My Underdog Story 2026

By Willie Lee Parker III

A story of survival, addiction, redemption, and purpose.

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My name is Willie Parker.

For a long time, I believed my life was already over before it even had a chance to begin.

I wasn't born into stability, peace, or encouragement. My childhood was filled with chaos, fear, confusion, and pain. My parents divorced when I was young, and after my mother won full custody of me and my sister in Colorado, my father kidnapped us and fled across the country to Mississippi.

From that point on, life became unstable.

We moved constantly from place to place and school to school. Every school taught differently, and eventually I fell so far behind academically that I stopped believing in myself completely. By fourth grade, I had already mentally given up on school. I would write my name on assignments and turn them in blank because deep down I believed I just wasn't smart enough anyway.

At school, I was bullied because I wore secondhand clothes and torn-up shoes. I was placed into special education classes and alternative school programs because I refused to participate anymore. Teachers thought I was lazy or disrespectful, but the truth was I had already lost hope in myself.

At home, things were even worse.

My father abused me mentally and physically for years. He beat me with belts, sticks, wires, and his hands until my back, legs, and body bled. There were days I couldn't even sit down at school because the pain was so bad. Teachers thought I was refusing to listen, but I stayed silent because silence felt safer than telling the truth.

My father constantly told me I would never become anything in life. He told me I was a mistake. One night at the dinner table, because I was chewing with my mouth open, he hit me so hard he flipped me backward out of my chair. To this day, my lip still carries the scar from that moment.

For years, he convinced me my mother didn't care about me. When I was younger, he told me she was dead. As I got older and began questioning things, the stories changed. He would say she abandoned us or wanted to send us away. Even the Christmas presents my mom sent us were secretly rewrapped and pretended to be from him.

Growing up like that broke something inside me.

By the time I was 16 years old, I had finally had enough. My father bought me a bus ticket to Houston, Texas, to go live with my mother.

But when freedom finally hit me, I didn’t know how to handle it.
After years of pain, fear, anger, and confusion, I went completely out of control. I started partying heavily and drinking almost every night trying to numb everything I had experienced growing up. Drinking led to worse decisions, and before long I became someone I never imagined I would be.
I became a liar.
I became a thief.
I stole from people, stole from cars, robbed drug dealers and businesses, and slowly destroyed every relationship around me. Addiction completely took over my life. I was hurting so deeply inside that I stopped caring what happened to me.
Then in September of 2015, everything finally caught up with me.
I overdosed and was pronounced dead for 6 mins on the scene.
Doctors placed me into a two-day coma, unsure if I would ever breathe on my own again.
The last thing I remember before everything went black was hearing someone screaming in the background:
“Call 911! Call 911!”
Then there was nothing.
No sound.
No feeling.
No sense of time.
Just darkness.
Then suddenly, I saw a bright light.
My eyes were closed, but the light was so bright it felt like it was shining straight through my eyelids. Then I felt what seemed like fire starting inside my thighs and spreading throughout my body.
It felt like someone poured gasoline on me and lit me on fire.
I remember screaming:
“I’m on fire! Somebody put me out!”
And I heard a voice respond:
“I’m trying! Relax!”

Then everything went black again.
I woke up that Monday morning in the ICU with my mother and stepfather praying beside my hospital bed.
That's when I learned I had been pronounced dead at the scene.
But even after surviving death, my life still spiraled downward.
I became homeless for two years because nobody trusted me anymore — and honestly, I didn't trust myself either. I lost friendships, relationships, opportunities, and purpose. I was robbed while homeless. I hit rock bottom emotionally, mentally, financially, and spiritually.
I truly believed my life was over.
Then one day, years later, I found out my father had died.
And something inside me changed.
For the first time in my life, I realized he no longer controlled me. His words no longer had power over my future unless I allowed them to.
That realization changed everything.
I had two choices:
Continue living like a victim…
or fight for a different life.
So I made a decision.
I joined a GED program.
For the first time in my life, I actually applied myself academically. I studied. I showed up. I kept pushing even when I doubted myself.
And in just four months, I passed my GED.
Today, I'm college bound.
Not because life suddenly became easy.
Not because I'm smarter than everyone else.
But because I finally stopped believing the lies spoken over me my entire life.
That's also why I created Have Faith Prep.
Because I know there are people out there right now who feel exactly like I once felt.
People struggling with addiction.
People who were abused.

People who were bullied.
People who feel behind in life.
People who feel hopeless and forgotten.
I understand that pain because I lived it.
But I also learned something important:
Your past does not have to dictate your future.
You are not your addiction.
You are not your trauma.
You are not your failures.
And you are not the names people called you.
There is hope.
You matter.
And if somebody like me — a dropout, addict, thief, homeless man, someone who overdosed and was pronounced dead — can stand here today college bound with purpose and a vision for helping others…
Then your story is not over either.
Sometimes a comeback starts with one decision.
One decision to believe your life can still become something greater.
And that one decision changed mine forever.
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