

Rochelle Riley, second from left, with family members Delya Lloyd, Lorna Lloyd, Donald Riley, Beverley Riley



Rochelle Riley

Speaks to Pattillo Alumni Group

Written by BETTY TEMPLE

Rochelle Riley, Tarboro native, noted columnist for *The Detroit Free Press*, and radio station co-host, was the featured speaker at the First Annual Fellowship Brunch sponsored by the W.A. Pattillo High School National Alumni Association on Saturday, February 6, at Pattillo Middle School.

Ms. Riley, who decided at the age of 8 to be a writer, was introduced by Reuben Blackwell, her fellow classmate at UNC-Chapel Hill in the late 70's. Blackwell is the CEO of Opportunities Industrialization Center, Inc., in Rocky Mount and a member of the Rocky Mount City Council.

"She always knew she wanted to be a journalist," he said in his introductory remarks, "and she went on to work out her dream."

Ms. Riley spoke of herself as a Christian, a mother, grandmother, and tennis player, in addition to her career as a

writer.

"I try to change things with my words," she said. She introduced her family members, sister, Beverley; brother, Donald; aunt, Lorna Lloyd, and cousin, Delya Lloyd. She spoke about the impact her mother, Marva Pitt Riley, and grandfather and grandmother, Bennie and Lowney Pitt, had made on her life. Her grandparents raised the three children after their mother was stricken with multiple sclerosis. "The greatest leader I ever knew was my grandfather," she said.

She complimented the members of the W.A. Pattillo alumni group who had gathered to hear her. "Look around you," she said. "We are all insuring that people don't forget W.A. Pattillo High School. This school is on hallowed ground. I remember every teacher I had there - a community of loving, committed African Americans."

Ms. Riley attended W.A. Pattillo School from first to

"I try to change things with my words"

sixth grade. After the Tarboro schools were integrated, she enrolled at C.B. Martin Middle School and attended Tarboro High School where she was co-president of the student body, a cheerleader, a member of the National Honor Society and the Band, and Miss Tarboro Senior High in 1976.

She pointed out that when she was growing up, everybody in the community looked after everybody else. "Think about the people who made a difference," she said, mentioning the lady who lived across the street from Pattillo School and kept a close eye on what was going on, Coach Earl Miller who found her clarinet when she thought she had lost it for sure, and the numerous Church Street neighbors who called her mother one time to tell her that "Rochelle was walking down the street holding hands with a boy."

"We have to make sure that people tell these stories," she said. "We live through these stories," she added. "Our ability to remember every great moment is very important."

She quoted comedian Steven Wright who said "Everywhere is in walking distance if you have the time."

After her graduation from UNC-Chapel Hill, Rochelle worked for *The Dallas Morning News*, then went to *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville, Kentucky, to be a columnist. Her first column petitioned the affluent people of the town to build a museum in honor of Louisville native Muhammad Ali and helped to generate an \$80 million campaign to build the Muhammad Ali Center there. From Louisville she went to *The Detroit Free Press* where she writes a column three days a week covering education, government, children's issues and popular culture. In addition to her work with the *Free Press*, she co-hosts a talk show "In the Mix with Marie and Rochelle" on WJR 760 AM, which is heard in 38 states. She also appears frequently on NPR and MSNBC. Several collections of her columns have been published and one of them, *Life Lessons*, is available at the Edgecombe Library.

In keeping with her commitment to the W.A. Pattillo High School National Alumni Association, she announced the establishment of a scholarship to North Carolina Central University honoring her mother Marva Jean Pitt Riley.

The W.A. Pattillo High School National Alumni Association, Inc., was established in 1978. Its purpose is to provide scholarships and grants to students to help further their educations and to provide financial and other assistance to educational institutions at all levels. The group has its Reunion every year on the first weekend in July. Dr. Fred S. Wood, Jr., of Greensboro, Class of 1962, is president of the organization.

The alumni association provides several scholarships annually and also provides financial assistance to W.A. Pattillo Middle School and The Princeville School. Over the last four years, this group has awarded \$23,000 in scholarships, \$11,600 in financial assistance to schools, and \$2,000 in Incentive Awards to elementary and middle school students.

In addition to Rochelle's talk, Fellowship Brunch attendees were treated to two songs sung by the Southwest High School Chorus directed by Ms. Angela Sessoms, welcome greetings from Jar'Heem Thomas, student government president at Pattillo, and Ms. Lauren Lampron, Pattillo Middle School principal, and several musical selections by the Rev. Milton Harrell, Pattillo High School Class of 1956.

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