



Face on the Floor roast

Sanders' recipe for fame started with a spoon

By Elaine Allen, Communications Committee

Her mother almost stole the show from Symone Sanders during the “Face on the Barroom Floor” event on Thursday, Feb. 24. Instead of taking the podium like any emcee would, Omaha Star Publisher Terri Sanders paraded through the Omaha Press Club dining room in a yellow hard hat, holding a large silver serving spoon, and announcing her arrival with a bullhorn instead of a microphone.

As she took the podium, Terri Sanders described her young daughter, standing in their kitchen, holding a wooden spoon to her mouth, and pretending she was “Donna Burns, reporting live. This,” her mother said, “is how Symone got her start.”

The second roaster called to the podium wasn't on the program. Aida Amoura-Rezac, who worked with Symone in former Mayor Jim Suttle's office, praised Symone as a woman "so exuberant, so out there. I hope she's an encouragement to young people."

Girls Inc. Director of Programs Emily Mwaja roasted her former Girls Inc. protégé, who at the time attended Mercy High School, by saying, "Symone would show up so cute in her girls school uniform."

She praised 16-year-old Symone's introduction of former President Bill Clinton at a Girls Inc. fundraiser luncheon, as a portent to her appearances as a CNN commentator. "At Girls Inc., Symone would say when I'm at the mic, show me some decorum."

Citing Symone's infamous August 14, 2017 encounter on CNN with former Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Ken Cuccinelli, Mwaja joked that maybe the title of Symone's second book should be "No, You Shut the F*** Up."

In her roast, former Omaha City Council member and State Sen. Brenda Council echoed Mwaja. "Bill Clinton was so impressed with 16-year-old Symone's poise when she introduced him at the Girls Inc. luncheon that he mentioned her in his book." To that, Symone chimed in from her seat, "On page 81!"

The audience cheered when Council praised Symone's "multi-talented and multi-faceted" adviser role during one of Joe Biden's presidential campaign rallies. "One of Symone's duties was as defensive lineman against a crazy chick in Wisconsin when she took her down!"

Council, who became a "Face" in 1995, said she was pleased that Biden appointed a young, Black woman from Omaha, Nebraska. "I see what one Black woman can do for other Black women. Baby girl, I'm so proud of you and I welcome you to Face on the Barroom floor."

Thomas Warren, chief of staff for Omaha Mayor Jean Stothert, was the last roaster. He lamented that the previous roasters stole all the jokes. As the head of the Urban League of Omaha, he was at the Girls, Inc. luncheon when Symone introduced Bill Clinton. "I thought, 'Damn, how do you follow that?'" When he read her first book, Warren said, "It was exhausting. I needed a drink after the first chapter."

When she went to work for a 2016 presidential campaign, Warren joked, "Was she working for Hillary Clinton? No! Bernie Sanders! From Vermont! There are 10 Black people in Vermont!"

Warren and his wife Aileen became "Faces" in 2019. Like his sister Brenda Council, he welcomed Symone as the latest "Face."

As her "Face" was unveiled, artist Jeffrey Koterba said he tried to "reflect your wonderful trajectory." In the caricature, Symone is pictured driving a red convertible with 402 license plates, heading from Omaha to Washington, D.C., surrounded by images of Bernie Sanders, President Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, and logos of CNN, MSNBC, and Girls Inc.

Thanking the 131 people in the audience, Symone Sanders said, "This is the biggest honor you can get if you're from Nebraska. I love you. I love Omaha. You are what made me."

Growing up in the close, tight-knit community of North Omaha, she said, "I'm grateful for this community. I wouldn't be who I am without North Omaha."

She credited Mercy High School, “where I got a global perspective.” She thanked the Empowerment Network’s Friday meeting of Black leaders for offering their support and encouragement.

Then, it was her turn for rebuttal, roasting her mother first. “I once paid Mom to project manage a party for me. I gave her a budget between \$5,000 and \$6,000.” But as the champagne continued to flow, she began to question how much the party was costing. The tab came to \$12,000. “And that’s when I fired my mother.”

Sanders also fired barbs at both Girls Inc., the Urban League, Creighton University, and Chief Warren. Directing a question to Brenda Council, she asked, “How do you like your brother working for a Republican?” With that, the audience howled with laughter.

As she brought the evening’s program to a close, Symone Sanders said, “I am very honored to be here.”