

# TAMIKA CRENSHAW

## PROVE MYSELF WRONG



Tamika's story is one of strength, faith, and transformation—a journey from instability to purpose.

Growing up on Evansville's South Side, she moved constantly with her grandmother, never knowing how long they'd stay. "I don't like change at all," she said, recalling the exhaustion of always starting over.

Now a mother, grandmother, business owner, and community leader in Tepe Park, Tamika has turned struggle into strength. Her story proves that even through chaos, faith and determination can build something lasting—roots, confidence, and a new beginning.

*A new month, another house on an unfamiliar street, another school. New teachers, a new set of friends, new routine, and another time wondering, how long will we stay this time?*

*This was Tamika's reality every couple of months growing up with her grandmother. Each move meant packing belongings into boxes that never seemed fully unpacked, stepping into neighborhoods where faces were unfamiliar, and sitting in classrooms where she was always the new kid. Her grandmother struggled to manage money, often skipping out on bills, and as a result the family was forced to start over again and again.*

*There was no stability, no chance to grow roots. One house would barely begin to feel like home before the eviction notice came or the decision was made to move on. For Tamika, the pattern was exhausting. "I don't like change at all. New school, new people... yeah, I didn't like it."*

*But through all the instability, there was one constant: the Southside. No matter how many times they packed up, no matter which street they ended up on, Tamika still claimed the Southside as her home. It was where her grandmother always landed, where her siblings stuck close, and where Tamika's sense of identity took root in spite of the chaos.*

Tamika's journey began on the South Side of Evansville. She remembered the early moves of her childhood with striking clarity. "My mom moved out there. We lived in Fulton projects, and then she wasn't doing what she was supposed to be doing. So then my grandma ended up taking us in. And my grandma always lived on the south side. She moved every 30 to 60 days."

Her grandmother struggled to manage money and stability. "She didn't like to pay her bills, which, I mean, it was probably hard for her to pay the bills. She had her Social Security, and of course, welfare for us. So there were ten of us on one welfare check."



*Tamika with her Mom and Brothers*

For Tamika, that meant a life of constant uprooting when rent couldn't be paid—new schools, new neighborhoods, new people. "I don't like change at all," she admitted. "New school, new people...yeah, I didn't like it." Yet, in the chaos of moving and uncertainty, her siblings became her anchor. "We are tight, very tight. Those are my best friends."

They called themselves "Karen's kids," after their mother. The name carried a mixture of loyalty and pain, because their mother struggled with bipolar disorder and was not someone they could rely on.

"I have learned to be civil, because you have to be, but you can't trust her."

In that chaos, Tamika learned how to protect herself—and others. "I was kind of angry. I was the fighter in the family. I fought for my brothers and my sisters."

That protective streak shaped her young personality. She was quick to defend her people, but just as quick to cut someone off if they hurt her. "Like, you got a checking account. After you get so many negatives, it's like, I'm done with you."



*Tamika with her sister and uncle*



*Tamika with her sister*

## **Lessons from Parenting & Relationships**

By sixteen, Tamika was a mother herself.

She and her first son grew up together. As a young mom, she leaned on toughness. Discipline was how she showed love. "I am not playing that, talking back. I'm not playing that, thinking you could tell me what to do, like, no." And in her mind, structure was protection.

Tamika spent over two decades with the father of her youngest children. At first, she held on to the relationship, hoping it would work. But slowly, she realized she was carrying more than her share.

"I was with the last three's dad for 22 years, he wasn't much of a role model. I wanted to stop messing with him at like 34, 35. I finally got rid of him at 40."

His habits, especially the drinking, wore her down. "Him waking up just drinking, like, roll over, drink, like, that's like, no. And then I was just fed up with it."



*Tamika, 15, pregnant with her oldest son*

Through these years, she remained a steady presence for her children, but she also realized her limits. “I wasn’t emotionally...available. I told them I loved them, but we didn’t do it as much. I’m not a big hugger.” She had given her kids structure and protection, but not always emotional openness.

Her children recently let her know how they felt. She found herself disregarding their struggles and complaints about her strict parenting because, in her mind, she was raising them much better than her mother and grandmother had raised her.

That conversation was transformative.

“They were just like, you can’t just say we didn’t go through nothing because you went through that.”

For the first time, she saw that parenting wasn’t just about keeping kids safe or disciplined—it was also about being emotionally present. “Now I feel like we’re closer,” she reflected. “You think about it like, because if you lose them, you’re gonna want that hug.”



*Tamika with her children*

## **Finding Stability in Community**

A major turning point in Tamika’s life came when she moved back to Tepe Park around 2017. At first, it was just about finding a place to raise her kids. She wanted her kids to be around people who knew what they were going through, who had similar life experiences. But eventually, the community drew her in.

She began leading a Zumba class outside of the Clubhouse, which led her into leadership. “I started doing [Zumba] in the Clubhouse, and then Eric [Tillman] said that he wanted to meet me.”



*Zumba class on the Tepe Park basketball court*

Eric recognized the leadership potential in her and invited her to attend Tepe Park Neighborhood Association meetings, and eventually she also joined the Leadership team.

It's built more confidence being on the Tepe Leadership Team. It really has, and it's changed me," Tamika explained. "I actually have met men who are loyal to their women. It regains your confidence. Like, there's good people out there."

At first, she was nervous and unsure. "Was it scary? I was just like, hm. I probably didn't say anything, really, the first year. I probably stood back." But over time, she gained confidence.

Through leadership, she learned to speak up, to make decisions, and to trust others. She learned she had a voice that mattered and gained confidence to start her own business.

With years of experience cleaning hotels and apartments, she decided to start her own cleaning business. "I had already been cleaning for a business, and I had started a business with one of my friends.

We made flyers, passed them out, and people were calling."

Though that original business partnership didn't work out, Tamika pressed on. She recognized that she had natural skills in training and leadership. "Every job I've had, I've always been the trainer or the training manager. I adapt to systems really quick, and I teach people like they don't know nothing." It could have been her need to constantly adapt to new people and places as a child, but she's learned how to quickly make sense of her surroundings.



*TLC We Clean promotional photo shoot*

Those skills became the backbone of her business aspirations and when she heard of Tepe Park's Resident Entrepreneur Funds, she jumped on the opportunity. With a dream of a family business that employed her kids, a business plan, and funding from the Resident Entrepreneur Funds, she launched TLC We Clean.

She has grown that business to include several regular clients, and has plans to grow it even more in the future.



*2023 Tepe Park Summer Bash event Leadership*

## Transformation Through Faith

Alongside community and entrepreneurship, Tamika's faith deepened. Though she had been forced into church as a child, she eventually returned on her own terms.

"I feel like I always believed in something, but I never, like I do now, praise Him and worship Him. Talk to Him more, know that I'm talking to Him"

What began with a YouTube video eventually grew into a renewed relationship with God. "It's changed the way you view yourself, what you're worth, what I'm putting up with." Faith gave her new eyes to see her own value and a new strength to stand in it.



*TLC We Clean promotional photo shoot*



*Tamika's grandkids*

## Looking Back, Moving Forward

Her story is one of growth, through hardship, through parenting, through faith, and through finding her place in community. She knows her journey isn't over, but she has already proven so much. From an unstable childhood to being a leader, a mother, a grandmother, and a business owner, Tamika's life shows what resilience looks like. She has turned hardship into strength and survival into transformation.

Her transformation is not just about surviving—it's about becoming. She is a mother, grandmother, leader, and entrepreneur. She is a woman who learned to break cycles, to love differently than she was loved, and to find her own voice and place to plant roots.

As she looks ahead, her words carry both determination and hope: "I'm gonna do it just to prove myself wrong"