

Spider escaped from street web

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Staff Writer

From throwing punches in gang fights to tossing questions at celebrities, the journey of Spider Jones is an inspirational story about turning life's adversities into personal triumph.

The Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame inductee and Toronto radio personality recently told his story to more than 250 high school students during the Peel board's Black History Forum: *Overcoming Obstacles*.

The forum was conducted at Peel District School Board headquarters. Students from schools all over the region came to hear Jones speak. They also enjoyed student performances



SPIDER JONES

of song and poetry in addition to participating in workshops.

Black History Month holds a great deal of personal meaning to Anthony Morgan. "We learn very little about ourselves (in school)," said the Bramalea Secondary School student. He also believes the events inspired by the celebration of black culture offers some important lessons for students of all colours and backgrounds.

"We must know about each other so we are better able to interact," he said.

The discussions that evolve during such events answer a lot of questions black students have about themselves and also help other students understand their classmates, he added. "This is a unite thing. Not a black or white thing," Morgan said in a poem.

The lives of some black figures can also be universally inspirational.

Spider Jones grew up poor in the black neighbourhoods of Windsor. One of nine children, he lived with his mother and father in the home his grandfather built. His mother grew up on a North Carolina share cropper's farm and his father worked 6 1/2 days a week to feed the family.

Jones slept in a bed with five siblings and was often sick. When Jones was 6-years-old, his 18-month-old brother died of pneumonia. The memory of a man coming into his home and placing his brother's body into a black bag haunted him for more than a decade.

"I slept in school, my mind was fatigued. I could not learn," he told the students.

He languished in a remedial class for years. He began to believe he was worthless and stopped dreaming. Jones dropped out of school at 15 and joined a street gang.

He once aspired to be a radio disc jockey. But living in a time when black radio personalities were non-existent, he found nothing but discouragement.

Jones lived the gang life until he was 24. Long enough to see his cousin murdered, his brother shot and the inside of prison walls.

"When I first got out of jail I had no career," Jones admitted. "I had nothing."

He moved Toronto to become a disc jockey in a bar.

"I think because of where I came from I couldn't get to where I'm going," he told his teenage audience. He lacked confidence and self esteem.

His life changed after meeting his future wife at a dance. She asked him cut all his ties to the gang life and encouraged him to return to school at the age of 28.

After taking classes to upgrade his high school qualifications, he entered a college journalism course. He graduated and tried entering the broadcast radio industry, but had door after door closed in his face. However, he never gave up.

Today, his resume includes co-hosting a syndicated television show and hosting his own radio show on Toronto's Fan 590. He now has his own radio show on CFRB and recently published a book about his life. Jones has interviewed such sports greats as Muhammad Ali, Willie Mays, Wayne Gretzky, Charles Oakley and Bobby Orr.

"I'm living my dream now," he said. Jones urged students to pursue their dreams and to begin by staying in school and ignoring the negative influences of others.