Madame CJ Walker

By: Alyssa Hernandez

On a cotton plantation in Delta, Louisiana, on December 23, 1867, Madame CJ Walker, an African American was born Sarah Breedlove. Sarah was the fifth child and the first in the family to be free-born. Her two parents were Owen and Minerva Breedlove, both recently freed slaves at the time Sarah was born. Sarah Breedlove's story is something that everyone should know about.

In 1874, with Sarah being the young age of seven, Sarah's mother, Minerva, died. The following year, her father passed away as well; both because of unknown causes. Due to this sad passing, Sarah had to live with one of her sisters, Louvenia, and her brother-in-law, Willie Powell.

At the age of 14, Sarah had been receiving mistreatment from Willie, her brother-in-law. This caused Sarah to marry Moses McWilliams. On June 6, 1885, Sarah gave birth to a baby girl, A’Lelia. Unfortunately for the family, Moses died 2 years later, leaving Sarah a single parent, and A’Lelia having no father. After his death, Sarah and A’Lelia moved to St. Louis, where Sarah worked as a washerwoman, earning $1.50 each day she worked. Sarah worked hard in order to have enough money to send A’Lelia to public school. Soon after, Sarah met her soon to be second husband, Charles J Walker. He helped Sarah to spark the start of her career.

In 1890, Sarah had found out she had a scalp disorder. Sarah experimented with many kinds of hair treatments to improve her condition. She was losing a lot of hair due to her disorder. This pushed Sarah to figure out a way to heal her condition. Sarah didn’t know it then, but this was the start of her career.

Annie Turnbo Malone, a successful African American hair care entrepreneur, hired Sarah as a commission agent. Sarah moved to Denver, Colorado to pursue her career, and with the help of her husband created advertisements for African American hair care. Also came the name Sarah is now known as, “Madame CJ Walker.” A few years later in 1907, Madame and her husband traveled around the South and the Southeast, in order to promote Madame’s products for hair care.
Her products included her own formula for pomade, as well as the use of heating combs, etc. Madame had many achievements. One of them was the Walker Agents. The Walker Agents promoted her ethics of “cleanliness and loveliness,” this was to advance the current status in that time of African Americans. They helped to organize clubs and conventions for African Americans as well. Madame opened a factory and also a beauty school in Pittsburgh, in 1908.

With the move of her business to Indianapolis, there came the profits of several million dollars. This made her the first African American millionaire. One of the most inspiring achievements was Madame donating the biggest amount of money by an African American, for the construction of an Indianapolis YMCA in 1913.

Unfortunately, Madame sadly died due to hypertension on May 25, 1919, at the age of 51. This left her daughter a legacy, to carry on what Madame built for the family. Madame had done a lot for African Americans, in a truly interesting but inspiring way.
Works Cited
