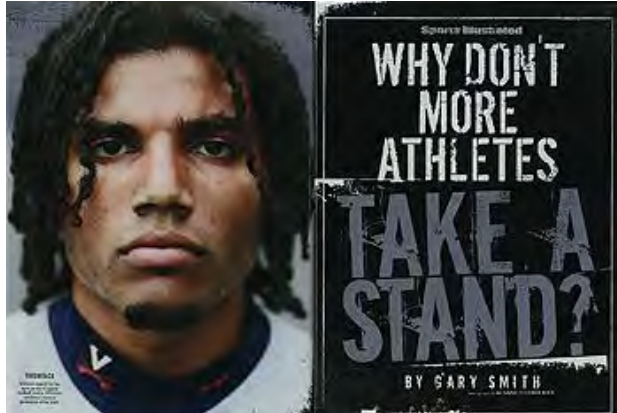


Joseph Wonman Williams Featured in Sports Illustrated for taking a stand

Yoshie Manaka

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Joseph Wonman Williams, a second-generation Unificationist attending the University of Virginia (UVA) who underwent an eight-day hunger-strike earlier this year as a part of the Living Wage Campaign, was featured in a fourteen-page story in the July 9, 2012 issue of *Sports Illustrated*.

Williams is from Sterling, VA and has completed his third year at UVA while taking a demanding major in political- and social thought. He plays football for the Virginia Cavaliers, and because of his unusual choice to fast as an active athlete, got featured in *Ebony* magazine, *ESPN* and the *Washington Post*. *Sports Illustrated* staffer Gary Smith spent months researching the unusually lengthy article titled “Why More Athletes Won’t Take a Stand.”

Williams’ mother, Rhonda, expressed surprise at the amount of attention Wonman (meaning “Full Harmony” in Korean) had received from the press. “When he decided to do the hunger strike, he called me and let me know about his decision,” she said. “I just told him, ‘Be careful, because you’re still training for football.’ And then all of a sudden, all of these articles started coming out, and I said, ‘Joseph, what’s going on? There are nineteen other students who are fasting! Why are they only paying attention to you?’ He told me, ‘Mom, of the nineteen, I am the only football player. And they think football players only do stupid things off-field, like drugs and womanizing. The fact that a football player actually did something good is newsworthy across the world.’”

Rhonda continued: “*Sports Illustrated* interviewed me, my daughter, Julie, and my first son, Victor, for two to three hours each, and then interviewed Joseph for a few days. Victor, Julie and I all spoke about the Unification Church and its impact on our lives. I was really wondering what Gary Smith was going to print about the church. I was hoping that it would be positive and that it could benefit Rev. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon in some way. The article turned out to be very positive about my son, and pretty positive about the way he was raised, which was with the values of the Unification Church.”

Sports Illustrated pointed out that Williams, as a student athlete, does not fit the profile of a typical campus activist. His upbringing in the Unification Church, Smith writes, enhanced his feeling of connectedness to those less fortunate than him:

“How *did* this kid slip through the cracks of the U.S. sports system – or bloom through one? Oh, it’s clear right away, he’s not been washed here by the mainstream.

“Four children and a parent sleeping in one bed at one shelter, piled in with families whose adults had addictions or physical handicaps, piled in with people wondering what was odd about *this* family, besides the obvious: It’s an interracial family in Virginia. Again and again, someone somehow materializing and offering them a hand, saving them from the streets and starvation.

“How did Joseph’s mom, Rhonda – raised Jewish and middle-class and suburban in Blue Bell, Pa. – end up a gypsy trying to keep four children out of oblivion’s clutches? Married to Bruce Williams, a burly, good-natured black man, a reformed drug addict from the hard half of Norfolk. Both had joined Reverend Sun Myung Moon’s Unification Church, done years of volunteer and mission work and, still strangers to each other, committed to wedding in 1982 as part of the church’s plan to erase the barriers between races and nations through intermarriage.

“Bruce ricocheted from job to job, a security guard one day; a counselor at a home for troubled kids the next; a taxi, a truck and bus driver... Between the moves and job changes, Rhonda would round up the kids on weekends and summer mornings, dress them in donated clothes, funnel them into a clunker, drive past all the ball fields where all those kids in crisp unis were playing weekend tournaments, and find someone, somewhere, in worse shape than they were to help out. Or *better off*; it didn’t matter.

“...*That’s* how Joseph made it though high school still holding on to the strange notion that he’s not separate from other human beings, not different from custodians and dormitory maids. That’s why he’s one of the 444,000 US student-ATHELETES standing at the hub of his campus imploring his peers and professors to care. He had to be incubated in a way that neither money nor poverty incubates in America, growing up differently from other fledgling white, brown and black athletes.”

To Rhonda, the article made some good points about the need for well-rounded student athletes. “When kids grow up in sports, it’s easy to become single-minded, and the child is not allowed to become a multi-dimensional person,” she said. “Once they’re in college, their regime is so severe, they can’t focus on academics. However, because of our lifestyle, Joe had more freedom in his life to mature and grow – and have a conscience.”

Rhonda mentions that Smith forgot to include the following point: “When we were moving, we had one point of stability in our life. That was Rev. and Mrs. Moon and the *Divine Principle*. We met together as a family every morning to affirm our faith and do *Hoon Dok Hae* [devotional reading of scriptures]. That gave our family an incredible amount of stability, even though we moved so many times. It’s such an amazing blessing. When we were in the midst of all this stressful stuff going on, we barely had time to even think. But that was our pillar of calm and stability.

“If it hadn’t been for the *Divine Principle*, I don’t think I could have made it. I don’t think my children could have had such a good attitude that they have without the Unification Church.”

Rev. Randall Francis, district pastor of District 1 (Washington D.C., Virginia and Maryland), said of Williams, “I have known the Williams family for more than 20 years. I was always in awe of their perseverance through difficult times and love for the community. Joe was always one who was tagging along with his parents, especially with his mother, and really made a positive impact on the faith community in Sterling. We are proud of him and can’t wait to see what his future holds; we know it will be bright.”