

Kindness fueled friendship of Breakfield, Sayers - Omaha World-Herald (NE) - May 9, 2003 - page 8c

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Vernon Breakfield and Gale Sayers became fast friends when they were 6 years old.

The boys met in their neighborhood near **Howard Kennedy** Elementary School on North 30th Street. Their families knew each other.

"We were in the same boat - poor - only we didn't think we were poor because everybody was in the same boat," said Sayers, the former Chicago Bears football star.

"We learned to be kind to one another and made it through."

Their friendship endured through high school at Omaha Central, where both were athletic standouts, through the separation that comes with adulthood, through successful careers and growing families, and, finally, through the liver cancer that claimed Breakfield's life this week.

"Whenever I came back to Omaha, I always made it a point to visit with him," Sayers said. "I didn't need to talk to him every week or even every month. I knew he was there, and he knew I was there."

In the last month, Sayers came to Omaha to visit Breakfield once a week. He last saw his old friend three days ago.

Breakfield, 60, died Wednesday at his home.

He was a 1961 Central graduate, where he was a member of a state championship track team and earned All - Intercity League honors in football.

He was a halfback at Luther Junior College for a year, and worked for 35 years as the print shop supervisor for the Kirkham - Michael engineering firm. He retired about three years ago.

Breakfield also worked with youths at the Bryant Center, coordinating basketball leagues.

He met his wife of 40 years, Gwen, at a neighborhood skating rink when both were in high school. She survives, along with sons Vernon Jr. and Victor, sister Vera Hill and three grandchildren, all of Omaha.

Services will be at 10 a.m. Saturday at Salem Baptist Church, 3131 Lake St. Sayers will speak at the funeral.

"He lived a good life, raised two great sons," Sayers said. "I will miss him a lot."

CITATION (APA STYLE)

Freeman, B. (2003, May 9). Kindness fueled friendship of Breakfield, Sayers. *Omaha World-Herald (NE)*, p. 8c. Available from NewsBank: America's News – Historical and Current: <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=AMNEWS&docref=news/12DD06D7D71AA470>.

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