



# The Scholar

Winter 1998

A Better Chance in Darien Newsletter

Volume 3

No 1

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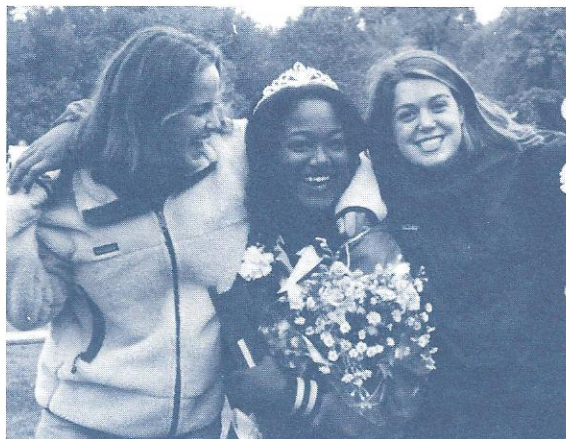
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Students

Kate Ofikuru 2001  
Linet Martin 2001  
Erica Pardo '99  
Migdalía Caraballo '98  
Barbara Lawrence '98



## WHAT'S HAPPENING?!

The mood is relief, a certain giddiness and anticipation of new things to come spring semester—mid-terms have been taken and passed with flying colors. This fall Kate made her mark on the girls' volleyball team. Erica continued to show her prowess with cross country, breezed through her PSAT's and is now contributing her talents to the yearbook. Linet joined Erica in cross country and volunteers at Person-to-Person. Migdalía is also working on the yearbook and is anxiously awaiting college acceptances (NYU!!!!) with Barbara, who has narrowed her wish list to eight colleges. The fact that Barbara was elected co-captain of the Blue Wave Dancers, chosen Homecoming Queen and is cheer-leading for basketball has not seemed to distract her from her studies (just another woman who can manage everything spectacularly well!!) The Christmas party was a festive occasion, with members of the girls' families joining us to celebrate the holiday season and a fall semester well done. ABC is once again most fortunate in being designated recipient of the proceeds from the ticket sales for the upcoming Antiques Show Preview Party, sponsored by the First Congregational Church Women's Association. Watch for your invitations. Life is good!



## Beautiful DREAMERS

All five girls are making a difference to children in Stamford, devoting four hours a month as mentors. In the Southfield Village public housing project, children share common experiences—broken homes, drugs and violence. They can see no reason why they should apply themselves in school. In 1981 Eugene Lang challenged the graduating students of Harlem P.S. 121 to stay in school, promising full tuition to any student who graduated from high school and wanted to go on to college. And so "I Have A Dream" (IHAD) was born. Lang's program produced dramatic results: the dropout rate fell from the usual 75% to less than 10%. More than 60% of his initial group went on to higher education. Others have followed in his footsteps with similar results. Nation-wide there are now more than 160 local projects affiliated with the national program—more than 10,000 students have benefited. The IHAD Foundation of Stamford was created in 1993, adopting the class of 2002 (third grade); in 1995 the class of 2003 was added. The two classes total about 125 Dreamers who attend four middle schools. Included among Stamford's activities are: after-school tutoring; weekend mentoring; boy and girl scout troops; a summer daycamp; intensive remedial reading instruction; and a computer lab. A tutor works with the same Dreamer throughout the school year, fostering the development of trusting relationships and a productive learning experience. Building self-confidence is a major objective of the program. Each Dreamer is matched with a mentor who acts as a special friend who listens, cares, and can offer advice and help. For information on volunteering your assistance please call Andrea Karls at 968.0010.

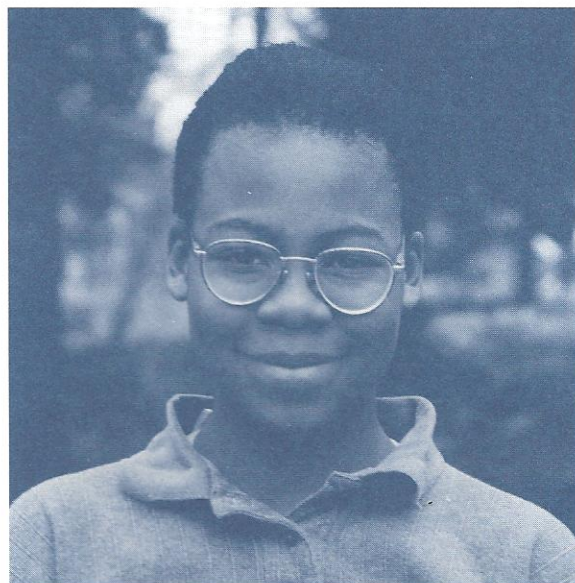


# Is there a Doctor in the house?



Kate Ofikuru

My name is Kate Ofikuru. I am 14 years old and came to Darien in September from the Bronx. I have an older brother, Jimmy, who is 15, a younger brother, Chukuneku, who is 6, and a younger sister, Elizabeth, who is 13. I love to play volleyball, softball and basketball. I am enjoying my freshman year very much and am lucky to have the Megroz's as my host family and the Lippman's as my back-up host family. Among my hobbies are singing, writing, collecting all sorts of stuff and reading. A few of my dreams are to be a Tudor singer, make varsity Volleyball, and graduate from an outstanding college and graduate school. I am looking forward to becoming an Obstetrician/Gynecologist when I finish school. My favorite color is blue and I love dogs.



Linet Martin

My name is Linet Martin. I come from the Bronx—four blocks from Kate!, though it took coming to Darien to bring us together. At 14 years old, I am the youngest among five girls and one boy at home and the youngest in the ABC house. Other than missing my cat Princess, I'm having a pretty good time here. My favorite classes are Biology and Algebra. I love to play classical music on the guitar and listening to all sorts of music on the radio—I'm lobbying for stereos in our rooms! My favorite activity is reading fantasy and science fiction. I volunteer at Person-to-Person after school Monday through Thursday. My host family, the Zepeda's are really great, as are my back-up family, the Groppa's. I would like to be a Pediatrician when I grow up.

## Thank You Miss Oprah! THE HEART OF A WOMAN

Oprah Winfrey recently made a most generous gift of \$One million to ABC National. The money will be used to reinforce the infrastructure of the national organization. Specifically, ABC National will be able to add more staff and technical resources to enhance current program and fund-raising capabilities. In addition, she has pledged the proceeds of her video, "Make the Connection," a terrific(how surprising!!), inspiring video providing the insight on to how maximize your potential. If we go by the past successes of anything produced by, praised by and/or associated with Ms. Winfrey, ABC National should be able offer scholarships to any child of color in the U.S.A. who is qualified and motivated to be a participant in the program—how about an ABC house in every well-to-do community in the U.S.?! Probably the most promising aspect of Oprah's involvement is her offer to serve as ABC's national spokesperson. Think of the possibilities!



## WHERE HAVE ALL THE FLOWERS GONE?

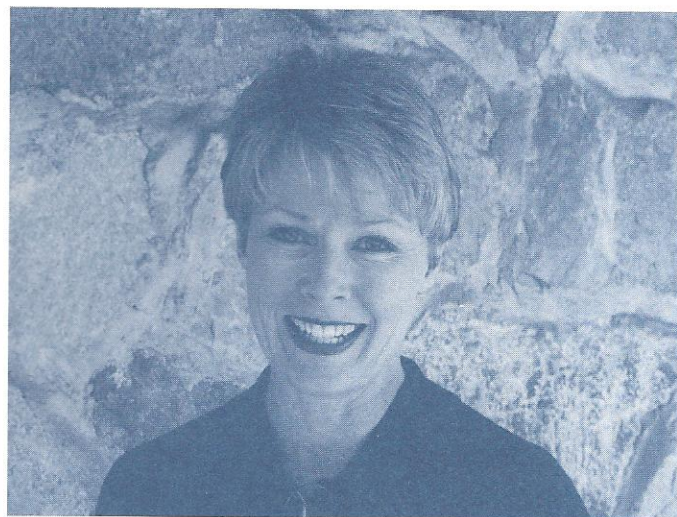
Jackie and Danique would love to hear from you:

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# Remembrance of Things Past



Cherie Greene

The night the ABC Board confirmed my nomination as president, I felt honored and flattered, but also a profound realization of my responsibility to the program, the community and mostly to those girls having the ABC experience. Much has been written about the benefit to the girls selected to participate. They have an opportunity to leapfrog their peers and escape often difficult educational environments. Attending Darien High School and receiving the quality education it offers, is indeed special, but to a 13 or 14-year old leaving her family to travel to a different socio-economic culture takes a measure of courage that is often unappreciated.

Being president of ABC was one of the most challenging, and ultimately one of the most satisfying, responsibilities I have ever undertaken. My family reminds me there wasn't a day that went by without my thinking about or addressing ABC issues: late night phone calls dealing with school, family, social or sports issues; the complex decisions that come with overseeing teenagers in surrogate surroundings; attempting to figure out how to best motivate people to give their time, money, and most importantly, their energy to the program; and the demands of presenting the program to the High School and the community.

To be sure, the challenges paled in comparison with the benefits my family gained through our involvement in the program. Notice that I use the word "our", for when you join ABC it is a family commitment.

In addition to my serving as president we were a host family to one of the girls. She lived with us on weekends, and often there would be more than one ABC student in our home. Our children were so fortunate in being given the opportunity to really get to know others who came from different backgrounds and environments. They learned so much and gained a true appreciation of what they have. They learned to give in ways that transcend money. And they learned to appreciate other cultures

and people for who they are, recognizing the need to take the time to get to know people who might appear, at first glance, to be different. To say this was always easy would not be an honest statement. Various issues would arise from time to time but we worked through them and were all the better for it. There came to be a mutual understanding and respect—one that allowed an open exchange of ideas and perspectives. We didn't always agree, but we always laughed. There were certainly many entertaining conversations about what is cool and what is not!

There are so many fond memories—taking the juniors to Syracuse University for a visit and having a great time talking about everything, from boys to diversity. One beautiful spring afternoon the girls were out on the patio, playing music, practicing their steps for a dance routine for a talent contest. It was a joy to see—especially our kids and other high school friends critiquing their presentation, drinking soda, eating pizza and listening to this wonderful crazy song! I also remember sobering moments, as when our son and daughter recounted how one of the girls was afraid to go home because she was afraid she might have lost another friend to the random shootings in her neighborhood or what they had to do to protect themselves in street fights.

While ABC successfully offers minority youths an opportunity to reach their highest potential it also offers a better chance for growth and understanding among those Darien families lucky enough to be involved with the program and a better chance for each one our high school students and every member of our community to broaden their horizons. During my two years as president, our family gained so much in ways beyond quantification. The experience gave our children balance and depth, making us all more considerate and respectful human beings. There are not many opportunities in life that offer such a sweet reward.



# Letter *from the* President

*H*appy New Year! The 1997/98 school year began in typical whirlwind fashion, from helping our bright new freshmen, Linet Martin and Kate Ofikuru, adjust to a new school/new place, to sharing in the excitement surrounding the crowning of Barbara Homecoming Queen.



Asking Bruce Hall whether there's room for adults in Internet 101

Juggling the myriad classes and extracurricular activities while maintaining order in a household of teenagers requires exceptional organizational skills which have been magnificently demonstrated by our seasoned Resident Directors Bob and Dianne Johnson. We also welcome our new proctors, Debbie Walsh and Mary Vlachogiannis, who oversee our Sunday through Thursday night Study Halls. They are constantly exceeding the job description parameters of maintaining an orderly study hall by jumping in to assist the girls when they need help with a homework assignment. Pam Hale, our cook, returned to provide another year of great food and gracious company.

This winter also promises to be quite busy as our Student Selection Committee gears up for its search for three new students for next year. The Nominating Committee will continue its task of filling positions on the Executive Board, as well as adding new members to the regular Board. Donna Rosevear, our esteemed transportation lady, and her committee of loyal drivers make sure the girls have a ride home from school, library, practice and activity.

I would like to extend sincere thanks and limitless appreciation to the Edward S. Moore Foundation for their incredibly generous gift. We are indebted to every individual and corporation which has decided that A Better Chance is a cause worth supporting. We proudly offer the students as evidence of the tremendous worth of this program. Many thanks to all of you and best wishes for 1998.

Debbie Parnon

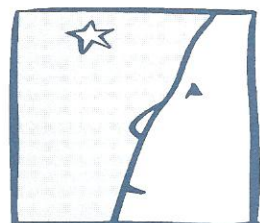
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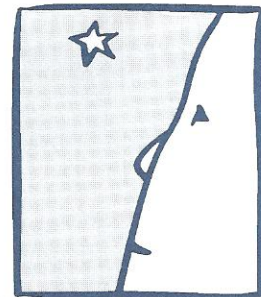
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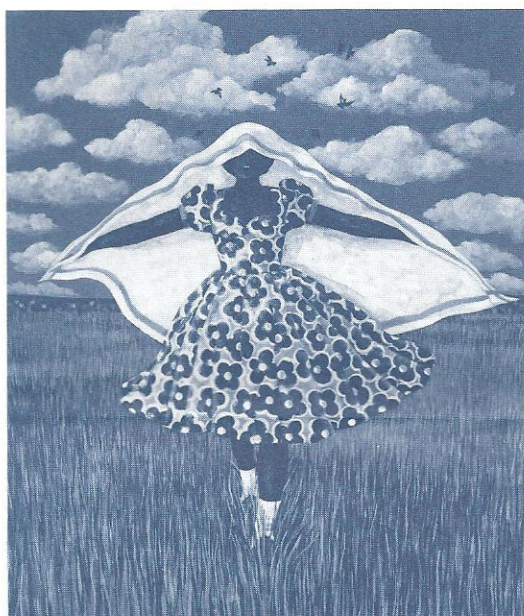


# *A fascinating* **AND THE WORD WAS GULLAH** *piece of American history*



Hilton Head, Kiawah Island—beautiful vacation resorts that call to mind golf courses, restaurants and condominiums. But before "FORE" was heard, these islands were home to a unique African American culture which still exists today, though for the most part, on the almost 1,000 neighboring islands. A little research revealed another fascinating patch in the quilt of African American history.

The Lowcountry of South Carolina and Georgia, including the Atlantic coastal "Sea Islands" from Charleston to Savannah, has been home to a singular African American culture which became known as "Gullah". All were brought against their will from either the Gold Coast of West Africa or Barbados—by 1840 2,200 whites and 18,000 slaves inhabited just one district. They agrarian talent, the strongest indomitable pride. They quickly superior rice producers and highest quality. By supreme and ancestry, large numbers and mainland served only to cultural roots and inspire the exhibiting an impermeable pride beliefs inherent in all African of the community at their core psychological and physical years after they first arrived to enter their belief systems, influenced, were not destroyed. Revolution, these slaves had culture, incorporating many beliefs and customs into their



During the Civil War when many fled the Union Army, the former themselves. By order of General William Tecumseh Sherman on January 16, 1865, a great portion of the land on these Sea Islands was officially set aside for the former slaves. Black homesteaders claimed, cultivated and tenaciously held on to this land, many of the same families still occupying their original homesteads today.

The Sea Islands are flat swampy lands with elevations from 0 to 100 feet. The area is characterized by deep rivers and creeks snaking their way along the coast and dividing the land into countless large and small islands. Tidal streams and inlets drain an intricate system of shallow marsh filled coastal lagoons. Road and bridge building is extremely difficult in this type of land, and bridges connecting the larger islands were not begun until the late 1930's. Some of the smaller islands today are still accessible only by water. Electricity did not arrive to much of this area until the 1960's.

Sea Islanders continue to preserve their cultural heritage, reflecting both continuity with Africa and creative adaptation to life in America. They have farmed, fished, shrimped and crabbed for a living and now sell their beautiful and distinctive crafts. It has always been a hard life, but a self-sufficient one and one which has allowed their folk culture to flourish, becoming evermore rich in storytelling, art, dance and language. Theirs is a spiritual community of the extended family in which respect for the wisdom of elders is paramount and the birth of babies is sacred.

The creole language of Gullah developed as a result of strict rules that forbade the slaves from speaking in their native African tongues. It is a merger of English and several languages used on the West African coast and it is the language in which the Sea Islanders' folk culture has been passed down to posterity. The Gullah proverbs, metaphors and stories still reflect the African preference for speaking by indirection. There is so much more to learn about this culture and it is now possible via the most modern of bridges—yes, there is a web site—key word in "Gullah". Have fun!

came to these fertile islands bearing sense of community and an became respected indigo tillers, farmers who grew cotton of the glorious irony, their common subsequent isolation from the reinforce and preserve their African evolution of a rich Gullah culture and dignity. The strong religious societies have always had the good and have provided an impenetrable protection—because it took 100 for Methodist and Baptist doctrine the Gullahs' historical beliefs, while By the time of the American already created a very definitive elements of their native languages, lives on the plantations.

of the Lowcountry plantation owners slaves began to cultivate the land for



# Poetry in Motion

## Thank God for Charleston

It's twilight and I take up my pen to write  
These things that I think about Charleston.

I don't have the education to write like the buckruh  
(white person) write  
That live on Broad Street.

Because when the Lord said to choose the box that held the  
Things with which to make our living

My old people chose the heavy box that held the  
most, and

The box held an axe, a shovel and a hoe,

That buckruh took the little box that was left and they got  
The pencil, the paper, and the books and things.

Very well, I don't have the words to write about  
Charleston. My home, my "Holy Land."

But the Lord knows my heart "stands" just like  
the buckruh

Who has his name on the books that he writes.

The moon has risen now, and the wind brings the  
smell of the marsh

From the harbor of the land That I love.

Thank God for my life and the health to sing his  
praises.

Thank God that I was born and that I am going to  
die in Charleston

Interpretation by Virginia Mixson Geraty, L.H.D.

# Books!!

*soul food*

## Gullah Images The Art of Jonathan Green *Foreword by Pat Conroy*

"The Gullah people depicted in Jonathan Green's world look like they got dressed while staring at rainbows. His art is a love song to his past. You imagine him singing as he paints, an ode to joy and the bright astonishment of memory." An indomitable sense of community and homage to his ancestral roots shine through every painting. Your life will be richer once you've become acquainted with his work!

## A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs *by Margaret Washington Creel*

The Gullah culture "possessed a proclivity for rising above their near-tragic situation for the sake of community." Margaret Creel's book takes the reader on an incredible journey of discovery, introducing the traveler to a culture rich in spirit, history and creativity.

## The Color of Water *by James McBride*

A loving and magnificently written tribute to his mother by an award winning writer, composer and saxophonist who is one of twelve children. The N.Y. Times calls it a "triumph... complex and moving... suffused with issues of race, religion and identity." One day, on their way home from Church, James asked his mother whether God was Black or White. After a deep sigh, his mother replies, "... God is the color of water." This unforgettable memoir, told with humor, passion and illumination is often compared with Frank McCord's *Angela's Ashes*.

## Paradise of the Blind *by Duong Thu Huong*

An enthralling tale of three Vietnamese women struggling to survive in a post Viet Nam War society where subservience to men is expected and Communist corruption crushes every dream. Banned in its own country, Huong's descriptive, often poetic narrative captures both the personal tragedies and sweeping national effects of Communist domination, as well as capturing the haunting beauty of a country and its people.

## In the Time of the Butterflies *by Julia Alvarez*

A touching and inspiring story of four sisters, natives of the Dominican Republic and victims of Trujillo's oppressive regime. It is, at once, a romantic novel allowing the reader to feel a part of the personal lives of the four women as they grow up, fall in love and develop their own political consciousness, and, at the same time, a chilling depiction of the everyday horrors associated with a dictator whose common practice was to imprison and torture anyone who disagreed with his policies. Beautifully written and unforgettable.

## Culture Club

### Antiques Show

*First Congregational Church March 20*

### MasterHand: Individuality and Creativity Among Yoruba Sculptors of Nigeria

*Metropolitan Museum of Art until March 1*

## At the Home Movies



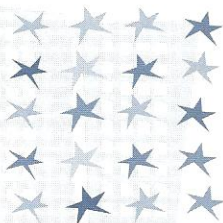
### Make the Connection

Kolya

Pushing Hands

Rendez Vous in Paris

Shall We Dance



## PLEDGE *the edge*

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