

# Working with the legends

CONTINUED FROM C3

Uggams began her singing career only a few blocks uptown, winning various radio contests with her voice and vocalizing her way into Harlem's Apollo Theater during its glory days.

"I would stand in the wings and watch every little move and study every little thing and think, 'OK, why is the audience jumping to their feet for this person?' So I'm a sponge and I think that pays off."

"Because I was a baby, they took me under their wing," she recalls. "I really didn't realize that I was working with legends."

She made her TV debut at age six in an episode of *Beulah*, playing Ethel Waters' niece. And her singing was so good as a contestant on *Name That Tune* that she was asked to return as a regular. One night, her rendition of *The Lord's Prayer* was noticed by record producer Mitch Miller, who promptly made her a cast member on his bouncing-ball show, *Sing Along With Mitch* in 1961. Only years later would she learn that Miller had been under enormous pressure by southern stations to drop Uggams or at least have her sing separately so affiliates could edit her out. Miller refused, leaving the teenage Uggams the only regular black performer on network TV at the time.

Uggams was given her own short-lived variety series, was co-host of another for which she won an Emmy, and earned a Tony for *Hallelujah, Baby!* Then came *Roots*, playing Ben Vereen's mother.

"We knew it was special but we didn't know that it was going to be THE event," she says. "We had to get it right because it was the first opportunity where you got to see how African-American people got here and what they were before they got here."

Then she smiles. "The other thing about it for all of us was like, 'Oh my gosh, we've never seen so many black people employed at once!'" she says.

Uggams' other credits include appearances on the soap *All My Children*, the movies *Sugar Hill* and *Black Girl*, concert tours of *Sondheim andershwin* tunes, and a Tony nomination last year for *King Hedley II*.

# 'This was worth the trip'

CONTINUED FROM C3

By the time Jones was 12, his family had moved to Detroit. He fell in with the wrong crowd, dropped out of school at 15 and joined a youth gang called *The Mobsters*.

Before too long, Jones was into petty crime. But his fists did plenty of talking, too. He entered "smokers," or illegal boxing matches, for small change.

In 1967, scared off by the race riots in Detroit, Jones moved to Toronto.

His bad ways continued and he was in and out jail a couple of times.

The boxing kept him in shape, and he trained with Chualo, even sparred with him the odd time. The two became fast friends.

In Toronto he picked up the nickname Spider because a trainer said Jones reminded him of the boxer, Spider Webb. Spider Jones won Golden Gloves in Michigan, New York state, Ontario and North America.

Today, Jones and Chualo do a lot of personal appearances together. Jones gives motivational speeches about overcoming hardship, while Chualo talks about losing three of his five children and his first wife to drug addictions.

They're also business partners in a TV series about classic boxing bouts, which will air on ESPN.

They trade words now instead of punches. Jones and Chualo gave the Mercer Streeters a sample of their routine.

Jones: "Thirty years ago we fought in Chicago and you never gave me my cut."

Chualo: "Sure I did. Took 27 stitches to close it."

Jones: "George makes me sound like a crook coming up. Fact is I was an honour student."

Chualo: "Yeah. Yes, your honour. No, your honour."



**STOMPING GROUNDS:** Former boxers George Chualo, left, and Spider Jones on Mercer Street. Star photo: Nick Brancaccio

Whited and his daughter tried to square this Charlie Jones with the tough kid they knew. This Charlie Jones went back to school in his 30s and learned how to be a broadcaster. He eventually became one of Toronto's best-known fight analysts and has appeared on TSN.

He won numerous awards for his community service, including a 2001 Premier's Choice Award from the Ontario government.

Motivational speaking is what keeps Jones in shape now, and in the money.

"Growing up around here," he said, "I was told I'd never amount to anything. You've got to start believing in yourself before others believe in you."

He checked his watch. Another fight beckoned.

Turning to Whited, he said: "Man, this was worth the trip." He shook his hand, promised to return soon and was off.

But not before he took one last, lingering look at Wigle Park.

# Jones pulls no punches with students

Former boxer warns students about dangers of bullying

BY MICHAEL PELHAM  
Special to the News Advertiser

**PICKERING** — Of all the places Spider Jones has lived, Pickering is the best.

However, something needs to be done to stop bullying in schools and crime on the streets before it gets worse.

The three-time Golden Gloves boxing champion and radio personality expressed the sentiments during an anti-bullying information night held recently in Pickering council chambers. He shared his personal experiences with bullies and discussed how they can rob children of their self-esteem.

Mr. Jones has lived with his family in Pickering for 10 years, "and this is the best com-



JASON LIEBREGTS/ News Advertiser photo

Pickering resident Spider Jones discussed the dangers of bullying during a recent speech to local students.

munity I've ever lived in," he said to applause. "That doesn't mean we're perfect. That does-

n't mean we don't have situations, we don't have problems, because bullies, crime, does not

discriminate, that's why we have to nip it in the bud."

He recalled his own struggles against his childhood bully, and how it played a huge part in lowering his self-esteem.

"Bullying may be a simplistic term. I was being terrorized," Mr. Jones said in an interview before his speech. "I know the feeling, I know what fear is, and I just want to offer my support."

Bullying has no place in a community or in schools, he added.

"I don't think any kid should go to school in fear. He should go to school to learn, to be enlightened, to make friends, and to enjoy it," he said.

"I commend the teachers and the people out here who have gotten involved in this, who have given up their time."

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**"FUNI**

# SPIDER: Some kids will never be reached no matter what you do

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"It haunts me that I let my family down and that I hurt them," he said. "I regret that I used to beat up people just to look good in the eyes of my friends."

On top of the emotional scars are scars from straight razors and fights that serve as reminders.

But back then, there was little thought about consequence.

In Jones's old circles, if you beat someone up, you were respected and feared. And, to the old Spider, that meant something.

But gang life has got harder.

Gangs have proliferated in recent years and more kids are dying on the streets, Jones said.

He knows about street life. And he knows people can change and sometimes he gets to see it happen.

Like the time he visited one of the most hardened criminals in a Toronto detention centre — who might have been all of 17.

"He came up to me and talked, he actually hugged me and gave me a kiss," said Jones. "I saw him last month. He's got a job and is going to school."

For Jones, there's no success in the ring or on the microphone that

feels that good.

"It's not where you come from, it's where you are going," he said. "I tell the story and hope I reach into the heart of somebody."

But he's realistic about gangs and gang life.

"There are some kids who, no matter what you do, you're not going reach," he said.

"This is not a fairy tale and there's not a happy ending every time."

But that doesn't mean he'll stop trying.

Jones doesn't talk and take off. He leaves behind his e-mail ad-

dress and invites kids to contact him.

The problem is easier to solve early on, Jones said, but success will only come through community, police and political efforts.

"Gangs are vicious," Jones said. "They hang around the halls of schools, they work on other kids and they peddle fear and intimidation."

Spider Jones can be heard 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays on Toronto's CFRB AM 1010, and reached through e-mail at spiderjones@rogers.com



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