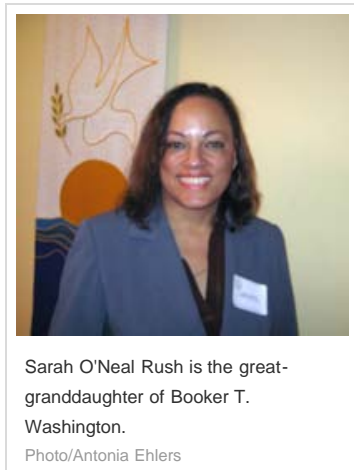




Great-granddaughter of Booker T. Washington visits Serra

February 18, 1:30 PM Serra High School, San Mateo Examiner Antonia Ehlers

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Sarah O'Neal Rush is the great-granddaughter of Booker T. Washington. Photo/Antonia Ehlers

The Serra school community recently hosted guest speaker Sarah O'Neal Rush, the great-granddaughter of Booker T. Washington. Rush captivated the audience as she shared compelling personal stories of her grandfather's rise above slavery. Booker T. Washington was a former slave, the author of "Up from Slavery" and the founder of Tuskegee University.

"We were honored to share an afternoon with Sarah O'Neal Rush," said Principal Barry Thornton. "She stressed the importance of education, family and community. Our students, faculty and staff were so inspired by her personal experience and wisdom."

Rush's highly motivational talk illustrated how ordinary people can achieve extraordinary feats. Her great-grandfather used to carry the books of his master's children. He spied on their

classes, vowing to read and write one day. During those times, reading and writing was considered a crime for slaves and was punishable by death. Booker T. Washington not only learned to read and write, he established a flourishing university and built it brick by brick.

"At birth, Booker T. Washington was considered to be worth less than \$400," Rush noted. "However, he went on to become the most influential black educator of his time. He knew what it was like to be a slave and he knew what it was like to be free. He had thousands of followers. He was the first African American on a postage stamp and the first African American invited to dine at the White House. My great-grandfather had a plan and a dream and a remarkable commitment to make them come true. No matter how dim the clouds, he was determined to find the silver lining."

Booker T. Washington experienced extreme poverty in rural Alabama. A family he visited shared one fork for all food. Many of his friends didn't know how to use a toothbrush. A couple he knew lived in a shack but had an expensive clock on their mantel - a symbol of hope and the desire to change.

According to Rush, "My great-grandfather was inspired by these people because they had recognized their weaknesses and had a true desire to improve their circumstances."

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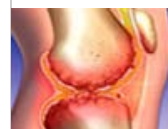
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Rush shared Booker T. Washington's secrets for success: Never get so far ahead that you forget to look back. Take responsibility for where you are now compared to where you want to be. Discover your own extraordinary legacy. At the young age of 25, Booker T. Washington opened Tuskegee University on July 4, 1881. The university continues to educate thousands of great minds today, including Rush's daughter, Iesha, who is a freshman.

Raised by a struggling single mother, Rush pulled herself up by her own bootstraps. She did not personally flourish until she discovered her family roots and rich history.

"It is so important to connect with your family history," she said. "I thought my life was simple and ordinary until I discovered my history at a Booker T. Washington family reunion. I realized I was not an accident of birth because God does not make mistakes. My great-grandfather continues to inspire me today."

Rush lectures all over the country and works with high-risk youth. She has a Master's Degree in professional psychology. Rush also is the founder of Extraordinary Legacy and the Booker T. Washington Empowerment Network.

Serra sophomores Erich Wilson and Larry Moore enjoyed the talk and said it gave them a fresh perspective on their own lives.

"It was amazing to hear how Booker T. Washington achieved so much and it made us realize that the problems we have as teenagers are nothing compared to what he went through," Moore explained. "We learned to be persistent in whatever we do and above all, do our best."

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