

# **Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story Study Guide**

**Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story by Ben Carson**

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Goodbye, Daddy.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Carrying the Load.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Eight Years Old.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Two Positives.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">A Boy's Big Problem.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">A Terrible Temper.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">ROTC Triumph.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">College Choices.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Changing the Rules.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">A Serious Step.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Another Step Forward.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Coming Into My Own.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">A Special Year.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">A Girl Named Maranda.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Heartbreak.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Little Beth.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Three Special Children.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Craig and Susan.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Separating Twins and The Rest of Their Story.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Family Affairs and Think Big.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">30</a>



Themes..... 32

Style..... 34

Quotes..... 36

Topics for Discussion..... 38



# Plot Summary

Ben Carson becomes a world-class pediatric neurosurgeon at the prestigious Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, MD. Growing up in poverty-stricken Detroit with his mother and elder brother, Curtis, Ben could have never dreamed of the future that lay ahead for him. When 9-year-old Ben's father abandons his family, his heart is broken with the hurt lasting a life-time.

Ben's mother, Sonya, is the driving force in her sons' young lives. Sonya was born in rural Tennessee and had 23 siblings. To escape her harsh existence, Sonya married at 13. Despite her third-grade education, Sonya was an intelligent woman who knew that education was paramount for her sons to escape the ghetto and have successful lives. Though working three jobs at a time, Sonya is a task master. The boys are allowed to watch only two hours of TV a week and have to read two books each week, providing Sonya with book reports. The boys are not thrilled with the set-up but love and respect their mother and comply with her rules.

There were many temptations and challenges for Ben and Curtis that could have led them astray. Ben falls under peer pressures and demands "cool" clothes to fit in with the other kids. He develops an attitude for a short period and his grades begin to suffer, but Sonya does not give up on him nor on her goals for her sons. She continues to focus on what is important and keeps driving home the values of education and success as a priority. Throughout their formative years, Sonya tells her boys they can be whatever they want and that reading will help them realize their dreams. She never once gave up on them. Sonya inspired Ben's strong Christian beliefs which he maintains his whole life. So many times when Ben is up against impossible odds, he prays to God and always finds his way through them.

Ben begins to believe in himself and works hard at becoming one of the best kids in class in junior and senior high school. Although he faces racial prejudice and ridicule from some classmates and even some teachers, Ben perseveres always hearing his mother's words in the back of his head. Due to his outstanding academic achievements and his high SAT scores, Ben is sought out by the best schools in the country. Ben finally settles on the prestigious Yale University where he receives a full academic scholarship. Very early on Ben knows that he will be a doctor—there is never a doubt about his career from that point on. Ben works toward his goal in every class he takes and places very high in his graduating class at Yale. While at Yale, Ben meets Candy who is a few years behind him. She is smart, a talented musician and from Ben's home state. Their initial friendship grows into a romance. Candy eventually becomes Ben's wife. Ben continues on to medical school, selecting Michigan State which has a great medical school, is affordable and close to home.

During his time in medical school, Ben becomes an outstanding student and is the one that always knows the answers. The interns and residents start to rely on Ben to help them carry out their duties. Although Ben's first vision was to become a missionary doctor or a psychiatrist, he starts to become interested in neurosurgery. Ben hears



some news that may jeopardize the neurosurgery department at the University of Michigan and applies at Johns Hopkins for the remainder of medical school. Being accepted at this world-class teaching hospital was a turning point in Ben's medical career. Ben goes on to a stellar career as the Chief of Pediatric Neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins, leading surgical teams in difficult and controversial surgeries including separating conjoined twins sharing parts of their skulls. Ben Carson has become an inspiration to all races and to young and old alike.



# Goodbye, Daddy

## Goodbye, Daddy Summary and Analysis

Ben Carter is a young boy when his mother tells him that his father is leaving and will not be back. Ben loves his father and is very upset. Ben recalls how much fun his father was, how he would count the minutes until his father came home at night. Only later in life did Ben and his brother Curtis find out that his father had another "wife" and other children. In later years, Ben's mother refers to his father having been involved with other women and drugs. Although at first Ben prays that his parents get back together, ultimately Ben realizes that he and his mother and brother are happier without him. Ben's mother, Sonya Carter, is hard-pressed to get much support from her ex-husband. Even going to court for support does not yield many support payments. Although the boys had to do without, Sonya stays positive and never places blame on their father. She always tells her sons that they would be fine. Ben explains that it would be impossible to tell his story without telling his mother's.

# Carrying the Load

## Carrying the Load Summary and Analysis

Sonya Robinson did not have much formal education. Yet when Curtis brings home a note from the school counselor, with Curtis' help in reading some of the words, she realizes what the message is. She exclaims that she was not going to allow her son to be "treated that way." The gist of the message was that due to Curtis' history of low grades, he would be placed on a technical curriculum thus giving up any hope of going to college. Ben's strong and protective mother takes care of the problem the very next morning. She tells Curtis that evening that he will be going to school. An intelligent woman, Sonya is able to assess the overall situation and quickly determine what action needs to be taken—and action she did take on Curtis' behalf.

Sonya was relentless in her support of her sons, sometimes leading to pestering in her sons' opinions. Sonya never allowed her sons to stop believing in themselves. By contrast, Ben's father placed importance on exterior impressions: Always dress well; be nice to people and they'll be nice to you. Sonya had 23 siblings and married at 13. Marriage for Sonya was a way to escape her childhood environment. She strives to see that her sons don't make life altering mistakes due to any oppression they may feel. Only years later did her sons learn that frequent trips she took away to visit relatives were actually times when she committed herself to psychiatric institutions.

The divorce and her financial situation had thrust her into deep depression and confusion. She was unable to keep up the small house in Detroit she won in the divorce and moved herself and her sons to live with a sister's family in Boston. Her trips away kept up there but the boys had the assurances and support of their aunt and uncle that her mother would be fine. Sonya went through great pain for many years but always loved and supported her sons and didn't let them know of her personal tragedy.



# Eight Years Old

## Eight Years Old Summary and Analysis

In the backyard of the tenement in Boston where Ben and his brother and mother are staying, the boys see rats that are almost as big as cats. Sometimes the rats get into the basement where Ben refuses to go by himself. The roaches are winning the battle inside the living quarters. There are rumors about snakes gobbling up kids that put a scare in the boys. There are homeless men and screaming sirens aplenty. Sonya works all the time in two or three different domestic jobs each day. Despite the living conditions, the family is happy and has a great Christmas. The boys receive more toys than ever before. Ben's favorite toy is a chemistry set, which he plays with for hours on end. Around that same time, he and Curtis came forward in their church to receive Jesus Christ. A few weeks later they were both baptized. After hearing their pastor tell a story about a missionary doctor, at age eight Ben makes his decision to become a doctor.

After two years in Boston, Sonya is financially enough on her feet to move her and the boys back to Detroit. Sonya plans to try to reclaim the house she left there. Sonya had placed the boys in a church school in Boston thinking that they would receive a better education. Unfortunately that was not the case. When the boys return to public school in Detroit, Ben is in the fifth grade and receives the lowest marks in his class. The other children, mainly white, ridicule him but learning something from his mother is able to hide the pain and put on a care-free facade.





# Two Positives

## Two Positives Summary and Analysis

The fifth grade, however, is a turning point in Ben's life. Mandatory eye examinations discover that Ben's bad vision almost renders him handicapped. Luckily, the school system provides him with free glasses. Immediately Ben's grades improve. He goes from failing to a "D" in math. The D, while an improvement, is not good enough for Sonya. Against his will, he memorizes all the times tables. His math tests suddenly become among the best in class. Sonya, always on a mission to improve her sons, next lays down the law about TV watching. The boys protest but to Sonya's deaf ears. Instead of hours of TV, the boys would each have to read two books per week. Sonya told her sons that if one is a good reader one can accomplish anything. Ben and Curtis did not like this new standard. Ben thinks it is next to impossible—he had never even read one book in his life. However, the boys love and respect their mom so much, and they know she means business, so they comply with her demands. Ben is drawn to science books and becomes an expert in identifying rock types and animal species and is greatly encouraged by his science teacher. During the time period, Ben's love of science begins in earnest. Ben's newly developed reading skills lead to his much improved spelling abilities. By the time Ben reaches 7th grade he is officially the smartest kid in the class. His predominantly white classmates who had formerly mocked him were now coming to him for help with their schoolwork.

Sonya had never distinguished black people from white people. Ben attributes his freedom to compete against his white classmates to his mother's unbiased attitude. However, this time period was not without its negative racial encounters. Once, when hopping a train, a gang of white boys attack and strike Ben. Another incident occurred when Ben is given the award for the highest academic achievement for 8th grade. The teacher addresses the mostly white assembled students. She is upset and infers that by Ben receiving the award it is proof that the other children were not doing their best. Ben gets the message but thanks to his upbringing does not buy it. None the less, it hurts. The upside of this incident is the support Ben receives from his white classmates who agree that the teacher is off base. Curtis and Ben play in a neighborhood football league. The boys are small but are the fastest on their team. After one game, a group of white men throw them off the team and tell them to never come back—evidently they ran faster than their sons or brothers. Ben and Curtis kept these racist incidents to themselves. They did not want to worry their mother. How ironic; when the boys are young, Sonya protects them from their father's travails. Now that they are older, they are protecting her. They learned from a pro.



# A Boy's Big Problem

## A Boy's Big Problem Summary and Analysis

In 8th grade, Ben endures another humiliating experience. He is the victim of "capping." Capping in the 8th grade is when one kid makes the most sarcastic remark possible about the other kid's clothes—always within earshot of the victim. Usually these brave souls waited until they had a group so they could gang up on the kid. Ben learns how to give it right back and comes to be respected and accepted. Ben had never given much thought to his clothes before, but now in the 8th grade, with the ribbing he was taking over his clothes, he finally pressures his mother to get him some trendy clothes. Now that he is capping back and dressing cool, he becomes part of the in-crowd. He is invited to all the parties and hang-outs with the cool guys but his grade average drops from A to C. A visit from Mary Harris changed all that. Sonya met Mary when she delivered Ben and introduced her to the 7th Day Adventists religion. Mary's Christian outreach to Sonya when she was in the worst times provided a great strength to Sonya and in fact saved her from a suicide attempt. The devoutness of Mary and Sonya influenced Ben to renew his vows to Christ at age 14. As it turned out he really needed that strength as he was due to face the most severe personal problem of his life.

# A Terrible Temper

## A Terrible Temper Summary and Analysis

A classmate taunts Ben about a "dumb" answer he gave in class. The kid is relentless, angering the already embarrassed Ben. The words finally leads to a shoving match. Ben pushes the other kid, Jerry, who hits his head on a locker and staggers back. Blood goes spewing from a deep gash in his forehead. Ben apologizes profusely for the incident to Jerry and to the principal. Around the same time, Ben becomes very angry with his mother over a new pair of pants she bought for him that did not meet his fashion senses. He started to hit at his mother but his brother stops him. Ben realizes he has a huge problem with his inability to control his temper. A few more incidents when Ben lost his temper occur including one where he plunges at his best friend with a knife. After that incident, Ben hid in the bathroom at home for hours praying to God for help and reading the Bible. Ben experiences a miracle. He straightens himself up and walks out of the bathroom knowing that he would never let his temper take control ever again; and it never did.



# ROTC Triumph

## ROTC Triumph Summary and Analysis

Knowing that Ben is interested in becoming a psychiatrist, Curtis gives his brother a subscription to *Psychology Today* as a birthday present. Ben enjoys the articles although admittedly a lot of the content is over his 13-year old understanding. Ben decides to become a psychiatrist since there are so many crazy people in America and maintains that goal until he enters medical school. Like his brother before him, in 10th grade, Ben joins the ROTC and vows to go as far as he can—perhaps to Colonel. Ben does exceedingly well and achieves his goal of reaching on campus Colonel rank. His success in ROTC goes hand in hand with his renewed success in academics. Ben has his brother Curtis to thank for the example he set in his ROTC experience. By the time graduation comes around, Ben is offered a full scholarship at West Point. However, the scholarship means a commitment to the military. As much as Ben is honored by the offer, Ben's sight is still on becoming a doctor. The high achieving Ben is being recruited by great schools such as Harvard and Yale. One goal that Ben never reaches is to appear on College Quiz Bowl. However, preparing for the possibility of appearing on that TV show sparks a life-time interest in classical music.



# College Choices

## College Choices Summary and Analysis

Ben looks at the ten dollar bill on the kitchen table which will cover only one non-returnable college entrance application fee. Ben struggles between applying at Harvard or Yale. Remembering that Yale whipped Harvard badly in a recent College Quiz Bowl, he goes with Yale. Once on campus and in class, Ben begins to realize that the study skills he learned in high school were not enough at Yale. Ben begins to do badly in his studies and has thoughts that he doesn't belong at Yale. Most hurtful, Ben is failing chemistry. His first semester final is the next day and he has no hopes of passing it. If he fails chemistry, his medical career is out the window.

Ben, at the end of his rope, turns to God. He prays for a miracle and suddenly feels everything will be all right. He has no hope of passing chemistry but maybe this is God's way—he has something else in mind for Ben. Ben, however, vows to do his best on the exam and if he can scrape by maybe the professor will throw out all his other failed tests. Ben crams for two hours then exhausted falls asleep. He has a dream where a shadowy figure writes out test answers on a blackboard. As Ben awakes, he retains some of the answers and goes off to his final. After receiving the test, the questions on the tests were many of those revealed in his dream. Ben scores 97 percent on his test which Ben attributes to the shadowing figure in his dream. To Ben, that figure was God and the strong message was that he wants Ben to be a doctor. Ben is thankful and vows to learn how to learn in college not just cram like he learned in high school. This is another turning point in Ben's life.



# Changing the Rules

## Changing the Rules Summary and Analysis

During the summers between college semesters, Ben finds temporary jobs to save up for the next school year. One summer he works as a highway supervisor over a group of young men cleaning up litter. He challenged his group to work early before the heat. As soon as the workers filled 150 bags with trash, they could go home. Ben's team outperforms every other group. In the summer of 1971, the Detroit area is hit with a depression and Ben is having trouble finding work. Even his old highway job was taken. Eventually, Ben convinces his old highway supervisor to give him his job back.

Throughout his college days, Ben is plagued with money worries. On two occasions when Ben is totally broke, he turns to God. He is walking aimlessly around when he stumbles onto a ten-dollar bill crumpled up in front of a church. On the second occasion, his psychology class is notified that they have to take their final over again—the papers were all burned. Ben trudges through what seems like the most difficult psychology test he could imagine. Students start to bail out of this difficult exam, indicating they will say they did not receive the notice. Ben is surprised when he as the last student is photographed for the school paper and given a ten dollar bill as a reward.

# A Serious Step

## A Serious Step Summary and Analysis

As an upperclassman, Ben is part of a Yale welcoming group for incoming Michigan students. One of those students is a pretty pre-med freshman, Lacena Rustin who goes by the name of Candy. Candy is a positive, intelligent and talented young woman. Along with her academic abilities, she is a violin virtuoso. At first the two are just casual friends. Ben recruits her to sing in the church choir leading to Candy's conversion to the Adventists' religion. The two are loaned a car to head a recruitment effort back in Michigan. On their way back, Ben is driving as Candy drifts off to sleep. Ben also falls asleep but unfortunately he is at the wheel. They have a near miss which awakens Candy. She realizes what happened and feels guilty. They are both so relieved and see the experience as God having plans for them. They realize how much they care for each other.

From that point on they are inseparable. Ben is immediately accepted at the University of Michigan medical school. On one summer job, he works as a crane operator at a his mother's employer's steel company. The skills Ben learns on this job enhanced is already excellent eye hand coordinations. Ben feels certain that the work he did at the steel mill on the crane served to prepare him for a career as a surgeon. He has an innate ability to see things in a three-dimensional perspective—essential for the successful surgeon.

# Another Step Forward

## Another Step Forward Summary and Analysis

Ben is watching a surgical procedure being performed by one of his instructors. The surgeon is having difficulty finding the "foramen ovale" (the hole at the base of the skull). Ben develops a way to mark the spot with metal tabs and locating the exact location of the hole with an x-ray beam. He ultimately shares this procedure with his instructors who are amazed and duly impressed. During his rotation as a medical student, Ben discovers that his talent and abilities could best be used as a neurosurgeon. Although he is perfectly content staying at the University of Michigan during his entire medical school education, he overhears something that sends him in another direction.

An instructor is discussing the fact that there was going to be a change in the chairmanship of the Neurosurgery Department. Ben, feeling that this development may place the department in chaos, decides to apply to Johns Hopkins for the remainder of his education. Ben is accepted at Johns Hopkins. Between his second and third years, he and Candy marry. Candy has a string of various jobs to support them while Ben finishes school. Candy returns to school and receives a Masters of Business and obtains an executive position with a bank. During his residency at Johns Hopkins, he notices snobbery on the part of some of the doctors—they don't speak to the underlings. Ben takes the opposite approach and develops relationships with them. Some have been there 25 years and teaches him a lot. Others let him know what might be going on with a patient before he does.



# Coming Into My Own

## Coming Into My Own Summary and Analysis

When Ben visits various departments as an intern, he has to cope with hospital staff at first mistaking him for an orderly. Generally, the staff member is embarrassed after learning his actual role. Years after his tenure as an intern at Johns Hopkins, Ben learns that the department head, Dr. Long, would show any patient to the door who refused to have a black doctor on his case. During this phase of his career, Ben encounters a Chief Resident who tries to bait Ben into a conflict. Ben keeps his cool knowing that such an incident could toss him out of the program. He has come too far to risk that!

Ben's intelligence, dedication and cool head pays off. In an unusual move, Johns Hopkins does not require Ben to undergo a year of general surgery responsibilities. Instead he is invited to assume a residency position in the Neurosurgery Department—just what he had prayed for. While assigned to a hospital under the auspices of Johns Hopkins, Ben finds himself the only available surgeon when a badly battered man is admitted. Ben is unsuccessful in locating an attending surgeon and realizes it is up to him to save the man's life. However, Ben faces serious legal ramifications since it is illegal for a resident to perform surgery without an attending physician present. A doctor's assistant senses Ben's thought processes and tells him to "got for it." Ben takes his advice and winds up saving the man's life much to the acclaim of the other doctors.

In his first year of residency, Ben undertakes innovative research in collaboration with a Johns Hopkins biochemist. Using white rabbits, the team is able to grow a strain of cancer in the brains of the rabbits. Ben was awarded the Resident of the Year award for his work which propelled him to Chief Resident status again ahead of schedule. As Chief Resident, Ben hones in skills in the delicate processes involved in neurosurgery.

# A Special Year

## A Special Year Summary and Analysis

One of Ben's associates at Johns Hopkins, Bryant Stokes a native of Australia encourages Ben to consider becoming a senior registrar at a teaching hospital in Perth. Ben is appreciative of Bryant's offer but repeatedly dismisses the possibility. Ben thinks that Bryant is not looking at the whole picture—a black doctor would not be accepted in Australia where apartheid is a bigger problem than it is in Africa. However, the prospect of doing his senior residency in Australia keeps nagging at him. He finally learns that apartheid in Australia had been outlawed. Ben and Candy agree that with so many signs pointing at Australia that God wants him to go.

Ben's year in Australia proves quite beneficial to his career. One of his first cases involves a young woman with a large brain tumor threatening her cranial nerves leading to profound disability. Ben asks that he be allowed to operate on her using a microscopic process. The senior consultant begrudgingly allows the attempt thinking the young doctor will not be successful. However, Ben comes through and is able to remove the tumor and save all her cranial nerves. Ben's reputation grows and he is called upon by staff members for assistance and soon becomes the expert at the hospital. Another highlight in their year in Australia is the birth of their first child, Murray. Ben returns to America uncertain of his future.

Although he is tempted to join the staff at a hospital in a black neighborhood, Ben remains at Johns Hopkins. Although he wants to help black people, he wants to help all people and he thinks he can accomplish more at Johns Hopkins. His decision pays off shortly after his return. At the young age of 33, he is named Chief Surgeon of the Pediatric Neurosurgery Department at Johns Hopkins. Ben keeps this position for the duration of his career. Initially he has to overcome some bias toward his race and his age but his skills and abilities soon destroy any doubt.

# A Girl Named Maranda

## A Girl Named Maranda Summary and Analysis

Four-year-old Maranda Francisco had been taken to a myriad of doctors and specialists during her short life. At 18 months old she began having seizures progressing from infrequently to hundreds per day. She received many misdiagnoses and not much hope that anything could be done to help her. Finally a doctor in Denver correctly diagnosed her condition as Rasmussen's encephalitis, a rare inflammation of the brain tissue. Without correction, Maranda was destined to die soon. The case is referred to Johns Hopkins due to its leadership in the area of seizure treatment.

Ben is asked by to consider performing the extremely risky surgery to correct Maranda's decision. Ben has never done this operation called a hemispherectomy but after much thought and research agrees to take it on. Ben meets with the desperate parents who agree to the surgery and understand the grave possibilities of paralysis or even death. Maranda will die soon without treatment—at least the operation provides some hope. Ben tells the parents they have only one thing he needs them to do—pray. Ben joins in the prayer that evening confident that God would never get him in something he could not cope with.

# Heartbreak

## Heartbreak Summary and Analysis

The operation that is supposed to take five hours, takes ten. Maranda bleeds an exorbitant amount and is transfused twice her normal amount of blood during the surgery. Maranda recovers and is leading a normal life. She has no seizures and just walks with a slight limp—which she had prior to the surgery as well. Even though part of her brain is taken in the surgery, her young age allows her brain functions to transfer to other areas of the brain thus avoiding major disability. Ben's operation brings national and media acclaim. Maranda and her parents appear on the Phil Donohue show. Ben is invited but doesn't want to jeopardize his appearance before the boards to receive his final certification. He did not want them to think he was a "hot dog."

The operation receives attention from the national pediatric neurosurgery community. The hemispherectomy procedure had been abandoned years ago due to its potential for grave results, but with Ben's success, the procedure brings renewed interest and is being practiced in hospitals across the country. In 30 such procedures, Ben loses only one patient. The girl is 11 months old and is seemingly recovering from the surgery. However, she suffers cardiac arrest and is not able to be resuscitated. Ben openly weeps when he tells the parents the tragic news. The little girl's death stays with Ben. Although he goes on and achieves great success and helps thousands of families, when his thoughts turn to the little girl he is still able to muster a tear for the one he lost.

# Little Beth

## Little Beth Summary and Analysis

Ben faces a personal trial after a successful operation on Beth. The little girl had bumped her head after falling off a swing. At first the injury seemed minor but later she developed seizures. Ben and his associates interview the parents and examine Beth. The doctors tread lightly as they sense resistance and disbelief in the procedure as described by these experts. Ben feels the operation should take place but does not push it when the parents decide not to proceed. Beth is not having as many seizures and the parents believe she may be getting better on her own. However, a short time later, Beth's seizures increase and the family returns to Johns Hopkins for further evaluation after which the decision is made to go ahead with the operation. Beth's surgery goes perfectly however she lingers in a coma for weeks. The looks on the parents' faces tell Ben that they are blaming themselves for going ahead with the operation. They become resigned to the reality that they will lose their daughter. Ben is worried but never loses confidence and never stops praying. Finally, one night at 2 a.m. when her father is sleeping in her hospital room, she suddenly says, "Dad, my nose is itching." The father was so ecstatic that he rushes out in the hall in his underwear to spread the good news.

Another patient is 13-year-old Denise. Ben and his staff feel that she will benefit from the hemispherectomy procedure. However, other Johns Hopkins doctors feel Denise will be at too much risk. Denise is older than most patients who have this procedure, her seizures never stop, the area of the brain affected is very vulnerable and her overall health is poor. Ben and his doctors persist and finally perform the operation. Denise comes through with flying colors, eventually returning to school with a 3.5 average. Ben feels that some of his controversial surgeries are preparing him for the steps that lay ahead of him.

# Three Special Children

## Three Special Children Summary and Analysis

Three young patients stand out to Ben. Bo-Bo is a four-year-old who was hit by an ice cream truck. Pressure was building in her brain and the situation was dire. Ben sees that her eyes are dilated and has her rushed to the operating room. It was a risky situation, but days after Bo-Bo came out of surgery she came out of her coma and returned to being a happy four-year old. Another child, ten-year-old Charles, was hit by a car and was in worse shape than Bo-Bo and is a little older patient. Ben has a lot of criticism about his proposal to perform a risky craniectomy on the boy. More than the riskiness of the operation, many of the doctors feel it is a waste of time and giving the parents undue hope. Most felt the boy would die either way.

Finally, against much opposition, Ben and his team go ahead with the operation. The operation was successful however due to his profound injuries, his recovery is slower. Finally, Ben recalls the five-month old Danielle who was born with a malignant brain tumor that ultimately grew through her skull to a size the same as her head. Again, no one but Ben thought there was a chance and went ahead with surgery. Although Danielle survived surgery, the cancer from her brain tumor had spread to other vital organs and she did not survive. Danielle is a case where Ben was not able to save a child but is outnumbered by the thousands where the patients survived to live a normal or near-normal life.



# Craig and Susan

## Craig and Susan Summary and Analysis

Craig and Susan are a young married couple who were high-school sweethearts. As a young man, Craig developed a brain tumor which was surgically removed. However, that was not the end of it. Craig was diagnosed with a disease called Von Hippel-Lindau (VHL) which causes the recurrence of brain and retinal tumors. Craig went through many surgeries for the removal of the tumors and suffered from deteriorating health and physical strength. As the years went on, Craig's condition worsened and doctors held out little hope that he could be helped. Susan learned all about her husband's disease and became interested enough to become a nurse. This is when Susan and Craig comes into Ben's life.

Due to Ben's stellar reputation, Susan asks for Ben's help in an upcoming surgery. Ben agrees to help and successfully removes the deadly tumor and Craig recovers. Sadly, two years later, Ben develops another tumor that proves to reside in the pons, the most dangerous spot in the brain. Of course, Susan and Craig ask for Ben's help but his schedule is so full that he is not able to make the commitment. However, upon assessing Ben's terribly deteriorating condition, he reverses his decision and plans the surgery. It takes two long and tedious surgeries but Ben is able to remove all of the tumor. Some had grown into the stem and when Ben pulls it out he is sure that Craig will be paralyzed on one side; but he and Susan keep up their prayers and a miracle happens. The very next morning after surgery, Craig can lift both arms and is alert and responsive. Ben tells Craig he got his miracle. Craig recovers well but because of his disease will develop more tumors—but the chances are they will grow in that dangerous portion of the brain again



# Separating Twins and The Rest of Their Story

## Separating Twins and The Rest of Their Story Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 19

Josef and Theresa Binder of German had been advised by their doctor that the twins they were expecting were Siamese or conjoined twin boys. Theresa's initial reaction was repulsion that she would not be having babies but a monster. She considered suicide that would get rid of all three of them. Realizing she would be committing murder, she could not go through with taking the deadly pills she had gathered. As soon as they were born, Theresa fell in love with them and became a devoted mother. The twins were joined on the back of their heads and shared a section of skull and skin as well as a major vein.

The twins' doctor in Germany contacts Johns Hopkins requesting that its surgical team attempt to separate the Binder twins. After studying the records, Ben agrees to be on the team for the surgery. The team consists of 75 surgeons, doctors, nurses and staff. The team undergoes five months of intensive study in preparation for the groundbreaking surgery. The team has dress rehearsals covering all aspects of the surgery down to where each doctor would stand. The chief surgeons will visit the boys in Germany for a first-hand look at their patients. Two weeks before the trip, Ben's house is broken into and a file with important papers including Ben's passport. The police tells him there is no way they would recover the documents while the State Department informs Ben there is not enough time to issue another passport. Ben prays that God somehow get him to Germany. Several days later the police call and tell him in amazement that his passport had been recovered. Ben is not totally surprised.

Surgery begins on the boys on Labor Day, a slow day at the hospital. The 22-hour process sees many harrowing moments. The boys are bleeding so much that the hospital almost runs out of blood. The gape in the back of their heads is larger than expected and consistently fills with a "lake" of blood. However, finally the boys are separated and live their first moments free of one another. The boys will need further plastic surgery at a later time—if they recover.

### Chapter 20

After the operations, the boys are placed in a drug-induced coma for 10 days. During that period, no one could assess the results. They could be blind or paralyzed, one or both could go into cardiac arrest. The media was going wild over the operation and were waiting for the doctors when they surface from the operating room. The doctors answer all questions despite their exhaustion. The doctors begin reducing the their drug





doses and the boys start to awaken. The boys are moving their hands and legs and are starting to respond to stimuli. The twins are following movement so finally the doctors can affirm that the boys are not blind. Patrick begins playing with toys but unfortunately he aspirated food into his lungs and goes into respiratory arrest before a nurse discovers it and saves his life. Patrick will have brain damage from the incident. Despite this event, Patrick along with his brother continue to do well and return to Germany as two individual people.



# Family Affairs and Think Big

## Family Affairs and Think Big Summary and Analysis

### Chapter 21

Candy wakes Ben up at 2am telling him that her contractions are minutes apart. Ben is scurrying around to get ready for the 30 minute drive to the hospital when Candy announces that the baby is coming. Ben lays her back down just in time to deliver his new son. Someone dials 911 and Candy and baby are off to the hospital. Ben realizes he is stretching himself far to thinly. He has so many demands and realizes he must budget his time and set priorities. Ben's top priorities are his family, his neurosurgery responsibilities and his pledge to be a positive role model to young people. Ben's church and church community is important to him. He teaches an adult Sunday school class and is the Church's Health Director. Ben leaves the hospital at 7:30 p.m. instead of 11:00 as usual. His family is of the utmost importance to him and vows to spend more time with them.

### Chapter 22

Candy and Ben share the dream of establishing a national scholarship for underprivileged young people with talent and potential in any field. During Q&A during his many inspirational talks, he is often asked what his secret to success is. His response is always the same: Think big. T(Talent) - find out what that is; H(Hope) - expect success; I(Insight) - Learn from others; (N) - Be kind to everyone; (K)Knowledge - Key to success; (B)Books - Develop your mind; (I)In-Depth Learning - Learn don't cram for a test; and, (G)God - Never get too big for God.

Ben encourages young people to look beyond careers in music or sports with very few people making a success in those fields. Many times young people have big aspirations - I want to be a doctor or a lawyer - but have no idea how to get there. Ben receives loads of feedback from students and adults who thank him for inspiring their lives. Although there are always difficulties along the way, Ben inspires others by his strength, determination, kindness and success.



# Characters

## Ben Carson

Ben Carson becomes a world-class pediatric neurosurgeon at the prestigious Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, MD. Growing up in poverty-stricken Detroit with his mother and elder brother, Curtis, Ben could have never dreamed of the future that lay ahead for him. When 9-year-old Ben's father abandons his family, his heart is broken with the hurt lasting a life-time.

There were many temptations and challenges for Ben that could have led astray. As a junior high student, Ben falls under peer pressures and demands "cool" clothes to fit in with the other kids. He develops an attitude for a short period and his grades begin to suffer; but his mother does not give up on him nor on her goals for her sons to succeed and climb out of the ghetto. Sonya inspired Ben's strong Christian beliefs which he maintains his whole life. So many times when Ben is up against impossible odds, he prays to God and always finds his way through them.

Ben begins to believe in himself and works hard at becoming one of the best kids in class in junior and senior high school. Although he faces racial prejudice and ridicule from some classmates and even some teachers, Ben perseveres always hearing his mother's words in the back of his head. Due to his outstanding academic achievements and his high SAT scores, Ben is sought out by the best schools in the country. Ben finally settles on the prestigious Yale University where he receives a full academic scholarship. Very early on Ben knows that he will be a doctor—there is never a doubt about his career from that point on. Ben works toward his goal in every class he takes and places very high in his graduating class at Yale. While at Yale, Ben meets Candy who is a few years behind him. She is smart, a talented musician and from Ben's home state. Their initial friendship grows into a romance. Candy eventually becomes Ben's wife. Ben continues on to medical school, selecting Michigan State which has a great medical school, is affordable and close to home.

During his time in medical school, Ben becomes an outstanding student and is the one that always knows the answers. The interns and residents start to rely on Ben to help them carry out their duties. Although Ben's first vision was to become a missionary doctor or a psychiatrist, he starts to become interested in neurosurgery. Ben hears some news that may jeopardize the neurosurgery department at the University of Michigan and applies at Johns Hopkins for the remainder of medical school. Being accepted at this world-class teaching hospital was a turning point in Ben's medical career.

Ben's top priorities in life are his wife and three sons, his career as a pediatric neurosurgeon and as a role model to young people, particularly those growing up disadvantaged as he did. Ben's inspires young people to set goals and learn how to achieve them. Many of the words his mother told him comes through in his talks. Ben



stays devoted to God and never forgets how many times God got him through rough and challenging times.

## **Sonya Robinson Carson**

Sonya Robinson did not have much formal education. She was born in rural Tennessee and had 23 siblings. She escaped an unhappy childhood by marrying Ben's mother at the age of 13. Sonya had only a third grade education and was almost illiterate into adulthood. However, after she had her children, Sonya wanted to read the Bible so much that through hours of hard work taught herself to read. She became a fan of poetry often memorizing long passages and quoting them to her sons. To encourage Ben, she would recite poems like Robert Frost's "The road Not Taken" and one by anonymous called "You Have Yourself to Blame." She got her point across. She became an avid and excellent reader and passed her love of reading and its importance onto her sons.

An intelligent woman, Sonya is able to assess the overall situation and quickly determine what action needs to be taken. Sonya never allows her sons to stop believing in themselves. She strives to see that her sons don't make life altering mistakes due to any oppression they may feel. Only years later did her sons learn that frequent trips she took away to visit relatives were actually times when she committed herself to psychiatric institutions. The divorce and her financial situation had thrust her into deep depression and confusion. She was unable to keep up the small house she won in the divorce and moves herself and her sons to live with a sister's family in Boston. Her trips away continue but the boys have the support of their aunt and uncle and their assurances that her mother would be fine. Sonya went through great pain for many years but always loved and supported her sons and didn't let them know of her personal tragedy.

Throughout Ben's life and career, he always hears the words of his mother in the back of his head. Her stern yet loving nurturing during Ben's childhood and youth, stayed with him and produced a world-class pediatric neurosurgeon. Ben Carson is the first to admit that without his mother's intelligence and love and convictions, he would have never succeeded at the high level he realized.

## **Candy Carson**

Candy is the wife of Ben Carson. They met at Yale, became friends and later married and had three sons.

## **Craig and Suan**

Craig is a young man with a rare disease causing recurring brain tumors. Susan is his wife and a nurse at Johns Hopkins. The couple convince Ben to perform a risky surgery on Craig.



## **Benjamin & Patrick Binder**

Benjamin & Patrick Binder are the German-born conjoined twins who shared a common skull. They are separated in a groundbreaking team headed by Ben Carson.

## **Curtis Carson**

Curtis Carson is the brother of Ben Carson. He benefited from his mother's upbringing, becoming a successful engineer.

## **Maranda Francisco**

Maranda Francisco is a young patient of Ben's. She is in dire condition when first comes to Ben's attention. Every other doctor had considered her case hopeless but Ben undertakes risky surgery on her and saves her life.

## **Bo-Bo**

Bo-Bo is a four-year-old who fell off her swing severely damaging her brain. Ben operates on her and returns her to normal life.

## **Charles**

Charles is a ten year old who was given up as dying by other doctors. Again, Ben prays and takes on the risky operation that saves his life.

## **Drs. Long and Udvarhelyi**

Dr. Long and Dr. Udvarhelyi are two Johns Hopkins senior doctors who recognized Ben's talents and abilities. They both support and further his career.



## **Objects/Places**

### **Detroit, Michigan**

Detroit, Michigan is the community where Ben grew up with his mother and brother.

### **Johns Hopkins University**

Johns Hopkins University is the prestigious teaching hospital where Ben does his internship and residency and becomes a world-class pediatric neurosurgeon.

### **Yale University**

Ben attends Yale University for his undergraduate studies on a full academic scholarship.

### **Perth, Australia**

A colleague at Johns Hopkins convinces Ben to do his senior residency at a teaching hospital in Perth, Australia.

### **Ulm, Germany**

The conjoined twins that Ben separates were born in Ulm, Germany.

### **University of Michigan**

Ben begins his first year of medical school at the University of Michigan.

### **Boston, Massachusetts**

After Ben's father leaves the family, his mother, brother and he moves to Boston, Massachusetts staying with his aunt and uncle.

### **Rural Tennessee**

Sonya Robinson Carson begins life in rural Tennessee in her family of 23 siblings.



## **Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church**

Ben and his family are members of this church. He is an elder and the church's Health Director.

## **Operating Rooms**

Ben spends hours upon hours in tense and risky surgical procedures in Johns Hopkins' operating rooms.



# Themes

## Education/Success/Achievement

Sonya Carson will not settle for anything less than the success of her sons. Even though she has only a third grade education, she is intelligent and know how important education and reading are for the future of her boys. A day does not go by without Sonya encouraging her boys, telling them they can become whatever they want. She is stern and strident in her goals for her sons. She wants them to have a better life than she had. Ben Carson is not a great student in elementary grades but begins to achieve in junior and senior high school. He often remembers his mother's words when facing adverse conditions including racial prejudice and low expectations from students as well as teachers.

But Ben perseveres and to his surprise begins to realize that he might be one of the smart kids in class. He slowly develops his intellect along with a positive attitude and a growing confidence in his own abilities. His mother limits TV time for him and his brother while requiring them to read two books a week with book reports for her. Sonya stresses to her boys that if one can read one can achieve their dreams. By the time Ben graduates from high school he is in the top of his class and is accepted to Yale and awarded with a full undergraduate academic scholarship. Throughout college, Ben tells himself that he can learn and can achieve. He studies and graduates with top honors and goes on to medical school at the University of Michigan. His second year he transfers to Johns Hopkins which is a turning point. The skills he learned as a child from his mother lay the groundwork for his impending career as a world-class pediatric neurosurgeon. What helped to get him through the tough times was the importance of education and achievement his mother stressed unfailingly as a child and young man.

## God/Religion

From a young child on, religion is an integral part of Ben's life. His mother, Sonya, had only a third-grade education and was basically illiterate, but when she joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a young woman, she taught herself to read so that she could read the bible. Ben is a member of the same church and remains devout his entire life. No matter what barriers or problems he faces, he turns to God in prayer. Many times when Ben is deciding whether to do a risky surgery—one that could result in severe brain damage or even death—he turns to God in prayer. He receives his answer and knows how to proceed with steady calm and confidence.

Even during surgery when a patient is in jeopardy, vital signs in decline or bleeding heavily, Ben turns to God for help. He knows the issues of life and death are in God's hands and that God is using his "gifted hands" as a tool. Despite his fame and acclaim for his achievements, Ben's religion keeps him grounded and humble. In his





inspirational talks in front of young people, he reminds them to never forget God relaying to them how often he calls upon Him for help and guidance.

In the final chapter, Ben lists one of his priorities as God and his church, the Spencerville Seventh-day Adventist Church where he is an Elder and the Director of Health for the congregation.

# Style

## Perspective

Gifted Hands, The Ben Carson Story is written in the first-person perspective. Ben Carson along with Cecil Murphey, writes this autobiographical story of the African-American boy from the Detroit ghetto who rises to stellar achievement as a world-class pediatric neurosurgeon. With this personal perspective, the reader is able to key in on the emotions and events that touches and impacts this gifted man's life. Ben tells of his pain and anguish when he learns that his father left them and will not return. He relates the hard times he, his mother and brother endured after being abandoned—emotionally and financially—by his father. The reader learns how important his mother's influence is to his eventual success. Even though Ben does not start out as a good student, his mother instinctively knows he and his brother, Curtis, are smart and can excel.

Ben often hears the words of his mother as he faces everything from racial prejudice to opposition from colleagues on his decision to undertake a risky surgery. Ben develops a positive, can-do attitude that takes him far and propels him into the role of leader. He realizes that he can be a top student, that his sometimes controversial and innovative approach to surgery leads to success and most importantly to saving lives. Ben stresses the important things in life to him—family, career, inspiration to youth and above all devotion and belief in God. Ben structures his story so that all aspects of his life where his priorities lie are tied together and are constants in his life. He does not segregate those important things but makes them part of every aspect and turning point in his life.

## Tone

The overarching tone of this story written by Dr. Carson is one of inspiration. Ben Carson who is a gentle, positive and intelligent person leads a life and enjoys a career that is an inspiration to all. Even at a young age Ben shows wisdom and tolerance beyond his years. Even when Ben faces racial bias he feels little animosity toward the other person. In the 8th grade, Ben wins the top student award. During the award ceremony, a teacher addresses the rest of the mainly white student body. She focuses more on how these (white) students could have done better. The inference being that Ben only won the award because the white students didn't try hard enough. Though Ben is hurt and is acutely aware of the inherent prejudice in this statement, even at his young age he shows tolerance and understanding. Ben knows deep down that reacting negatively to others' biases will only serve to harm his career and goals.

In his later career, Ben Carson is often called upon to provide inspirational talks before youth groups. Ben passes on his key to success to the youngsters encouraging them to Think Big. Ben receives much feedback over the years from young and old and black and white alike how his life and career provided them with inspiration. Ben's gentle tone

is apparent throughout the book in his dealings with family, patients, colleagues and adversaries.

## Structure

The basic structure of this autobiographical account is chiefly linear in nature. Although there are a few flashbacks, most of the story is told in chronological order. The twenty-two chapters are concise and carry the story along at a satisfying pace. Even when describing extremely complicated surgeries, Ben Carson does not get the reader lost or bogged down with overly technical terminology and procedural descriptions. Ben Carson uses cliffhangers in more than several chapter transitions that keeps the reader's interest and piques his curiosity as to event outcomes. Carson peppers his story with interesting dialog with family members and colleagues which provides the backdrop for controversy and conflict necessary in any story of substance.

Although the majority of the story focuses first on his childhood and inspirational mother and the second portion on his career, Ben Carson intersperses the obvious love and devotion he has to his wife and children. Throughout the book, God is represented as the force that keeps him humble and provides help and guidance when it is most needed.



## Quotes

"Bennie, if you can read, honey, you can learn just about anything you want to know. The doors of the world are open to people who can read." Chapter 4, page 37

Proverbs 16:32: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city." Chapter 6, page 59

"During those hours in the bathroom I also came to realize that if people could make me angry they could control me. Why should I give someone else such power over my life?" Chapter 6, page 59

"The bottom line was that we have only ourselves to blame. We create our own destiny by the way we do things. We have to take advantage of opportunities and be responsible for our choices." Chapter 7, page 63

"There isn't anybody in the world who isn't worth something. I say if you're nice to them, they'll be nice to you. The same people you meet on the way up are the same people you meet on the way down." Chapter 11, page 122

"A few white patients didn't want a black doctor. Dr. Long had a standard answer, given in a calm but firm voice: 'There's the door. You're welcome to walk through it. But if you stay here, Dr. Carson will handle your case.'" Chapter 12, page 124

"Dr. Long proposed to the Board that I become the new chief of pediatric neurosurgery. He told the board that, although I was only 33, I had a wide range of experience and invaluable skills. Not one person on the board of that 'racist institution' objected." Chapter 13, page 143

"'It's a dangerous operation. Maranda may well die in the operating room.' I said the words easily enough, but I also sensed how terrible they must have sounded to that mother. Yet I felt it was important to give her every negative fact." Chapter 14, page 150.

"Maranda appeared on the Phil Donahue Show. The producers wanted me on the show, but I turned down the invitation for several reasons. First, I'm concerned about the image I project. Second, I'm aware of the subtlety of being admired on the television circuit. The danger is that if you hear how wonderful you are often enough, you begin to believe it not matter how hard you try to resist it." Chapter 15, page 159

"Although I continued to function, for the next several days I lived under a cloud of depression and pain. Even today when I allow myself to dwell on the death of Jennifer, it still affects me, and I can feel tears reaching toward the surface." Chapter 15, page 165

"We know that you're a man of God, and that the Lord has all these things in His hands. We also believe we've done everything humanly possible to save our daughter. Despite this outcome, we'll always be grateful for everything that was done here." Chapter 17, page 185

"Even if they survived the surgery, weeks would lapse before we could fully assess their condition. The waiting would be a constant strain, looking for the first signs of normalcy, all the while fearing that we might detect signs of brain damage." Chapter 20, page 213



## Topics for Discussion

Describe Sonya Carson's early life. What values did Sonya Carson teach her sons?

What personal characteristic did Ben have to fight against and in what ways did it manifest itself?

Describe incidents of racial prejudice that Ben had to face and how he coped with them.

What far away country did Ben travel to for his senior residency? How did this event help Ben in his career as a neurosurgeon?

What is the significance of the surgery Ben performs on Maranda Francisco? How did it affect pediatric surgery nation-wide?

How does the role of God and prayer impact Ben's career and life? Provide specific examples.

What does the acronym THINK BIG that Ben uses in his inspirational talks stand for?