

Entertainment

Tavis Smiley promotes his new book at Special Occasions in Winston-Salem.

He's Still Smiling

Nicole Spruill
Reporter

Thirty minutes before a book signing on March 3, many people lined up outside Special Occasions.

Unlike other days at Special Occasions, the owners were preparing themselves for a very special guest — Tavis Smiley.

Smiley, the host of BET Tonight and a political commentator on the *Tom Joyner Morning Show*, visited Winston-Salem on his book tour.

As cars lined up outside of Special Occasions, Smiley conducted interviews with reporters and autographed his third book, *Doing What's Right*.

Smiley grew up with nine brothers and sisters. His family had very little money so he knew how it was to struggle.

"We were disenfranchised socially, politically, and economically, so I knew how it was to go without," he said.

At age 13, he found his role models, Douglas Hogan and Sen. Birch Bayh. Hogan was a member of the city council in Kokomo, Ind. He was also the Sunday school superin-

tendent at New Bethel, Smiley's church. Focusing on both leaders, Smiley began to listen and absorb the information that he was learning from both men.



SMILEY

"I was at the age of 13, sandwiched between a guy who was making a difference on a local level and another guy who was making a difference on a national level. Listening to them talk, I soaked up the information like a sponge."

In the fall of 1982, Smiley went on to Indiana University where he enrolled in the school of Public and Environmental Affairs. His concentration was law and public policy. He entered that university with the question: How can he make a difference?

During his sophomore year, he was catapulted into social advocacy when a close friend of his, Denver Smith, was shot and killed by police officers in Bloomington, Ind.

"They shot him an inordinate number of times in attempting to arrest him; half of the bullets hit Denver in the back. That's what

made the story such a hot topic," he said.

This situation drove Smiley into advocacy. Making a difference in people lives is something he felt he could do well.

Smiley has made people listen to his message and he has brought about many changes.

For example, when *Living Single* was to have been first canceled, Smiley went on the *Tom Joyner Morning Show* and gave out the phone and fax number for Peter Roth, the then-president of the Fox network.

After all the faxes and phone calls, Roth gave in and *Living Single* was brought back on to start the Fall season.

Also, UPN was planning to launch a sitcom about slavery called *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer*.

Not seeing anything funny about slavery, Smiley went on air the next day and listed all the sponsors who bought advertising time for the show. One by one, the sponsors started dropping.

Questions & Answers

Spruill: You speak a lot about advocacy and making a difference. You have also been blessed with wonderful opportunities such as hosting BET Tonight and commenting on the Tom Joyner Morning Show. What would you say to students especially black males who see you as a role model and at some point in their lives would like to be where you are today?

Smiley: First of all you have to discover in life what your passion is. I'm passionate about trying to empower people. As such I have been blessed with the opportunities on the radio and televisions and through the lectures and books to do what I do. But ultimately you have to figure out what it is you are passionate about and not do it because somebody else is doing it, but do it because that is what you wanna do.

Spruill: Listening to the Nigel Alston program on WSNC-FM 90.5, you said one of your favorite quotes was by your big mama; Once a task you have first begun, Never finish until it's done; Be the labor great or small, Do it well or not at all. Being that this quote has inspired you a great deal, has there ever been a time in

your life when you just wanted to give in?

Smiley: Many times. The older I get the more I realize you can't really enjoy success unless you have had many failures anyway. Life for us is like a heart monitor. When the machine is going up and down it's all good, It's when it flat lines on you, that is when you are in trouble. We all have times when we feel that we want to give up, but ultimately when you allow yourself to give up, you surrender. Success is a journey not a destination. You just got to keep moving. It's better to have gotten started on something than to start and not complete the project. I believe in following things through.

Spruill: On the Nigel Alston program, you also said that issues have a way of finding us and you pick your hills and fights carefully. You said there are some fights that aren't worth fighting for even if you win, but there are fights you must engage in even if you lose. My question is there are students here at WSSU who feel boycotting Myrtle Beach is useless. However, many students feel it is appropriate for us to take action against the courts over the

Diallo case. Do both the situations coincide with what you were saying or do you think both issues are worth fighting for even if we lose?

Smiley: I think you ascertain how important something is to you and if you are going to get involved, you ought to go for it. The purpose of the quote is, there is something called principles that always have to be guided by. If you believe in something that adamantly, then you fight for it. It is not always about winning all the time. It's about standing up and being heard. Nobody likes to lose, but sometimes you have to go for it even when the odds are stacked against you. You have to fight the fights that you are most passionate about. Sometimes there are fights that are easier and there are fights that are more difficult, but you have to be guided by your principles.

Do you have a story idea? Call us at 750-2327.