

## Alphonso's Dream

This story originally appeared in *Coincidence or Godincidence Stories of miracles, mysteries and hope*. By Steve and Kathi Rose.

Alphonso James, was a 16-year-old uneducated, poor, African American champion break-dancer, and a pronounced “tough guy” in his Milwaukee neighborhood. He lived with an anger that left him “on the edge” most of the time. If you knew his family story, you would understand just why an ordinary day included cruising, hanging out, looking for action and usually finding it. He had enemies. He never knew when he would be the target of a gang lookin’ for him. A few weeks earlier he’d been involved in a fight with a rival gang. Tempers flared, knives and fists were drawn, and blood was shed, though no one was mortally injured.

“Fonz, we’ll get you,” declared a rival gang member as he fled bleeding profusely from a knife wound inflicted by AJ. The local hospital was known for their constant availability to treat the “gun and knife club.”

So you can understand that there was incredible tension for AJ who was living with his head on a swivel, always expecting a snake under every rock. It would have been bad enough to be living in the inner city, never knowing where his next meal was coming from, but there were these concerns too. Welcome to “Alphonso’s world.”

AJ’s lived with his mom, Julia, in the family’s “turn around and see yourself home.” When it came time to go to sleep for the night a broken down couch served as his resting place in the living room where the picture window faced the street. One particular night, for some reason, mom sat in a chair alongside of him as he slept. She couldn’t help but notice her boy’s chest heaving and his body twitching throughout the night. Then she spotted a car parked on the street outside the home. In no time, four teenage boys exited the vehicle, leaned against it while gaping at the James’ house.

“What’s going on?” wondered Julia. “Who are those kids?”

The entire time they stood outside, it was clear they were contemplating something and, in Julia’s mind, it wasn’t good. After about an hour, at approximately 3 a.m., they got back in their car and quickly left. Had they seen something? Had they been frightened off? Who knows, but they were gone and mom, for one, was relieved.

The sun began to break through bringing a new day with it, but AJ was still twitching and reeling as he slept. Finally an exhausted Alphonso woke. He felt as though he hadn’t slept a wink. A nightmare had literally robbed him of all his rest. He didn’t think too much of it at the time, but it came back to haunt him later that day.

Here’s what he dreamed. He saw a vision in his mind, much like a split screen. On the left side he saw himself dead in a casket! He was laid out in the only decent outfit he owned. It was frightening, of course, because even though he was always aware that he had enemies, he did feel somewhat invincible. On the other side of the “screen” vision he saw a god-awful place with cement walls and bars. The atmosphere was heavy and evil. He had never seen this place before and was sure that he never wanted to again! Although he was tempted, he decided not to tell anyone about his dream.

Just two months later, two policemen arrived at his front door, insisting that he come downtown to talk with them. He assumed it was about the stabbing. It wasn’t. Although he was wide-awake, AJ found himself in the middle of a real-life nightmare.

“I stabbed somebody a couple months ago,” he admitted, “But I didn’t kill nobody!” Alphonso proclaimed. Alphonso, scared out of his wits, was interrogated by detectives for hours, threatened and tricked into signing a piece of paper that turned out to be a confession.

For months this young man sat in jail with his very life hanging in the balance while he waited for trial. He could not imagine how he could be convicted. Because he hadn’t done it there would be no evidence. “But what if?” he thought from behind locked doors.

After a three-day trial ended after minimal testimony that included eyewitnesses who didn’t tell the truth and unenthused personal counsel who barely cross examined the prosecutions witnesses. AJ’s greatest fear became his reality, a guilty verdict. Now, he’d be torn from his freedom, family and most painful of all, a new baby daughter named Shakkarish. Alphonso was sentenced to life in prison.

One nightmare flowed into the next as he was taken north to Green Bay Correctional Institution. He exited the vehicle in shackles, was led through an open door that slammed behind him, and then was processed. And then, he witnessed something strange. He saw cement walls and bars, the exact ones he had seen in his dream that summer, although it meant nothing to him at that time.

The first few years of incarceration were pure hell. Learning to survive prison environment fueled James’ deep-seated anger. Chaplain Paul Emmel began to visit AJ regularly while he was in segregation. “Alphonso, God loves you and has a plan for your life,” he would tell him.

AJ didn’t want to hear it. Quite frankly, without getting into detail, he said and did things to this man of God that no one would have done to his worst enemy. Chaplain Emmel, however, kept coming back day after day, week after week, and month after month, always with the same message.

“Alphonso, God loves you and so do I,” he told him.

What Alphonso was too proud to admit to Chaplain Emmel was that he couldn’t read. Sometimes pride can be a powerful motivator. AJ got a dictionary from a prison library cart. He taught himself to read and in Alphonso’s words, “After ten years of never giving up on me, Chaplain Emmel had loved the hate away from me.” AJ had a powerful spiritual awakening! Now, a renewed man, no longer in fights, dealing drugs or leading the gangs from the inside, he was doing and seeing things quite differently. Many found it strange to see him reading and praying.

Shortly after his conversion experience, Alphonso found himself chatting with a fellow inmate. Actually they were serious enemies ten years earlier in Milwaukee. What the man told James provided an incredible revelation.

“Fonzo,” he began. “One night after we had it out wit’ you guys, the boys and me was outside your crib. We was there most of da night. We was gonna come in an’ kill you!” he confessed.

It was then Alphonso realized his dream of had come full circle. Nearly ten years later, he now caught what God was trying to tell him. Remember that in the right side of the vision he saw the God-awful place with bars? That was identical to the site he saw when he entered the Green Bay Prison! Although falsely convicted he was alive. If you recall, in the left side of his dream he’d seen himself in a casket. Apparently that was exactly the plan the devil had planned for him the night the “bad guys” were waiting outside the James house!