

Thursday, February 14, 2019
Updated: February 17, 10:12 AM ET

How Muggsy Bogues saved his brother's life, and found the meaning of his own

By Michael Graff

In the Muggsy Bogues family suite on Muggsy Bogues Night in Charlotte, North Carolina, last December, high-top tables are covered in Muggsy Bogues bobbleheads and chicken tenders, Muggsy Bogues' favorite stadium food.

Muggsy Bogues is downstairs, standing in a crowd near the corner of the hardwood, a few minutes away from a halftime ceremony in his honor at a game between the Hornets and Knicks at the Spectrum Center. The shortest player in NBA history, all of 5 feet, 3 inches, is closing in on 54 years old and still looks as if he can run a few fast breaks. His purple tie matches the old-school [Hornets](#) logo, and his purple-checked suit comes custom-designed from an upscale men's clothing boutique near his south Charlotte home.

Up in the family suite, another trim, 5-foot-3 man rises from his seat and wobbles a bit on his feet. His hand is shaky around a clear cup filled with golden Miller Lite. A wool hat sits high on his ears, and a cross dangles between the zippers of an open black leather jacket. He's missing his top front teeth but doesn't see much reason to replace them. He turned 60 this past September. By his math, that's nearly two more lifetimes than he expected.

Highlights from Muggsy's career flash on the big screen. There he is, spinning under elbows, lofting layups in long arches, flying past even the fastest opponents of his day, slipping passes through spaces no other player could've found. Before or since, nobody else has seen the professional game from the perspective of Tyrone "Muggsy" Bogues. Thirty years have come and gone since he joined a hodgepodge of expansion-draft castoffs to assemble the inaugural 1988-89 Charlotte Hornets. They finished 20-62 that season; the city threw a parade. They sold out 364 consecutive games in their first nine seasons. In Muggsy's basement today he displays a teal hardback chair from the old coliseum, signed by the city's former mayor-turned-governor Pat McCrory. "To Muggsy," it says. "You will always be number 1 in Charlotte!"

By the early 1990s, kids all over the country were finding Hornets Starter coats under Christmas trees. Muggsy was an NBA marketer's dream, a superhero for the little man, a he-did-it-so-I-can-do-it-too prototype, the point guard of a team that included other memorable characters like Larry "Grandmama" Johnson and Alonzo "Zo" Mourning. Muggsy was in "Space Jam." He appeared at elementary schools unannounced, dressed up for uptown balls, whatever Charlotte asked of him. If you were a child in the 1990s in Charlotte, you could stumble into your favorite NBA player anywhere, and you could hug him around the chest.

"Muggsy!" fans near the floor shout as they reach over the railing looking for a handshake.

He has heard it everywhere he has gone for 30 years.

Muggsy!

Muggsy!

Muggsy!

But even his biggest fans rarely notice the man in the wool hat and leather jacket. They have no idea that almost 25 years ago, at the height of Muggsy Bogues' career, he saved that man's life -- and, in turn, that man saved Muggsy's.

Chuckie Bogues is Muggsy's oldest sibling, and the next line in his bio is: Chuckie Bogues hasn't done a hard drug in 23 years. In a family with plenty to be proud of, that Chuckie is even alive tonight might be their greatest accomplishment.

"If I'd stayed up there," Chuckie says of their hometown of Baltimore, "I wouldn't be standing here talking."

The tribute video ends and the announcer growls out a call for everyone in the arena to get on their feet. As the applause grows and the spotlights fix on him, it's hard to believe there was a time when Muggsy Bogues could feel lonely, a time when all he had was the man in the luxury suite looking down from the shadows.



f the Charlotte Hornets' first-ever roster in 1988-89, and ended up staying 10 seasons. Thirty years later, with the 2019 All-Star Game in Charlotte, Bogues remains an icon in the city that made him a

On a warm afternoon last September, Muggsy and Chuckie are on their back patio playing dominoes and trying to explain family nicknames.

Their grandfather was Richard, but everybody called him Snook. Their father was also Richard, but everyone called him Billy. He married Elaine, who didn't want to be called Mom, so her kids called her Lainey.

Chuckie, whose real name is, get this, Richard, was first. Then came Anthony, whom everybody called Stroh. And Sherron, a girl, whom everybody called Helen. Lainey had two failed pregnancies after that, meaning that everybody doted on the fourth and final child, Tyrone, who started out as Apple but later became Muggsy.

"I can remember the first day when he was born," Chuckie says. "They brought him home and they say, 'Hold him.' I was 6. And I said, 'Ohhh, my little brother.'"

They moved out of the 1035 building in the Lafayette high-rises of east Baltimore and into the low-rises across the courtyard. There they had three bedrooms: one for mom and dad, one for Helen, and one the three boys shared.

2019 NBA All-Star Game



Team LeBron rallied past Team Giannis to capture All-Star glory in Charlotte.

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Chuckie taught his siblings how to maneuver in the city. They played card games for Now & Later, pitched nickels and pennies for cookies. But he grew distant as a teen and was using by the time he was 15, often in the company of their father, Billy, before Billy got sent away for 20 years for armed robbery. Chuckie never quit a drug if he started it. Heroin, cocaine, "whatever kind they *waaasss*," he says, a curtsy on the end of each sentence.

Meanwhile, his three younger siblings took to sports. Muggsy and Helen made clothes-hanger hoops, hung them on the closet door and tossed rolled-up socks through them. Muggsy's best friend Reggie Williams (everybody called him Russ) joined them, and they'd bang against the walls grabbing sock rebounds until 9 p.m., lights out.

Muggsy hated going to bed. One night when he was 5, he heard a window shatter at the bar and grill across the street. He ran downstairs. The owner -- "Old Man Chester" -- pulled a shotgun from his shed and fired buckshot around the low-rises at nobody in particular. Pellets hit Muggsy in the arms and legs. He woke up in the hospital.

"The expectation was that you wouldn't live past 20," Muggsy says, flipping over a domino.

"*Mmm-hmm*," Chuckie confirms. He's down about 45 points in the dominoes game but doesn't care. "I never thought I would make it. Heck no. That's why I always say I'm just grateful to see one more day. That's all I can say. I saw another one. Now look. Wild horses can't grab me."

They unreel the family story from there. Muggsy's chance to escape became clear at Dunbar High School. With him as point guard, the Poets went undefeated in back-to-back seasons and finished as one of the best high school teams of all time. When Muggsy grew too old for curfews, he practiced jumpers on the Lafayette courts until almost sunrise.

"Won't that boy go in the house and go to sleep?" Azalia Madison remembers her stepfather yelling. She grew up in Lafayette and now lives in Charlotte, too. "But nobody stopped him and nobody messed with him."

“

If I'd stayed up there [in Baltimore], I wouldn't be standing here talking.

”- *Chuckie Bogues*

Muggsy earned a scholarship to [Wake Forest](#) and set an ACC record at the time for career assists. Stroh joined the U.S. Army. He was at Fort Hood, Texas, listening to the radio the night his brother's name was called as the 12th pick in the 1987 NBA draft. Their sister, Sherron, or Helen, worked for 32 years in Baltimore's parks and recreation department. She died from lung cancer in 2015, and a year later Baltimore's mayor dedicated a day in June as Sherron Bogues Day.

But Chuckie, on the other hand?

It was 1985 or 1986, and Muggsy was home on a break from Wake Forest. As Chuckie starts to tell the story, Muggsy says, "Oh, my goodness" and gently slams his head on the table.

It's a payday, Chuckie says, and he walks down to sit on the wall overlooking the Inner Harbor, cash in the pockets of his new green koshi shorts and a slick pair of white Air

Jordans dangling over the Patapsco River. He lights a cigarette and a young woman behind him catches his attention.

His eyes follow her, his head follows his eyes, his body follows his head, and he spins himself right off his perch.

The harbor is no YMCA swimming pool. People who fall in don't come out. More than 50 bodies have been pulled in the past 20 years. Chuckie wades for a few minutes until he sees a fireman lowering a ladder to him. He's bleeding from barbed wire, but when he's back on solid ground and looks around, he realizes he's attracted a crowd. "I thought, 'I should jump back in,'" he says.

He changes clothes at his mother's house, then goes to his girlfriend's place. In the stairwell there, he walks into a wall and busts open his eye. Doctors that night stretch 10 stitches across the gash.

After being discharged, he returns to his mother's house. His brothers are asleep in their old room. Chuckie, apparently not finished entertaining himself for the day, thinks it'd be fun to startle them by jumping into the top bunk. He almost makes it, but "almost" isn't good enough when you're jumping on a top bunk, and down comes Chuckie. He puts his hand over his other eye, pulls it away, sees blood, and heads back to the hospital.

"Mr. Bogues," Chuckie recalls the doctor saying, "just go sit in the corner, and don't move."

Muggsy remembers Chuckie walking through the door, chewing bubble gum, his Air Jordans squishy. "And you'd ask him, 'What happened, boy?'" Muggsy says, before delivering a pitch-perfect imitation of Chuckie's mannerisms. "I fell in the *haaaaahhhbor*."



n't done a hard drug in 23 years, a fact he credits to his younger brother, Muggsy.

In October 1995, Muggsy received a phone call from his mother. She sounded exhausted.

"I don't know what to do with Chuckie anymore," Elaine Bogues said of her first-born, who was then 37 years old. No longer could anyone see the humor in Chuckie stories. He'd been arrested once, in 1993, for "a theft scheme of more than \$300." By 1995, he was snorting cocaine so often it was hard to hold a full conversation with him.

Elaine's other children had good government jobs with benefits, but only one, the NBA star, had the space for what Chuckie needed. "If you don't take him and move him in with you," she told Muggsy, "he's going to die."

The previous two years hadn't been easy on Muggsy. On July 27, 1993, one of his oldest friends, Boston Celtics standout and high school teammate Reggie Lewis, collapsed on a basketball court and suffered a sudden cardiac death. Eight days later, on Aug. 4, 1993, Muggsy's father, Billy, died from pneumonia in Baltimore. He'd been out of jail for a handful of years by then, but wound up using again, often with Chuckie. Muggsy delivered the eulogy, saying "he wasn't a perfect father," but also going out of his way to say that Billy tried to provide for the family.

Muggsy put together two of his best seasons after that, leading the Hornets to the playoffs in 1995. He signed a contract extension and the "Space Jam" deal, but the bright lights concealed another tough truth: His marriage was crumbling.

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Kim Bogue fell in love with Muggsy without knowing much about basketball and Muggsy's stardom. By 1995, she was a wife and mother who was tired of being alone. Even when Muggsy wasn't traveling, her stomach turned when other women -- "groupies," she called them -- approached him. The couple won't go into detail about whether there was infidelity, but trust between them collapsed. That summer, she took their children, Brittney and Ty, and moved to the north Charlotte suburb of Huntersville.

After years of saying yes to Chuckie's little requests for help, Muggsy had eventually cut his oldest brother off. "Twenty dollars or five dollars," Muggsy remembers. "It wasn't like you were giving him thousands. But that 20 dollars, it did damage to him."

Now the richest man in the family lived alone. In August 1995, he quietly went in for surgery on his left knee. He figured he'd sit out only a few weeks but wound up missing nearly the whole season. There are pains athletes talk about publicly and pains they deal with in private, and sometimes one provides just the right shade for the other. In interviews, Muggsy told reporters how hard it was to sit and watch his teammates play, not letting on about troubles at home.

Muggsy always does what his mom says. He moved Chuckie in and hid liquor bottles. He put six-packs of O'Doul's in the fridge. He checked the guest room to make it safe for rehab. He bought Chuckie a long, red robe. Some days, Muggsy opened the door to find Chuckie shaking underneath the robe. Other days, Muggsy heard him clear across the house, hollering the withdrawal out of his lungs. At a time when Muggsy couldn't fix much of anything else -- couldn't heal the knee, mend the marriage, revise his father's life, bring back Reggie -- you better believe he wasn't going to lose Chuckie.

"That was my job; that was my brother," Muggsy says. "That's what family is for -- the good, bad and indifferent. That's how my mom and dad raised us."



Muggsy, Alonzo Mourning, right, and Larry Johnson, left, captured the hearts of NBA fans in the early '90s.

The first six months of rehab were brutal. Chuckie wouldn't consider a licensed treatment facility. The shivering, the crying out, that all happened in the guest room above the garage.

Muggsy lived in one house throughout his time in Charlotte. It's in a community of big homes on the southern edge of the city. It's quiet out here; to Chuckie back then, it was the boondocks. The closest grocery store was a 30-minute walk.

Chuckie kept his room cold. Every couple of hours he shuffled to a spot in the middle, figuring the farther he was away from doors and windows, the less likely anyone was to hear him scream. On the back side of the room was a balcony that overlooked an outdoor basketball court, painted in Hornets colors, where Muggsy worked out his knee and played H-O-R-S-E with an all-star list of opponents. Chuckie wandered onto the deck every now and again, his hands shaking and holding lit cigarettes.

"Dell!" he'd shout out when Dell Curry, Muggsy's closest friend on the Hornets, missed a shot. "You got an R!"

To Muggsy, you will always be number 1 in Charlotte!

”- *Former Charlotte mayor Pat McCrory*

Muggsy didn't tell his teammates the extent of Chuckie's troubles. Some nights, he brought dinner into the room, only to come back hours later and see it unmoved, uneaten. Some nights he cleaned up Chuckie's vomit.

There were days when Muggsy questioned whether he was doing more harm than good. But he believed that forcing Chuckie into a facility would make him feel abandoned, resentful. Their mother had driven this much into them, that when nobody else can handle you, family will.

Slowly, Chuckie showed improvement. The vomiting stopped, the hollering was less frequent. One day Chuckie looked Muggsy in the eye and said, *I ain't gonna mess up on you.*

If all you see of Chuckie are the broken parts, you see what Muggsy could have become. If you look closer, though, you'll see how Chuckie grounded Muggsy and helped him through a correction.

More Than An Athlete

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The eight-part docuseries, produced by UNINTERRUPTED and airing on ESPN+, will follow LeBron James and Maverick Carter's improbable journey from Akron to the

global stage. [Watch on ESPN+](#)

From the Lafayette courts to the NBA, Muggsy had obsessed over proving people wrong about his size. He had few doubters left, especially after averaging a double-double with 10.8 points and 10.1 assists in 1993-94. He'd been profiled by most major publications, with headlines like "Tall Ain't All" or "How Muggsy Overcame Long Odds." He'd appeared in a 1993 episode of "Saturday Night Live" alongside Charles Barkley, Nirvana and RuPaul.

Maybe Kim was right, he began to think in those first few months watching over Chuckie. Maybe the determination that defined him was also a blinder -- she thought it morphed into cockiness. But loneliness gave him a chance to reflect on how he prioritized connections -- whether it's a sketch on SNL, an autograph for a fan, a check-in on Chuckie or the connection with Kim that he'd let slip.

They all are important in their own way, but not in the same way.

"When somebody's telling you, 'Oh, we love you. You're the greatest,' sometimes it gets to a guy's head," Kim says. "[Now] he comes home and says, 'Oh, this is real s--- right here. This is reality. And nobody sees this. No one sees what I'm doing. No one sees the struggle that I'm going through.'"

He called his kids every day -- "Not one day went by that I didn't," he emphasizes later. Kim, though, grew weary of being asked if she was "Muggsy Bogues' wife." She took the kids and moved to New York, then back to Baltimore.

Early in their marriage, Kim and Muggsy had been regular attendees at Central Church of God in south Charlotte. Muggsy returned to a regular Sunday schedule after she moved away, this time by himself. "It's more than I can handle," he told God.

In 1996-97, he started to take Chuckie to practices and games. Teammates adored him. And Chuckie was good luck; the Hornets finished 54-28 that season, the best record in franchise history.

Still, Muggsy kept Chuckie out of the press. It was too soon to be certain, he says. On the other side of the curtain between his public and private lives, though, Muggsy knew how much he owed Chuckie. In that otherwise empty house during those three or four years, they each went through self-discovery.

"It was a therapy for him and for me at the same time," Muggsy says. "When you're used to running a certain way, and that's no longer the case anymore, you've got to readjust."





How many chances would you give your family? Better yet, how many chances would your family give you?

Kim Bogues remembers the first time she met Chuckie. She'd been sneaking down to Winston-Salem on weekends to see Muggsy at Wake Forest. The secret was out when she became pregnant with Brittney during Muggsy's senior year.

The first time Kim visited Muggsy's childhood home in Lafayette, Muggsy left her alone in the living room for only a minute, just enough time for Chuckie to appear.

"Who are you?" he blurted.

"Kim," she said.

"Who you with?"

"I'm with Muggs."

"Oh, that means you have money. Gimme 20 dollars."

Kim's still waiting for him to pay her back.

After she and Muggsy divorced, Kim started a career in show business as a body extra on "The Wire" and soon made her way to food services on set. By the fifth and final season, she oversaw a food-production shift for the whole cast and crew. She later earned a culinary degree and became the personal chef for Julia Louis-Dreyfus on the set of "Veep."

Muggsy never recovered from the knee injury. A 1997 trade sent him to Golden State and he signed with Toronto, his final team, in 1999. He retired in 2001, the same year his mother died. During the moves, he'd managed to fulfill his other big promise to her, finishing his degree from Wake Forest in 1998. Four years after he retired, he took the head-coaching job of the WNBA's Charlotte Sting, but the franchise folded in 2007. Home life was steadier, though. Chuckie never left his side, moving with him to California, Canada and back to Charlotte. Muggsy and Kim agreed that a boy should live with his father; Ty moved down to finish high school in Charlotte. Muggsy settled down with a girlfriend, Sharon Smith. They dated for about six years and were considering marriage when doctors told Smith she had breast cancer. She died in 2009.

"It screwed me up badly," Muggsy says. Ty drifted while his dad mourned. By his senior year, Ty realized his future wasn't as a basketball player. He told his father he didn't want to live with him anymore.

Kim was in New York when a call came in that Ty was in trouble. He'd been in a car with friends and an open container. The prosecutor in juvenile court recognized the name on the docket and pulled Muggsy and Kim to the side. He said he'd meet with Ty, give him a little "scared-straight" talk, then have two deputies walk him out of the building in handcuffs. Only, they'd walk him to Muggsy and Kim's car and let them take it from there.

Chastened, Muggsy asked Kim if she would stay to help raise their son. Kim gave up her Upper East Side apartment and moved back to Charlotte. Ty's grades improved, and a decade later he works in marketing for the Hornets and helps his sister with her public relations firm. After Ty graduated, Muggsy and Kim began to date again.

Muggsy rebuilt other bridges to his past. He spent 15 years livid at former Hornets owner George Shinn for trading him and moving the franchise to New Orleans. But in 2013, a local magazine published an oral history of the inaugural team for the Hornets' 25th anniversary. Shinn and Bogues agreed to take part in a photo shoot. It was the first time they'd seen each other since 1997. They embraced and stood back-to-back for the cover. They started calling each other every few weeks and Muggsy rekindled his relationship with the Hornets, now owned by his "Space Jam" co-star Michael Jordan, eventually taking on an official role as the team's ambassador.

But there remained one more broken circle: Muggsy and Kim planned to remarry, but they didn't know when. They even had a marriage certificate. But Kim's work on the set of "Veep" kept her too busy to think about it -- or so she wanted him to believe.

On Jan. 9, 2015, Muggsy's 50th birthday, the couple dressed up for an uptown dinner. Kim convinced him to stop by a friend's apartment in high-rise building to pick up a gift. He opened the door to a 50th-floor lounge overlooking the city to cheers from his family, Kim's family, all their friends.

They chanted.

Muggsy.

Muggsy.

Muggsy.

But this wasn't just a surprise birthday party. It was a surprise wedding.

Kim and Brittney had been planning it for more than seven months. A pastor turned the corner and the couple exchanged vows right there, sniffles and tears all around the room as Muggsy promised to be a better husband than he was before.

"We started this thing a long time ago, before we even had anything," Muggsy said in his vows, captured on video. "I'm just so thankful. Many people don't get this opportunity a second time around." Rewind the video of Muggsy's entrance that night and standing in the doorway behind him is Chuckie, wearing a shirt and tie and the wool hat over his ears.

"He's always invisible," Kim says, "but he's always there."



Now look out on the floor at center court. Muggsy's three children are there -- Ty and Brittney from his marriage with Kim; Tyisha from a relationship before he met Kim -- and Tyisha's two children, Samartine and Taniya. There's Kim Bogues, in purple lipstick. If you'd told her 10 years ago she'd be here tonight, she says she'd have given you, direct

quote, "a right hook." Now? "Never say what you're never gonna do," she says.

Before the festivities of Muggsy Bogues Night, Chuckie drinks a couple of beers and plays Wii bowling with Kim's mom. Alcohol remains a crutch, but he has days when he drinks nothing at all. That's progress. The rest of the afternoon he horseshoes around with his great-nephew and plays with the family dog, a year-old black lab mix whose full name is Dunbar Billy Bogues.

Chuckie had a stroke about a decade ago. It erased some short-term memory and made him unbalanced on his feet. Each time Chuckie goes with his brother to a game, Chuckie introduces himself to concessions workers as if it's the first time they've met.

"I have the easiest goddamn life in the world," Chuckie says. He has settled into an informal caretaker role around the house. He mops the floors and takes out the trash every Monday. He picks up sticks around the yard, cooks dinner on occasion, waits for UPS deliveries.

"I'm just enjoying my family," he says. "I don't want jack for s--- anyway. Just to see them happy, just like this. If I wake up tomorrow morning, I don't give a hell if they got a hurricane shaking, I had a good day."

Chuckie's background on his cellphone is a picture of his great-nephew. He's the one who reminds Muggsy to call loved ones on their anniversaries and birthdays. Stripped of all material worries, Chuckie lines up his priorities as such: (1) family; (2) everything else. And in a roundabout way, during those hard days in 1995, he reminded his famous brother to do the same.

During the halftime ceremony, Muggsy receives a key to the city. He is, once again, the center of attention. He still appreciates moments like this, but he doesn't necessarily need them like he used to, back when his home was empty.

Kim has a new appreciation too. For Muggsy's birthday this year the family flew to New York and caught "Wicked" on Broadway. During the show, Kim noticed cast members' subtle facial expressions when they saw Muggsy in the front row. "When I'm with him and I see people do that I'm like, *How do you do it?*" Kim says. "It's priceless."

Muggsy takes the microphone at center court with his wife, children and grandchildren on the floor behind him, and 20 friends and family members whooping in the luxury box.

He starts by thanking God, and he's prepared his next line: "As a kid growing up in the inner city of Baltimore, all I wanted to do was play basketball." But along the route from God to Baltimore in this speech, Muggsy chokes up. He lowers the microphone from his lips. The applause builds and builds.

Muggsy.

Muggsy.

Muggsy.

Kim looks up at the video board as her husband wipes his eyes. Hers are watery, too. Muggsy says later that the tears are from his mom and his sister in heaven.

The cheers in the arena drown out something Muggsy can't hear but should, another message coming from above, this one all the way from the family luxury suite, where the man in the shadows hollers from his tiptoes, voice pitching higher and higher, "MY BIG LITTLE *BROTHER!*"
