

HER CONCERN: BLACK PEOPLE

HER GOAL: SOCIAL CHANGE

... shares her mother's struggle ...

By MICHELE FUETSCH

Eighteen-year-old Patricia Wilks lists the two most important things she ever learned from her mother.

"If you can't come clean, stay away dirty. That means if you're going to do something, then do it. Don't half-step. Don't make a commitment you don't intend to keep."

"Always stand up for what you believe."

Pat is the only daughter and youngest of the three children of Mr. and Mrs. Otis Wilks of East Palo Alto. Saturday she became the second student to graduate from the all-black Nairobi High School, founded in East Palo Alto last spring by her mother, Gertrude Wilks. Pat has been accepted to begin studies at Pitzer College in Claremont on Feb. 9.

WAGED BATTLE

Mrs. Wilks began earning herself a reputation as a black militant and a black community organizer six years ago when she founded the Mothers for Equal Education. Since that time, she has waged a continuing battle to secure quality education for black youngsters, which culminated in the founding last year of the Nairobi elementary school, high school and college.

The battle has been carried on in the public eye and, since Mrs. Wilks has tried to enlist the whole black community in the struggle, her own children were in the front lines.

Pat acknowledges that she has battle scars, but says firmly that she has never wished she was not Gertrude Wilks's daughter.

Mrs. Wilks says, "I've never wished Pat wasn't my daughter but I have wished sometimes that I could hide my children away, especially Pat."

The Wilks boys are Danny, 20, a student at Pomona College; and Otis, 24, who lives in San Jose.

Pat talked about the past and about some of her expectations for the future during an interview just prior to graduation day.

"SNEAK OUT"

When she was in the eighth grade Pat was among the first black youngsters to begin taking part in the "sneak out" initiated by her mother. The sneak out saw black youngsters crossing the Bayshore to spend the school week away from their families, in the homes of sympathetic Palo Alto Altans, thus enabling the youngsters to attend Palo Alto schools.

Later, when she was a junior at Cubberley High School, a transfer program for East Palo Alto youngsters was set up by the Palo Alto school district and Pat became a participant.

EXPELLED

Last April Pat was expelled from Cubberley after an alleged argument broke out between a group of white and

black girls. Pat claims she was never given an opportunity to present her side of the issue. She says school officials told her mother that the suspension was not due to one specific incident but was caused by a "build up of things."

Pat believes the expulsion was due in part to the fact that she was active in the Black Student Union and shared her mother's militant views. After leaving Cubberley, Pat enrolled in Nairobi.

Cubberley principal Win Roberson commented on Pat's explanation. He said, "That's probably the way she did see it and felt about it."

He declined to comment further saying, "It has always been my policy not to discuss student issues with anybody but the student and his particular parents." He added that he had received an invitation to Pat's graduation Saturday. Because of illness he could not attend.

LOST FAITH

"The experiences I went through in the Palo Alto schools left me bitter and I lost lots of faith in public schools and lots of faith in people. I lost faith in people and the majority of those people were white.

"When I was in the Palo Alto schools I was very tight. I kept a lot of things inside. I kind of got to the point where I couldn't really talk to people. Since I went to Nairobi I've had a chance to un-

wind and release all that I've held inside for so long," Pat explains.

What she found when she released her feelings was bitterness, she says. "I can't ever overlook what's happened but I'm not going to let bitterness rule me. I'll never let it stop me in anything I want to do."

HAS DOUBTS

Pat expressed very vocal doubts as to whether integration is the "answer" to black-white conflicts. "I don't think parents, both black and white, know what it's like to go over to a white school everyday and have to fight everybody from the janitor to the administrators."

She differentiates between the type of all-black school her mother has founded and the move of white parents in the South to organize private schools in opposition, to desegregation rulings. "The difference in Mississippi is that they are sending their children to school to be racists and we're sending kids to all black schools to be humans."

VALUES

Pat says she values education more than anything. "Because I feel education is the way to get wealth and power for the black community."

Her biggest concern right now is for "black people," her commitment — "to bring whatever I have into the black community and to pass any skills that I acquire on to other young black people."

Pat plans to major in chemistry at Pitzer. Last year at

Nairobi she took geology, physics and chemistry and this past semester has been taking a chemistry class five evenings a week from 5 to 7 o'clock at Nairobi. The instructor is Larry Fewell of East Palo Alto, a black chemist who works full-time for Ames Research Center. Pat says Mr. Fewell's willingness to "make an effort" to help students pursue their interests was instrumental in her choice of a chemistry major.

APPLY

"I hope to apply what I learned at Nairobi in the best way that I can and to be able to show that black schools can teach black children, that black children can learn and that black schools do provide students with the skills required to attend college."

Pat doesn't hesitate to use the word revolution in speaking of the aspirations of the black people. She defines it as "revolution aimed at improvement of the black community

and changing a racist society."

However, she doesn't discount the possibility that the revolution won't be a peaceful one. "If I get my degree in chemistry, then I want to teach chemistry to black students in black schools or help make bombs for the revolution, whatever is more necessary at the time," she says.

"Problems haven't been solved in 400 years. If they haven't been solved in all this time, how much longer do they want us to wait?" she asks.

CHOICE

Pat explains why she chose to attend Pitzer rather than Nairobi College, a decision due in part to the fact that with her brother at nearby Pomona, she had become attracted to the area while visiting him.

"I'd like to get away for a while, see other places and meet a few more people. Possibly, after completing a year at Pitzer I'll return to Nairobi."

Pat Wilks says she has no heroes. "All the black people that I have known throughout the years have been great factors in helping me to decide what I wanted to do with my life."



Afro-American ceremony

Students from Nairobi High School participated in Pat Wilk's graduation Saturday. They wore African costumes for the occasion. Shown, from left, are Nonie Mouton, Pat, Carol Holloway, her sister Augustine Halloway and Gail Wise.