

Parents' Day organizers honor mother of four

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Williams family

ARLINGTON, Va., July 17, 2012 — Rhonda Williams of Sterling, Virginia will be honored at a celebration of National Parents Day on Saturday, July 28 in Bristow, Virginia. Mrs. Williams was chosen for the award for raising four outstanding children, Joy, Victor, Joseph and Michael, while overcoming enormous difficulties. She attributes their success as a family to their faith in God, and to the inspiration they received from the teachings of their pastor, Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

An interracial marriage is usually challenging, and Rhonda and her husband Bruce separated after many years. Yet they never divorced. In the last decade of his life when Bruce's health was failing, Mrs. Williams and their children visited him over fifty times at hospitals, and at rehabilitation centers after surgeries. In the last months of his life before passing, Bruce, Rhonda and the children spoke almost every morning with each other on the telephone.

Due to financial difficulties, Mrs. Williams and her four children had to move many times while the kids were growing up. Eldest son Victor estimates that he moved from one home to another, including shelters, trailer, church basements and apartments, over thirty times.



Bruce and Rhonda Williams and family.

In reflecting on what gave the family strength in the midst of difficulties, Mrs. Williams was quoted in Unification News as saying, "When we were moving, we had one point of stability in our life. We met together as a family every morning to affirm our faith and do [scripture reading]. That gave our family an incredible amount of stability ... 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 ... "

One of the ways in which Rhonda helped her children to develop their faith and strength of character was to encourage them to learn compassion for other people who were even less fortunate than they. Often in the summer they would go as a family in their old auto to help out another family or individuals who

needed support. The children seem to have learned a great deal from these kinds of experiences.

Victor Williams, 22, graduated earlier this year from Virginia's Bridgewater College with a degree in Health and Physical Education. He was enabled to attend college in part, through winning a Beat the Odds Scholarship, an award given to persons who overcome great challenges in their lives.

Victor, who played football for Bridgewater, was a member of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) at school and was asked twice to give sermons to coaches, athletes and professors at meetings of the group. Recently married, he hopes to work in Virginia or Florida, teaching physical education to elementary school children.

It was his attitude of compassion and willingness to stand up for the needs of others that moved second son Joseph Williams, who is studying at the Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at the University of Virginia, to take part in the Living Wage Campaign. Joseph, who also plays football for the UVA Cavaliers, joined together with a number of other UVA students in a hunger strike to support low-paid service workers at the university in their fight for better working conditions.

Joseph's eight-day fast in support of the campus workers was featured in a lengthy article in the July 9 issue of Sports Illustrated by writer Gary Smith entitled, "Why Don't More Athletes Take a Stand?" It is unusual for a university athlete to engage in a hunger strike while in training, and Joseph's efforts also drew the attention of ESPN, Ebony Magazine and the Washington Post.

Rhonda was surprised by the attention her son was receiving, and as she explained to Unification News, "... 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 ...'"

Joy Williams, the eldest child and only daughter, is working as assistant bookkeeper at the Kirov Academy of Ballet in Washington, D.C. In addition to developing her interests in writing and singing, she is pursuing studies to become a CPA.

Youngest son Michael just graduated high school. He aims to become an engineer and has been accepted into Virginia's Old Dominion University.

In a letter to staff of the Parents' Day celebration, Mrs. Williams explained, "I would not be receiving an award were it not for my children's actions and behavior ... my children have told me, amazingly, that they are grateful for the life that they lived; they have friends who have every material thing a person could want and they are still unhappy and complaining. My children's upbringing has given them a different perspective ... And their support and attitude and personal life of faith has been amazingly healing and uplifting to both Bruce and me."

Parents' Day, observed on the fourth Sunday in July, was established by an act of Congress in 1994 as a way of highlighting the crucial role that parents play in providing love, guidance and protection for their children. The Virginia observance will be held from 11 a.m. – 1 p.m. at Choice Books, 10100 Piper Lane, Bristow, Virginia 20136.