Tawana:** I sure did. I was so determined to be normal and to be treated normal. Of course my family treated me normal and the kids in the neighborhood, once they got used to me, they treated me normal. But I just felt out of place at that school.

There was a school in Washington, DC called the Sharpe Health School. And I went to this school from kindergarten to the seventh grade and I did not like it. One summer I begged my Mom to allow me to have the opportunity to go to a public school like my sisters. And she was determined for me not to do it because she knew how mean and cruel the other kids would be to me, but I promised her that I could take it, I promised her that I wouldn't come home crying. So, I just knew that I could take it and she agreed.

And it was rough. From the first day of school I experienced what she was trying to shield me from.

**BAM:** But that didn't stop you, did it?

**Tawana:** Absolutely not. I kept fighting it. I didn't let the kids at school see me cry, but every day coming home from school I was bawling like a baby and had to wipe my face and get straight before my Mom got home from work.

That was a tough time for me just trying to fit in, trying to be liked, trying to be accepted. That was hard for me.

**BAM:** Now, as a society we take so many things for granted. What was it like to be a child growing up without arms, Tawana?

**Tawana:** It was rough, Nicole. It was some hard times and I'm just a strong-willed person. My Grandma Rogers, she passed away in 1999, but she and my Mom instilled such greatness in me. From a baby they let me know that I had what it took to make it in this world.

My Grandma told me at the age of four, she said, "Tee (that's my nickname), you must not have needed arms because God didn't give them to you."

How powerful is that?



Tawana using feet to sign autograph

*"You've got to fight like you've never fought before. I tell life every day, '**Bring it! Whatever you've got for me today, I've got my boxing gloves on my feet. So, bring it on!**'"*

**BAM:** That's powerful.

**Tawana:** And so, just going through the situations that I had to overcome, I was always reminded of what Grandma said to me; everything that I needed I already had within myself.

So, I just pushed my way through. I'd say to myself, 'Today is Monday. I'm going to make it through,' and on and on through the week. I just pushed my way and I pressed my way and I persevered and I was just so determined not to go back to Sharpe Health School that I did it.

I hung in there, I didn't quit, I didn't give up and I persevered and I made it.

**BAM:** Now, how did you do it, though? How did you write? How did you do things?

**Tawana:** Well, I carried my book on my shoulder. My Mom made me a bag. It wasn't actually a backpack, but it was a canvas bag and I would carry it on my shoulder and when I'd get into the classroom I'd put it down on the floor just bending my body and holding it with my chin and my shoulder and lowering it down to the floor. And I'd take my books out and my pencil and paper and I kept up.

I was a straight-A student all through grade school until I got in high school when the peer pressure got tough for me. But all through grade school I was a straight-A student, an honor roll student. I was awesome!

**BAM:** I'm telling you, you are awesome! Now, when people say they can't do it, I'm going to send them right over to you and say, "Don't tell me you can't do it."

**Tawana:** Absolutely. That's right. And that's my motto, you never give up. You've got to fight like you've never fought before. I tell life every day, 'Bring it! Whatever you've got for me today, I've got my boxing gloves on my feet. So, bring it on!'

**BAM:** Girl, you better not get me excited up here now. {Laughter} Now, you went through a rough time when you got older and the peer pressure. You were introduced to crack cocaine, is that correct?

**Tawana:** Absolutely. I was introduced to crack cocaine as a senior in high school when a so-called friend said, "Try it, Tawana. It will make you feel good."

And I lowered my standard. I forgot about the greatness that was on the inside of me and I succumbed to what everybody else was doing and I smoked crack cocaine for the first time. And back then we didn't call it crack, we called it freebasing.

And it blew my mind. The first hit that I took, I was instantly addicted.

**BAM:** And how long were you addicted?

**Tawana:** I was instantly addicted and my addiction consumed my life for ten years, from 1981 until 1991. In 1991 I hit rock bottom. I saw the hurt in Toby's eyes and Toby is now my husband. But I destroyed him on the inside because he knew that I was bigger and better and greater than crack cocaine.

I saw the hurt in his eyes after he came back from Desert Storm in Saudi Arabia. He was in the Air Force at that time. He had left me with money to pay the bills and to keep the household going while he was gone. And I was a crackhead, so of course, you know what I did; I smoked every dime of it.

And when he came home, that was my rock bottom. I didn't have to lose my house, my car, my baby, I didn't have to lose material things and family, but I almost lost the man, the only man, who loved me unconditionally. And that was my rock bottom.

And on that night we lay in bed and I just cried to God. I said, 'God, if you're real you got to help me with this. I can't do it by myself. I want you to do one or the other: I want you to either kill me in my sleep or deliver me from crack cocaine.'

And Nicole , the next day that I opened my eyes, life was brand new. It was like I was born again. I mean, I didn't know who God was, I really didn't believe in God, but I knew God had to be real because I saw my Grandma praying for me, I saw my husband, Toby, praying for me for ten years and laying hands on me and sacrificing and doing what they did for my deliverance.

But I want you to know that that day it was like the beginning of my life. It was like I was transformed. It was powerful!

**BAM:** Because you were a new creature.

**Tawana:** Absolutely.

**BAM:** That's awesome!

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Tawana at speaking engagement

*"The doctors told my Mom I would never walk. I've been walking since the age of two; I'm now 44 years old."*

**Tawana:** And then you know what? Not only did God do what I asked Him to do for me, then I had to step up and do my part, you know? A lot of times when people hear my testimony and I tell them what God did, they don't realize that Tawana had to step up and do her part after deliverance came.

I had to find some new friends and get away from negative, toxic people. I had to stop hanging around crackheads and alcoholics and I just had to change my environment and change my lifestyle.

And so I did that and it's been since 1991. That's all I can say. I give God glory for my deliverance because my deliverance was instant. Just like my addiction was instant, my deliverance was instant.

**BAM:** That is so powerful. One thing you said that really hit home was that you said, "I forgot all the things that God did for me." That's amazing to me, Tawana.

Now, you instantly were delivered from crack cocaine and you started your new life. On your site you have videos of how you fed your daughter. When was your daughter born?

**Tawana:** She was born in April of 1986. She's now 22 years old. And let me just say this: she's not supposed to be here. I'm not supposed to be here, number one, because the doctors told my Mom that I would not live to be two weeks old just because I didn't have arms. The doctors told my Mom I would never walk. I've been walking since the age of two; I'm now 44 years old.

And then they had the nerve to tell my Mom I would never have children. And my daughter April is 22 years old and I now have a grandson that is four years old, so the seed continues.

**BAM:** You've just proven everybody wrong.

**Tawana:** Absolutely.

**BAM:** That's right. That's awesome. You have the videos on your site and your videos actually show how you fed your daughter with your feet and how you changed diapers with your feet.

Tawana, you just get the Amazing Award from me.



Tawana with husband Toby

**"He allowed you to be born without arms for the world to see what a defeated life most of us live."**

**Tawana:** Thank you. I tell people, 'I am the bomb. So, what's your excuse?'

My thing is -you got to do what you can, where you are, with what you have. That is a quote by George Washington Carver that has carried me through the years.

**BAM:** Amazing.

**Tawana:** And I will never be satisfied with where I am in my life because when we get satisfied we get comfortable, we get complacent. So, I just continue to move, continue to grow and just continue to be a blessing to people all over the world.

My husband Toby told me something a while back. He said, "Tee, God didn't allow you to be born without arms for us, your family. He allowed you to be born without arms for the world to see what a defeated life most of us live."

That's powerful.

**BAM:** That is powerful.

**Tawana:** If you think about it, BAM, most of us do live a defeated life. We walk around, we say what we can't do before we try, we hang around the wrong people, we hang around negative people and then we say we want to be this superstar or we want to do that, we want to be great.

How are you going to be great hanging around negative people, hanging around crackheads, hanging around do-nothing people, people that are lazy and slothful and slack and procrastinators? No, it's just not going to happen.

**BAM:** Tawana, how long have you been married?

**Tawana:** I've been married since Christmas Day, December 25, 1991. When I got delivered from crack cocaine, Toby knew that I was over that. He knew that it was done.

He said, "If you stop getting high, I will marry you."

And he did it four months later. I got delivered in August, we got married in December. God is good.

**BAM:** Toby seems like he's an amazing man as well.

**Tawana:** Toby is awesome. He is an awesome man of God and I'm just so grateful that once I stopped seeking a man – and that's what most of us do because I've been there where I sought a man and found exactly what I was looking for. When you seek, you'll find it.

And that's what I found. I found a man to beat me, I found a man that held a crackpipe to my mouth, I found a man that told me I was nothing, that I'd never be anything, that abused me physically, emotionally and mentally.

But when I stopped seeking a man, when I stopped settling, that's when Toby found me. And the Bible says that when he found me, he found a good thing.

**BAM:** A good thing. That's right.

**Tawana:** Yes!

**BAM:** You're awesome, Tawana. I tell you, I could talk to you all day long. Now, let's talk about this book.

You're on a mission right now and you're traveling all across the country, is that correct?

**Tawana:** Absolutely.

**BAM:** And you are spreading the message of hope and inspiration. What are you trying to tell the world?

**Tawana:** What I want to convey to the world is that we all need to look at our own lives and where we are in our lives right now. And we need to ask ourselves, "What is it that you want to accomplish?" And once you determine what it is that you want, then use what you got. I did it.

Do not come up with excuses, "Well, I don't have the money. I don't have the resources. I don't know the right people." You know what? I found in life you're either going to have excuses or you're going to have results. You can't have both.

And there's another quote by George Washington Carver that I love and it simply says that "99% of all failures come from people who have the habit of making excuses." That's powerful.

So, what I'm trying to convey to people is that once you stop living an excuseful lifestyle and you start moving towards your greatness or towards your dream or whatever it is that you want to have in this life, it will happen.

I just was not satisfied with my life where I was, so I decided to use what I had and to continue to move and things began to happen for me. Once I stopped complaining about my situation, the quality of my life began to change. And through the inspiration of desperation I began to use what I had. And all the time and energy I spent complaining about my situation, BAM, guess what? My situation never changed and yours won't either.

So, that's the message in a nutshell that I want people to know. That you've got that same power; anything you want to happen in your life, it's possible. It can happen if you align yourself with the right people.

When I tried to go out in the world and get a job and I was turned down and they said you can't get a job, guess what I did? I created my own job.

**BAM:** Go ahead, now.

**Tawana:** I am the CEO of Tawana Williams Outreach. I write my own checks. My husband and I, we travel all across this country, sometimes 20 to 25 times per month.

I decided that I was going to do this. I decided that I was going to make a career for myself. I wasn't going to stand out in front of a store begging for money or a handout. I wasn't looking for a handout. I was looking for an opportunity to create a life for myself.

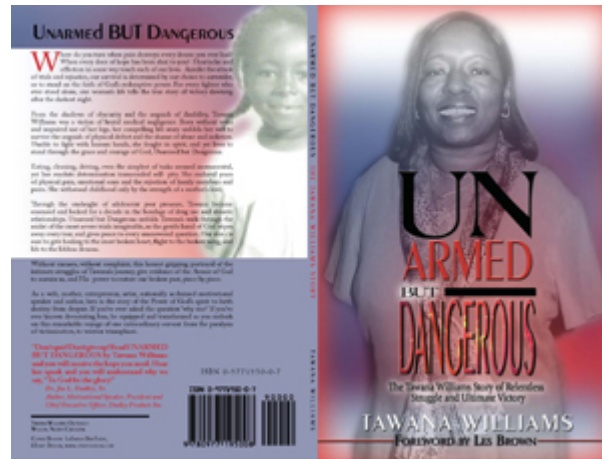
And I realized that all the bad things that had happened to me in life—being raped, being molested by my stepfather, being addicted to crack cocaine, experiencing abortion—all of those things could have made me bitter or better and I chose to be better and you've got that same power.

**BAM:** You bad, girl! I'll just tell you - you bad. {Laughter} I can't say nothing else. Right now my hands are up. It's like, "You just do your thing!"

Tell our listeners how they can contact you and how they can get your book, how they can book you to come to their church, their organization, their women's meetings. I want the world to know how they can get in touch with you.

**Tawana:** Well, my website is [www.tawanawilliams.com](http://www.tawanawilliams.com) or you can email me at [motivationalspeaker2003@yahoo.com](mailto:motivationalspeaker2003@yahoo.com). My phone number is 252-291-6081.

And I just want to say, BAM, that everybody that's under the sound of my voice needs to order a copy of ***Unarmed But Dangerous***. My book will change your life. This book will move you towards your greatness.



It doesn't matter where you are in your life. You can be a doctor, lawyer, preacher, somebody that's low in your life or addicted to drugs. ***Unarmed But Dangerous*** will move you, will give you no more excuses. It won't allow you to say what you can't do.

What ***Unarmed But Dangerous*** will do is make you begin to live your dreams and to live your life full so that when you die you die empty.

**BAM:** That's right. I think all youth groups should have it, all homes should have it, all people across the nation need to have it: book groups, women's groups, women's ministries; even high schools, Tawana.

**Tawana:** Absolutely. My book is everywhere. It's that tool. I had a lady call me one day and she said, "Miss Tawana, I read your book and I'm not trying to be funny and I love the word of God, but I'm putting your book up here right next to the Bible."

I was like. 'That is deep.'

**BAM:** That's right. That is so true. Well, Tawana, it's just been a blessing speaking to you and if we can assist you in any way to spread the word about your book, spread the word about what you're doing, email us and let us know. We will assist you in getting the word out.

I just thank you for sharing your story with others to provide hope, inspiration and encouragement.

**Tawana:** Thank you so much, Nicole

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### **About the Interviewer**

Nicole Cleveland is founder of Breathe Again Magazine Online and BAM! The Radio Show Podcast. She is on a mission to empower, encourage and motivate women by posting real life articles of women overcoming adversity. Visit [www.breatheagainmagazine.com](http://www.breatheagainmagazine.com) or contact her at [editor@breatheagainmagazine.com](mailto:editor@breatheagainmagazine.com)

