

Gloves come off for school presentation

By Catherine O'Hara
REVIEW STAFF

Spider Jones threw a few punches – the inspiring kind – at Guardian Angels Catholic Elementary School last week, encouraging youth to stay in school, pursue a higher education and turn their dreams into reality.

During his hour-long address, the former three-time Golden Glove Champion and CFRB broadcaster shared chapters of his life with students in an attempt to empower them and give them the strength to believe in themselves.

Raised in Detroit, Michigan – a state he referred to as the murder capital of the world – Jones had big dreams of becoming a radio announcer. But a life of crime temporarily prevented him from reaching his goals.

“Detroit was a dangerous city back then,” Jones told students. “There was a lot of crime, a lot of gang activity going on.”

At age 10, Jones was swept up by a violent momentum and joined a gang. By the time he was 15, he had dropped out of school and spent time behind bars for the crimes he committed. When he was released from jail, Jones realized that he didn't want to continue down that dangerous path.

He said it was hard to draw the strength he needed to change his life around with no self-esteem and no peer support. “No one believed in me, but more than that, I did not believe in myself. When you don't believe, you cannot achieve.”

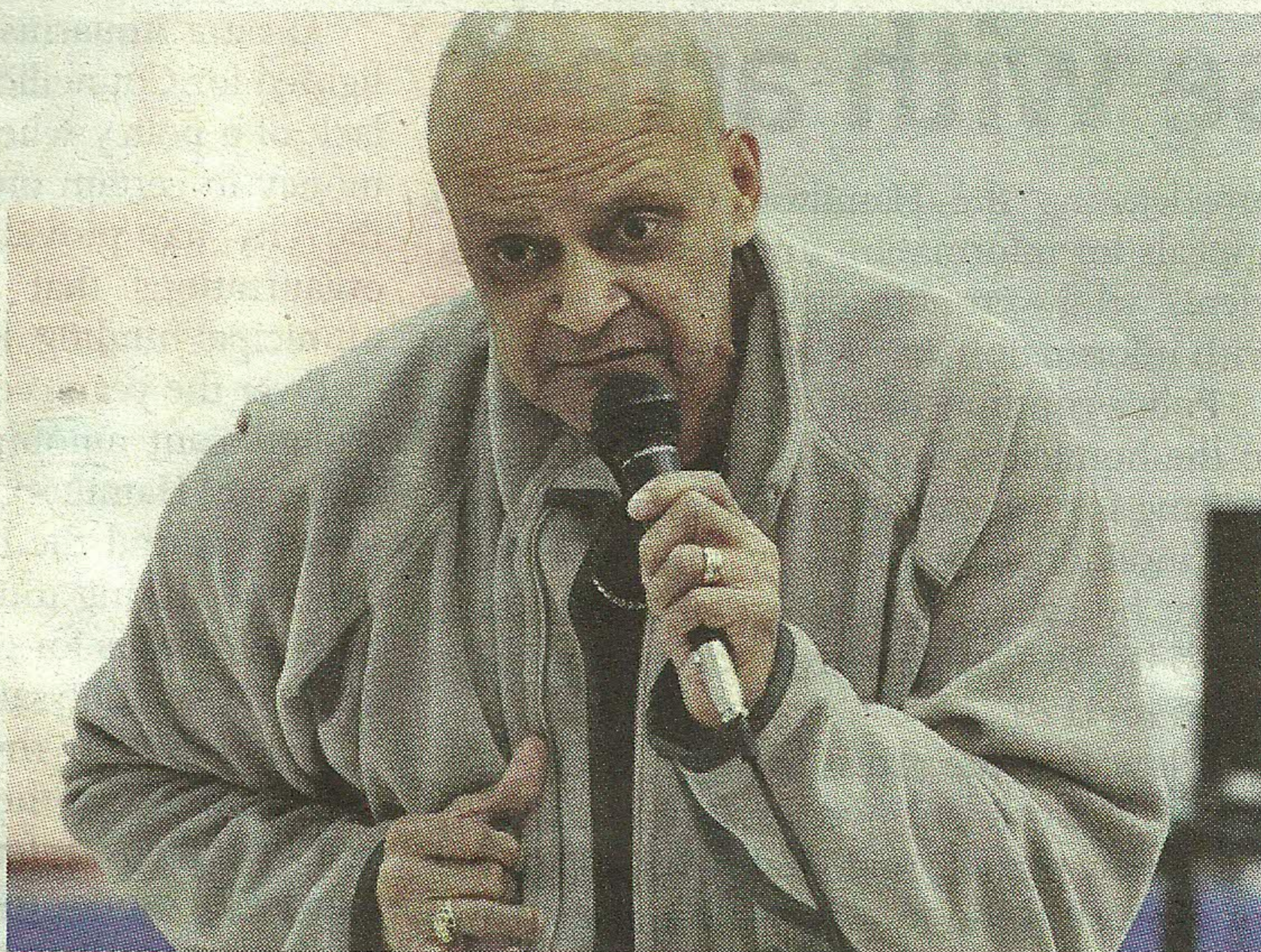
At the age of 28, Jones met his bride-to-be. They wed at City Hall and were anxiously awaiting the arrival of their first child. It was with the support of his wife that Jones decided to return to school to pursue an education in the field he always dreamed of working in.

He was 30 years old and scared of failing. But Jones is a fighter, he told Guardian Angels School students. Whether in the ring or in a classroom, the Canadian Boxing Hall of Fame inductee reached his goal.

At the age of 34, Jones graduated with honours from Seneca College and began his ultimate career as a broadcaster.

“I am living my dream,” said Jones. “If an ex-con who failed Grade 3 and Grade 4... can make it, then anybody can.”

Stressing the importance of staying in school, Jones asked students to share their dreams and career aspirations with their peers. While some were too shy to share their vision for the future, others noted they wanted to join the local police service or Canada's



PULLING NO PUNCHES: Spider Jones, in an intense moment at Guardian Angels Catholic School, spoke about achieving dreams.

Navy.

Praising the students for voicing their career ambitions, Jones said: “The first step is education. That's the great liberator.”

However, the road to success is not without its challenges. Hard work and determination, he reminded students at Guardian Angels, will help them reach their goals.

“My purpose is to motivate young people to (follow) their passion, their dream,” said Jones. “Young people like you, I want to see you have a good life.”

Guardian Angels School parent council member Roger Almeida was pleased the school was able to provide students with the opportunity to hear Jones speak.

“It was an incredible experience,” said Almeida, who is a long-time CFRB listener and Jones' fan. “Hopefully a few kids will be affected in a positive way.”

And if only one child is impacted by last Wednesday's presentation, noted the parent, “Then I think this presentation has done its job.”