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Darryl Strawberry's Way to the Cross

By Mimi Elliott
The 700 Club

[CBN.com](#) – FAMILY LIFE

Coming to peace with God was a long, hard struggle for Darryl Strawberry. He was the middle of five children born to Monica and "Big Hank" Strawberry. Big Hank's nickname was well-deserved -- he was a big guy, and he was also one of the best softball players in Los Angeles. Unfortunately, Darryl says Big Hank passed down a lot more than just his size and love of sports.

Big Hank worked nights at the Post Office. Afterwards, he'd go out drinking, gambling, and carousing with other women. When he'd get home, he'd plop down on the bed. Those were the good nights. Other nights, he'd fight with his wife, "yelling crazy nonsense half the time," Darryl says. His family was scared of him, and Darryl was often the target of Big Hank's rage.

One night, Big Hank came home drunk and grabbed a shotgun from the bedroom closet. For unknown reasons he threatened to kill everyone. Darryl's oldest brother, Mike, decided it was time to stand up to him, so he grabbed a skillet. Ronnie, Darryl's other brother, grabbed a butcher knife. Darryl grabbed a frying pan. Moments later the police arrived, and Big Hank left and never came back.

MEET THE METS

Darryl was a natural athlete. He played basketball and baseball at Crenshaw High (a school known for its sports) in south central Los Angeles. The team garnered national attention, and scouts and writers came to watch. Darryl didn't disappoint; he hit .371 his junior year and .400 as a senior. The New York Mets took notice, and drafted him as the number one overall pick in the 1980 amateur draft. By the age of 21, Darryl made it to the major leagues. That year he slugged 26 homers and was named the league's Rookie of the Year 1983.

Off the field, Darryl says life was one big frat party. The Mets drank to celebrate winning, and drank when times were rough. They took amphetamines "like mints" to perk them up, and other drugs just for fun. By 1986, the Mets were the best team in the league (and the rowdiest).

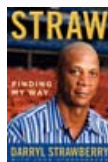
Darryl even picked fights with his teammates. During spring training one year, he got into a brawl after one of them called him a crybaby. His wild life affected his home life, too. One night during the playoffs, Darryl came back to his hotel, drunk and "probably on speed," he says. His wife Lisa had the chain on the door. Darryl burst into the room, got into a shouting fight, and smacked her so hard that he broke her nose. Years later he got into another fight with Lisa, only this time he pointed a gun at her. Police arrested Darryl and he spent the night in jail. A short time later he went to alcohol rehab for the first time. Darryl and Lisa later divorced.



WATCH NOW

Watch Darryl's Interview Now!

Book



Author, *Straw: Finding My Way* (Harper Collins, 2009)

Website

www.darrylstrawberry.net

Credits

Number 1 overall pick in the 1980 MLB Amateur Draft

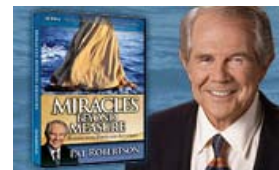
1983 National League Rookie of the Year

8-time All-Star selection

4-time World Series Champion (1986, 1996, 1998, 1999)

17-year MLB player (Mets, Dodgers, Giants, Yankees)

335 career home runs, 1,000 career RBI's (runs batted in)



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HOMECOMING

The Mets grew tired of Darryl, and they refused to sign him to a big contract; so Darryl decided to take a five-year, \$20+ million offer from his hometown Los Angeles Dodgers. Back home Darryl was close to most of the bad influences in his life. He started smoking crack because he says he was in great pain, and drinking and doing drugs brought temporary relief. In 1992, a relative of his suggested he go to a Morris Cerullo convention, and that day Darryl got saved. Darryl hoped it would mark the end of his problems, but that wasn't the case. Cerullo told Darryl that the "enemy" was going to attack Darryl. Soon Darryl dislocated his shoulder while chasing down a fly ball, and he reverted back to his old life of drinking and drugs.

In 1992, he ruptured a disk in his lower spine, something he attributes to the constant abuse he put on his body. Darryl tried to bounce back too early, but that just made things worse. In '92 and '93, he played in only 75 games. During this time, Darryl met and married another woman, Charisse. Darryl got into a fight with her, too, and was arrested (although charges later dropped).

Things got worse; in 1994, the IRS announced that Darryl was being investigated for tax fraud. In April, Darryl went partying, and missed his team's next game. He decided to check himself into the Betty Ford Clinic, but the Dodgers were frustrated with him so they released him. Darryl later signed with the San Francisco Giants, and while he flourished, his season was cut short because of the player's strike.

At home, Darryl's mother was diagnosed with breast cancer and she died the following summer. Soon Darryl slipped back into drinking and drug abuse. In January of 1995, Darryl tested positive for cocaine. MLB officials suspended him for 60 days and the Giants released him. The following month, Darryl pled guilty to felony tax evasion. He was fined \$350,000 and sentenced to six months of probation and house arrest.

BACK TO THE BIG APPLE

New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner thought Darryl deserved another shot, so he signed him to a deal. Darryl began playing after his house arrest was over, and he enjoyed a few successful seasons with the Yankees. Then in 1998, he started getting painful stomach cramps. When he finally got it checked out, doctors told him he had a cancer. Surgery to remove the tumor was successful, but Darryl still had to undergo six months of chemotherapy.

By April 1999, Darryl had been sober for four years. The bouts of cancer and chemo became too much for him to fight. So he started drinking again. His cocaine use started again, too. One night, he asked a girl if she wanted to party; the girl happened to be an undercover cop, and Darryl was arrested for soliciting a prostitute and possession of cocaine. Darryl pled 'no contest' to the charges and was sentenced to probation. The MLB suspended him for 120 days but after the suspension was over, Darryl rejoined the Yankees. During the playoffs, Darryl hit two home runs and helped the Yankees win the World Series.

Still, Darryl couldn't win his battle over drugs and alcohol. In January of 2000, Darryl failed a mandatory drug test. MLB officials suspended for him for a year, but for Darryl, it was the end of the line. He never played pro ball again.

AFTER BASEBALL

Darryl checked himself into rehab for the third time in ten years, but he left because he felt like his family needed him. (However, his family had learned how to live without Darryl, and he and his wife divorced.)

In June, a routine CT scan detected that his colon cancer spread. He had surgery to remove a stomach tumor. During his recovery he became addicted to prescription pain medication. In September 2000, after taking heavy doses of Ambien, Percodan and Vicodin, Darryl got into his car, and blacked out. He was arrested, this time sentenced to jail. Later he told the judge that he stopped taking chemotherapy and lost his will to live. The judge decided to send Darryl back to rehab, where he stayed for a few months.

One night, he decided to leave (against the rules) and got high. Four days later, Darryl turned himself in and was sentenced to another 18 months at a drug treatment center. He was kicked out of the program in April of 2002. The judge was going to give Darryl to five to six more years of drug treatment for violating probation, but Darryl opted for prison instead. He was sentenced to 18 months.

During those 18 months, Darryl cleaned himself up and was a model prisoner. Afterwards he went back to California, and spent another six months living with his sister. She encouraged him to read and study the Bible, to surrender everything to God, and to trust Him completely.

Since 2006, Darryl's life has completely transformed. He's cleaned himself up and has remarried. The Mets welcomed him back as a special instructor, and he tells young players how to watch out for the things he encountered during his career.

He also works with autistic children and at-risk kids, and he tells them about his struggles and how, through God, he finally managed to overcome them. When he tells them this, he says he finally realizes why God put him in this world, and why God kept him around for so long. He says, for the first time in his life, he has true joy.

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