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### GWU Alumna Eva Whittington Self, '83, Trusted God With Her Broken Pieces

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**ALUMNI**

## GWU Alumna Eva Whittington Self, '83, Trusted God With Her Broken Pieces

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON DECEMBER 30, 2021



### Paralyzed for 43 Years, Self Shares Her Testimony With Big and Small Groups

A car accident 43 years ago on a snowy country road in Concord, N.C., changed the future for Eva Whittington Self. After a week in the hospital, the 17-year-old learned that she would never walk again. She could have turned away from her faith, but the Gardner-Webb University 1983 alumna moved closer to God.

She once told an audience, “Faith is not a feeling. He is there whether you feel like he’s there or not and that was where I first learned that. In those nights, I would tell God it hurts ... I would tell him all the dreams, all the things I wanted to do one day. I wasn’t too sure if he was listening, but I tell you—he was listening. He, and only he, is able to take awful things, broken things, things that are just in pieces, and he takes them, and he molds them, and he uses them for our good and for his glory. I know because that’s what he’s done in my life.”

Self graduated from college, went to work for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), married Andrew, and had two daughters. For 16 years, Self traveled around the country with her husband and daughters speaking to audiences. She’s been on the national stage as a speaker for Focus on the Family, including the “Renewing the Heart” conference, and published a book, “May Bell’s Daughter: Overcoming Personal Tragedy with God’s Strength and a Mother’s Love.”

Life is quieter now. Her audience is an adult education class at Hopkinsville (Ky.) Community College. “It’s like a different type of ministry,” Self observed. “You are still having an opportunity to change lives.

I've enjoyed doing it, and I love the people I work with."



▶ Eva Whittington Self, center, sings in chapel (now called Dimensions) with Brenda Turnmire and Janet Bates.



▶ Eva Whittington Self, right, with her roommate, Elizabeth Jones Barton.



▶ Eva Whittington Self teaches at a community college in Kentucky.



Before the accident in 1978, college was not in her plans. She was going to work like the rest of her family. Her friend, Keith Flippin, was in school at Gardner-Webb. When he visited her in rehab, he brought his guitar, and they sang for the patients. Flippin insisted that she apply to Gardner-Webb. "Rick Holbrook was the admissions director then," she said. "He and his assistant drove to my house in Concord, picked me up and took me to Gardner-Webb for a visit."

Because she liked to sing, she chose to major in music education, but she didn't know how to read music. After people met her, they asked her to share her testimony. "My world got bigger," Self revealed. "Students would be preaching in the area, and they would say, 'Eva, come on and just sing a song and tell a five-minute testimony.' Sometimes the churches called me back and asked me to do the whole service. I spoke somewhere just about every weekend."

Self experienced many blessings at GWU. On her first day in H.A.P.Y dorm, the young women on her hall invited her to go with them to buy books. She wasn't prepared to buy her own books. She wheeled into her room, shut the door and began to cry. Looking down, she noticed the mail had been delivered. She received a \$300 check from a church where she had spoken. Later, a reporter from the local newspaper interviewed her for a story. The next month, a person in the community sent her \$100 and continued sending money.

The campus and community also offered emotional support. Her roommate was Elizabeth Jones Barton, a Boiling Springs native and the daughter of Sonja Jones, a longtime GWU supporter. "Sonja was all of our moms," Self shared. "She pulled me aside before my senior year, and said, 'Eva, you go to

all these churches and tell people what the Lord can do for them, but you don't trust him in your academics. You are not giving your best." The next semester Self made a 4.0.

In the fall of 1982, the entire campus demonstrated their love to Self. Unknown to her, the women on her hall in H.A.P.Y submitted her name for homecoming queen. She cried when they crowned her as the queen and gave her roses. "Gardner-Webb and that town has loved me well," she expressed. "I am so grateful to Gardner-Webb and how it changed my world."



- ▲ Eva Self, escorted by her father, was overcome with emotion when she was chosen Homecoming Queen in the fall of 1982.

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*Gardner-Webb University is North Carolina's recognized leader in private, Christian higher education. A Carnegie-Classified Doctoral/Professional University, GWU is home to six professional schools, 14 academic departments, more than 80 undergraduate and graduate majors, and a world-class faculty. Located on a beautiful 225-acre campus in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb prepares graduates to impact their chosen professions, equips them with the skills to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and inspires them to make a positive and lasting difference in the lives of others. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*