

# Richelle Webb

## Hall of Fame 2018

Introduced by Michelle S. Hite  
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In “Poem for Flora,” poet Nikki Giovanni describes being a black girl and feeling estranged from all things good, noble, and beautiful until she comes to see herself in the description of a person in the bible. Thus, she perks up when she hears in Sunday School that Sheba was “black and comely” and she thinks to herself, “I want to be like that.” Richelle Webb (Dixon) was the person who would teach me that I could look to my friends and see God in them; who taught me that, yes, I could admire famous poets and find lessons in parables, but most especially, that I could admire my friends; that my friends could be reliquaries or sacred containers holding evidence of divine abundance right here on earth. American cultural messaging suggests that our admiration should follow and then land on distant stars, but my teammates in general and Richelle in particular, taught me that if you pay close attention, there is a celestial presence close by that you can look to and say what Nikki Giovanni said of Sheba, “I want to be// like that.”

Of course, it could not be like Richelle as a short sprinter. I was not going to post those times as they are, indeed, *Hall of Fame numbers*. In fact, most high school girls were not going to even be in orbit with the kinds of numbers she posted--like the ones you saw/see on the screen here. Their wins would come from rulebook infractions; a Timex worn on a wrist pumping much faster than its hands could prove useful, say. I could at most hope to be among those appointed in case Richelle was disqualified. So that’s another thing that Richelle taught me how to do, a very useful thing, she taught me to face the truth. And the truth is that in life, there will be people who can do things better than you can do them. What I learned

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in accepting this truth is that there are options to facing this truth beyond envy or jealousy and even beyond admiration and veneration. You can commit to your life as a witness.

In Richelle's case, not running as fast as she could didn't mean that I couldn't take from her example of excellence. I could excel in the classroom as she did. I could confront injustice and intolerance as she did; I could champion my friends by walking miles to help raise funds to further the research that could make them well; I could hold their babies while they were hooded for their terminal degrees; I could wish that I too "would not look down on those who looked up to me" (Muhammad Ali). Yes, it is true that I could never run as fast as my dear friend and teammate Richelle Webb, but in setting about to be a serious woman of purpose, oh yes, even I, *could be like that*.

And so now it is my honor to call up my friend/teammate Richelle Webb Dixon to receive her award from President Wendy Hoke.