

3/7/92

LOCAL NEWS

# Rosa Parks signs off on her own story

## Civil rights legend promotes new book

By Nichell J. Taylor  
STAFF WRITER

Twelve-year-old Jabari Graham nervously approached the table where a living legend sat.

He watched intently as Rosa Parks, known to him as "the black woman who refused to get up from her bus seat," carefully placed her signature inside a new copy of her autobiography.

With a faint smile, Jabari looked up at his mother then back toward the legend and said, "Thank you, Mrs. Parks."

That scene was played repeatedly as more than 150 people lined up inside the Shrine of the Black Madonna Bookstore in Southwest Atlanta Friday evening to capture a glimpse of Mrs. Parks and to have the mother of the modern civil rights movement autograph her book.

Many came bearing gifts — a hand-made Rosa Parks doll, an historical collage, a rose — as well as praise. Selling by the dozens at the book signing, her autobiography, "Rosa Parks: My Story," chronicles her experiences with the civil rights movement as well as her personal life, in her own words and in her own way.

"This is the first book I've written myself," Mrs. Parks said. "I thought it was time



W.A. BRIDGES JR. / Staff

**Rosa Parks signs her autobiography at the Shrine of the Black Madonna Bookstore. She wrote the book because "I can tell my story better."**

to do so, because I can tell my story better than anyone else."

She said she geared the story toward young readers.

"I tried to keep the words plain and simple, not too adult for them," she said.

Even if they didn't know the whole story, the children in attendance at least had something to say about who Rosa Parks is.

"She was the African-American woman that the bus driver told to get up for a white person, and she went to jail for it," said 9-year-old Dejon Hurst, a student at Atlanta Preparatory School.

Farid Bilal, 13, had his own version. "She was a woman that helped us so that we can now sit in front of the bus. And now we can stay there and have rights as black people."

# Forsaking drugs, embracing life

## Young mother grateful to God, nonprofit group

By Nichell Taylor Bryant  
STAFF WRITER

Seated on a plush sectional in her Douglasville home, Janis James rocked and cooed at her infant daughter, Katherine, as the baby woke from a midmorning nap.

James, a crack cocaine addict for nine years and a heavy user of marijuana and alcohol since she was 18, thanked God the tiny body nestled in her arms was born healthy. James did, after all, use drugs during the early months of her pregnancy, she said. She was so high at the time, she recalled, that she denied to everyone she was pregnant.

Life changed for James in a relatively short period. December marked the sixth month of her drug-free status, she said. It

was just a year ago that she acknowledged she had a problem.

"Before that, I remember DFACS [Department of Family and Children Services] told me that if I ever used drugs again, they'd take both of my kids away," said James, 34, whose other child, Christopher, is 10. "But for an addict, even that threat isn't enough for someone to stop using."

Crack cocaine made friends for James. It also made her lose weight, worsening her poor self-image.

"We called it the 'Jenny crack diet,'" she mused. "My normal weight was about 150 pounds. I got down to 117."

"Today, I don't want to do drugs. I have surrendered. I know now what drugs do to me. Now good things are happening: I have a beautiful baby girl, I just bought this trailer, I earned back my parents' respect and I see more of my little boy, who is more adjusted in school. I even got a library card and registered to vote."

She again thanked God. She also thanked a friend for referring her to Mothers Making A Change (MMAC), a program run by the public, nonprofit Cobb and Douglas Counties Community Services Boards. Since MMAC's inception in November 1992, more than 300 pregnant women and mothers with substance abuse problems have received treatment, prenatal care, residential and outpatient services through the program, which is funded by the Georgia Department of Human Resources with help from the Cobb and Douglas governments, officials said.

"Last year, all of the babies born under the program were born drug-free, and a lot of the women had their babies, who were in foster care, returned to them," said Joyce Goldberg, a state DHR spokeswoman.

In a 1994 study of health risks to newborns, the department found that 46 percent of women interviewed (nearly 52,000 women whose babies underwent live

births) reported they drank alcohol three months before their pregnancy. And since most of the women did not know exactly when their babies were conceived, exposure to alcohol could have been there before they knew they were pregnant.

Of about 110,000 mothers who deliver each year, an estimated 560 use enough cocaine shortly before delivery for the drug to be detected in the newborn's blood, the study said.

Disturbed by these findings, MMAC has drug and health treatment facilities in Cobb and residences in Cobb and Douglas that offer:

- Daytime drug and alcohol treatment that addresses recovery, relapses, parenting, women's issues, stress management, life skills and academic enrichment, including GED preparation.

- Individual case management and street outreach programs in which teams of women, many of whom were once in need of help,

■ Craig Taylor, assistant director of the Georgia



**Janis James,** who once was so dependent on drugs that nothing else really mattered, plays with new daughter Katherine at her Douglasville home.

CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / Staff

visit homes and locate women in need of services. Prenatal care, child immunization and transportation are provided.

■ Shelter for homeless, pregnant women as well as women with children. The goal: Ensure proper prenatal care and unite families in a drug-free living environment. A child care center soon will be added to the Cobb treatment facility.

■ Outpatient services for pregnant women who are employed and unable to attend day treatment.

James was three months pregnant with Katherine when she approached MMAC. It was

June 3, her birthday.

"When I first got there, I was acting big and bad, like, 'Yeah, I'm here, and I've got a problem, but I'm going to get fixed.' But you can't just get fixed."

She previously completed a six-week substance abuse program but still felt defenseless against her addiction, she said.

"I had the tools, but I didn't know what to do with them," she said. "All they told me was to go to meetings and read your books, but nobody told me what to do if I ran into old friends or what to do for stress management. MMAC did all this and much more, every single day."



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# Relationships

Staff writer **Nichell J. Taylor**  
finally meets her namesake.

## 'Trek' star encounter has a special meaning

I knew I'd meet her at some point in my life, but I never imagined she'd materialize, as if out of nowhere, in my own back yard.

I'm referring to Nichelle Nichols, known best as Lieutenant Uhura of the original "Star Trek" TV series and subsequent movies. I'm nobody's groupie, but I didn't hesitate for one second to stand in a long line recently at Oxford Book Store in Buckhead to meet Nichols, the first African-American woman in "space." She was signing copies of her autobiography, "Beyond Uhura," and other memorabilia.

For most of my life, Nichols has represented much more to me than her intergalactic character. She is the woman whose first name my father, James Taylor (not the singer), gave to me when I was born in 1969, the year "Star Trek" was canceled after a three-year run.

In my father's words: "When I first saw her on the show and found out what her real name was, there was just something about that name, Nichelle, that I loved. Plus, the woman was and still is fine."

He also liked what she represented on the show: a beautiful, intelligent black woman, portrayed as an equal among other races.

My father told me that just after my birth, my mother chose Jeanette for my first name (it's now my middle name). But my father, impressed



**Nichell J. Taylor** (right) with "Star Trek's" Nichelle Nichols.

by the unique yet simple sound of "Nichelle," had my birth certificate changed to Nichell, leaving off the final "e." No matter. That spelling error has always looked perfect to me, because it was given by my father with love and purpose.

When I was about 10 years old, I remember asking my father where my name came from, because I had several schoolmates named Michelle, which sounded very similar. When he told me whose name it was, I immediately took an interest in watching "Star Trek" reruns. I even fantasized I was Uhura.

That phase, just like my childhood, faded quickly, but my interest in Nichols remained. I would get ex-

cited every time I'd run across a woman with the name. So far, I've met only two.

I told myself that one day I'd travel to find "the real Nichelle" and introduce myself. As it turned out, I didn't have to go far.

As I drew closer in line to Nichols at Oxford Book Store, my heartbeat sped up. I thought to myself, "I don't even know this woman, but I feel like she's a long-lost relative." When my turn arrived, I stared, noting how little she has aged from those early television episodes.

As she placed her loopy signature on a newspaper article about her I carried, I told her that my father had such a major crush on her that he named me, his only daughter, after her. Nichols looked up, smiled and said, "Is that right? Well, tell your father I said thank you." She also didn't mind that an "e" was missing from my name.

At that moment, I felt like I had accomplished something. I don't know what, exactly, but something. Maybe I thought there finally was closure to the mystery of this woman whose name I bear.

Now, I can "live long and prosper."

*In this weekly column, the staff of The Atlanta Journal-Constitution writes about the relationships in their lives. If you relate to a column, share your thoughts with the writer. P.O. Box 4869, Atlanta, Ga. 30302.*