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Newsletter

Liz Kolodney
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Welcome to Our 36th Year

by Katie Grasso

There are nine of us most nights – the five scholars, the two Resident Assistants and the two Resident Directors, sitting around the long wooden table that is sometimes, most times, haphazardly set with a conglomeration of mismatched plates and silverware, mugs, glasses and plastic cups. It was quiet for the first night. Then the noise exploded, and this house began to become a home away from home. At 6pm, not on the dot, we gather from all corners, and the girls tell of their days- the challenges and the triumphs, the funny and the frustrating. They are brave, these five city girls transplanted to this suburban area for the school year, brave to leave homes and families and friends and the familiar.

Odelia Ryan is the reigning senior this year, and she has boldly stepped into her role as the eldest. She returns to FM this fall after spending an incredible month in Spain with the Experiment in International Living Program. She loves being a senior and having her own room in the house, but also admits that the title comes with

a lot of hard work. In addition to her school work and college applications, Odelia is working a part-time job in Manlius.

Janai Fraser is the sole sophomore. She was a part of the step team last year and will continue to dance this school year as well. Janai says that it's, "A new year, a new adventure," and, like Odelia, she has been a great example for the three new freshmen who have joined the program this year.

Both Nellie Hernandez and Sara Elzeini, two of the three freshmen, come to us from the Fieldston Enrichment Program in NYC and have been best friends for years. Nellie researched the FM School before coming here and decided during her spring visit that, "It's a fun house." She is already involved with the school newspaper, having written an article about the first day of school. She is hoping to join other activities as well, particularly something athletic.

Sara has jumped right into the thick of things with a small part in the school play, *The Secret Garden*. She is the only freshman to get a role. She says that

"at the beginning it was rough being here, but it's better as time goes on and you make friends."

Deanna Starr, the third freshman, also hailing from NYC, chose to come to FM partly because her older brother is attending college forty-five minutes away, and they can visit each other now and then. Deanna, Nellie, and Sara are all hoping to be a part of the step team, captained by Odelia this year. Deanna is also thinking about trying out for a sport, though she states that "the competition is steep." She does like that there are a lot of different sports offered at FM.



l to r: Janai, Nellie, Sara, Deanna, & Odelia

It's been nine weeks since the girls left their families in the various boroughs of NYC and they have quickly made this big, old house into a warm and inviting home full of laughter and spirit. The noise level is perpetually high, unless it's study hours or curfew, and the walls of this old house are soaking in more tales of brave girls seeking a better education, a better chance.



Josh & Katie Grasso, RDs



Yvonne Steward, RA



Heather Howard, RA

Alumnae Happenings

Shynise Stiff (2010) - As one of the newest ABC alumni, I would like to say that I am truly beginning to enjoy the benefits of all the hard work I accomplished over my four years in Manlius. Unlike that of many of my peers, my adjustment into college life was quite easy. I already had experience living away from home, making new friends, and striving through hard classes. So FM ABC made me a pre-packaged college student. Thanks! Currently, I am an Applied Economics and Management major at Cornell University. And I love it!

Amelia Stone (2007) -I am beginning my last year at the University of Rochester. I carry so many lessons from my ABC experience and my first three years of college and hope to finish my senior year stronger than ever. It is a bit bittersweet that I am a senior; I feel like I have only been here for a year. I am currently applying to graduate programs in pursuit of a PhD in mathematics. I am still a McNair scholar, the president of the Student Organization for Caribbean Awareness, and I play the viola at Eastman. This year I joined the executive board of the National Society of Black Engineers serving as the Academic Excellence chair. Overall, all is well and I am still pushing forward.

Mildred Flores (2005) -I've recently been promoted to the assisted housing division of my real estate company. I make sure that we are compliant with the low income housing tax credit program of the IRS. The tenants are so sweet and appreciative that they are living in our luxury rental buildings. I feel so good helping them!



I'm also back in school! I'm an accounting major at the College of Westchester, a small business college in White Plains, NY. Their accelerated program allows me to attend 2 nights a week, with 2 classes per term and 5 nine week terms. I have a 4.0 GPA after completing my first semester. The school is great and I'm loving it. In fact, I am being inducted into Phi Theta Kappa, an international honor society for 2 year schools.

Jason is 4 and cuter as the days go by. He's still not fully talking. He loves school and his teachers love him. He is really into music, so I'm looking for music therapy programs that could possibly get him to do more talking.

I'm still in touch with my roomie and friend of 14 years, Desiree Tirado ('05), who's doing very well in law school.

Victoria Allison (2006) - I'm at UPenn getting my Masters in elementary education and doing my student teaching at an urban school. The program is very intense and there's lots and lots of reading and writing, but working with the students is the best part! I am working with first graders and it's fun, but it's really sad to see the stark disparities in socioeconomic status and schools/education in Philadelphia. Five short blocks away from my school is a brand new public elementary school. Most of those students have parents who are professors, doctors, lawyers and other professionals.

Over the summer I worked with eighth graders and previously I worked with fourth graders. I am trying to work with a range of grades so that I can see where I feel most comfortable.

I'm really missing Wellesley but trying hard to adjust to a city lifestyle again. Tell everyone I say hello!

Aleatha Ealey (2000) - All is well. I am still working in accounting for a NYC law firm. This past summer I volunteered to teach an Adult GED course with an organization called Community Impact at Columbia University. I taught Reading and Writing. I thoroughly enjoyed last semester and am volunteering again this fall. I loved teaching and giving back to the community so much that I am now considering a career change. To be honest, I've wanted to be a teacher since I was a little girl, so having this experience re-awakened those urges and I am ready to pursue a course of action in that direction.

I am going into my second year as secretary on the executive board of the Cornell Black Alumni Association. Although, it's a volunteer position, it has been very time demanding--especially since we are in the midst of planning a huge Gala Dinner where we plan to kick-off a scholarship/ endowment program. Between work and my numerous volunteer commitments, my schedule is pretty much non-stop--leaving a little time for trips to the gym, occasional weekend brunches, and my ultimate guilty pleasure: reality tv!

Congrats to our 2010 ABC Graduates!



*Indigo Arthur -
attending Syracuse
University*



*Shynise Stiff-attending
Cornell University*

*Jessica Reid - (2006)
graduate of Mount
Holyoke College*



*Victoria Allison - (2006)
graduate of
Wellesley College*



Beth Hanson (1998)- All is well on my end! My boyfriend, Earl, and I are still living happily together. His daughter (who lives in FL) spent the summer with us so we had a lot of fun re-acquainting her w/the city. I'm still working as a Copywriter in NYC. I've become more actively involved in one of my company's professional networks - the Black Diaspora - working on the Marketing & Identity and Mid-Level Recruitment committees. My company also has a program called Future Marketers where we invite a talented class of 6th graders from Harlem to participate in a 10-month program to learn how to create an advertising campaign for one of our clients (this year was Kool-Aid). Another volunteer and I taught the group all about the creative process, and helped them develop and execute their concepts. I loved doing it so much that I'm volunteering again this year! I'm the only Black copywriter in the NY office (GASP!), and one of less than a handful of Black Creatives (meaning art directors and copywriters) in the building. This makes it even more important to me that these kids see a face that reflects their own. I want them to know that they have lots of career options when they become an adult, and that it is possible to earn a living AND have fun at the same time!

Mayra Rivera (1997) - I am teaching inclusion this year. It's definitely a new experience. My co-teacher and I have 28 lovelies and we are preparing for a quality review in two weeks. My mom just returned from 25 days in Puerto Rico. She is still working but hopes to retire in the next few years.

Natasha Haynes-Smith (1990) - No big news to report. I am still enjoying being a producer for Showbiz Tonight on HLN. I just moved into a new condo. I'm still in New Jersey but closer to Manhattan and one of my first guests -- Amy Leibeck, my ABC resident director! She just happened to be in New Jersey, and we had a wonderful dinner. I will always feel like a 14 year old in her presence!

Carmen Carr Williams (1986) - I am living in Columbus, Ohio and have been since 1994. I have a 12 year old daughter and have been married for almost 14 years. I am working as a psychologist in a local school district and am keeping rather busy. I engage in a small bit of private practice but stopped my larger practice about 4 years ago. I have often thought of you all.

Donna Graham Stewartson (1984) - My family is doing well. I have been an administrator at U Mass-Boston, but I am looking for a new job. I have outgrown my current position. Hope to find a new one by December.

Annette Miles (1985) - My life has been hectic.. I reconnected with Carmen (Carr-Williams) which I am really happy about. I am going to mail her my extra DVD from the 35th reunion. I am currently in the operating room waiting for a patient to perform a semi urgent procedure. The kids are great. Lawren started 5th grade & Joshua started 3rd. Lawren is involved in chorus, basketball & plays the piano plus viola. Joshua plays baseball along with piano & cello. We are very blessed.

Indu Bala Kowalski (1980) - I am working as a Senior Scientist with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in their Maternal and Child Health Surveillance Program.



I received my PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1994. I did my postdoc at CDC and have stayed here since 1995. I received my Masters from Yale University's School of Medicine in 1986 and graduated from Amherst College in 1984.

My husband, Peter Kowalski, and I have been married since 1989. We have two boys; one, 16 and one, 8.

The newly painted house looks beautiful. Your picture brought back a lot of memories. I was just in East Africa on a new program that I am heading for CDC. That also felt like going home as I have been working on several projects there over the last 10 years.

Yvette Chevalie (1979) - As one of the elders, I'd like to report that I am a practicing attorney in Las Vegas, Nevada, a grandmother of 4, a mother of 2, a dog lover, a protector of children, and a believer in equality, civil rights, and personal liberty. I'm a teacher, a friend, and a proud ABC girl---oops I meant granny !!!

Grads - All Grown Up: Photos from the Gala



Natasha Forde King (1990), Amy Leibeck (former RD), Natasha Haynes-Smith (1990)



Cind Senensieb (1980), Yvette Chevalie (1979)



Victoria Allison (2006), Mildred Flores (2005), Beth Hanson (1998), Kiya Hope (1999)

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The 35th Reunion Gala!



The 35th A Better Chance Reunion gala, on November 5, 2009, brought the joy and excitement of honoring Susan Helmer and Gwyn and Pat Mannion (Unity Mutual Life Insurance Co) as First Friends of the program. To add to the celebration, several alumnae arrived for the weekend: Yvette Chevalier ('79), Cind Senensieb ('80), Lourdes Padilla Ramirez (1983), Tammy Rosado Gruenberg ('84), Annette Miles ('85), Natasha Haynes-Smith ('90), Natasha Forde King ('91), Beth Hanson ('98), Kiya Hope ('99), Jenelle Berry ('99), Aleatha Ealey ('02), Mildred Flores ('04), and Victoria Allison ('06). Looking at these lovely women and listening to them showed us how much they have thrived.

Here's part of what Jenelle Berry, the alumnae spokesperson said.

"While no one will dispute that academic achievement is the number

one reason for the existence of the program, the values and life lessons that we take away from this place are far greater than scholarship alone.

The 18th Century poet, Johann Van Goethe said, "Talents are best nurtured in solitude, but character is best formed in the stormy billows of the world." There is no question, from the moment we each boarded that train or bus, at the tender age of fourteen, we demonstrated great courage and fortitude in our ability to weather the storm ahead.

Many teenagers go off to boarding school and have their own sets of experiences, but ours is so



*Beth Hanson, Jenelle Berry,
Gwyn Mannion, Kiya Hope &
Susan Helmer*

completely different. We shared an experience that is so unique that, even 10 years later, I cannot clearly articulate or fully comprehend the way in which it shaped my life.

I came into the program an only child, and I left having sisters with whom I've developed a bond built through laughter, tears, triumphs and failure. These are the women that will no doubt continue to be my best friends and confidantes.

We temporarily left our mothers and gained dozens of women and families who supported, inspired and nurtured our growth and success. We arrived wide-eyed, naïve and afraid, and left mature, discerning women ready to take on the world."



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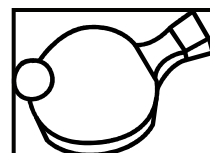


Kudos to
Kathy Nelson—
Great dinners!

Endless thanks to
Kevin Nass for his
financial advice and
expertise.

A huge shout out to
Peter Farnsworth and
Top Spin '09.

You have changed
our lives!



Thanks again and again to Andrew
Leary. We appreciate your com-
puter skills and endless patience.

Thanks to:

Kristen Rubacka,
Junior League,
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We love the furniture!

We appreciate the love
and support of our host
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