

FORUM

'I am really happy when...'



Nigel Alston
Motivational Moments

"The mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work unless it's open."
— Unknown

How many of you like to read? I asked the class of fourth-graders. Immediately, all but one hand, Jasmine's, popped up in the air. She had a shy smile on her face as she sat sideways in her chair looking at me. Eventually she raised her hand too. Later, like Phillip, who likes math, she would not put it down, eager to participate and add her voice to the conversation.

D'Zandera was not as shy or reserved, though. She took the initiative to walk to the front of the class and tug at my coat to get my attention. She had something to tell me. It was a private matter, one on one, not for the rest of the class to hear.

"You and I have something in common," the fourth-grader told me, with confidence, as she looked up at me. She is a cute little girl with bright, inquisitive eyes; a warm, beautiful smile; and plenty of

energy and enthusiasm. D'Zandera and her classmates love to learn and she really wanted me to know that she was a writer too, and, according to her teacher, an excellent one.

Ms. Mack, the teacher, had introduced me to the class as a speaker, writer and friend. Standing in the front of the class, towering over the students seated at their desks, we engaged in a conversation about books, the importance of reading and their favorite stories.

Ms. Mack's class had full participation in a local program with a national emphasis, the annual arts program Reflections, an arts recognition and achievement program sponsored by the National PTA. The program offers students the opportunity to create works of art for fun and recognition. Students in preschool through grade 12 are encouraged to create and submit works of art in four areas: literature, musical composition, photography, and the visual arts.

I was invited to the school (North Hills Elementary — a 2002-2003 School of Distinction), to serve as a judge for the participants in grades three through five, by Ernestine Huff. Huff, along with her husband, James, is an accom-

plished artist and has a daughter in fifth grade at the school. Art is her profession. She volunteered to be involved in the PTA and is very instrumental in the annual arts program and its success at North Hills. This year's participation included more than 170 entries from kindergarten through fifth grade. Fewer than 70 participated two years ago.

Huff loves the school and the idea of being involved in providing a good foundation for students in their formative years. The Reflections program not only offers the opportunity for students to express themselves creatively, it teaches the value of presentation, meeting deadlines and following guidelines. That is as important to Huff as the art itself.

This year, the program has as its theme "I am really happy when..."

"I am really happy when I read fiction. I am really happy when I watch television. I am really happy when I eat a pop tart. I am really happy when I act smart. I am really happy when I eat. I am really happy when I write on a sheet. I am really happy when I count sheep," wrote one student.

Another shared these comments: "I am really happy when I go out and play with friends at the end of a long

school day. I like to play tennis and practice my swing. That's why I'm happy as soon as it's spring... And I'm really happy when I'm just being me."

I was refreshed after leaving the school, serving as a judge and visiting the classroom or fourth-graders. I am really happy when ... I am in a roomful of elementary school children. It is exciting to see them so excited. I am really happy when ... those children raise their hands enthusiastically, responding to questions, demonstrating an eagerness to learn and share. Good teaching is going on in that class. The teacher expects the students to excel. I am really happy when ... I meet good people, like Ernestine Huff, who are giving of their time and talent.

You can feel the passion and see the commitment of their efforts making a difference in the school. Those efforts can lead to an attitude expressed by another participant who wrote: "I like school because it leads to a path of success."

That should make us all happy. It keeps the dream alive.

Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. Visit his Web site at www.motivational-moments.com.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Emergency Food and Shelter National Board, chaired by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), has granted Forsyth County \$155,526 to distribute to agencies providing emergency services. Funds are only to be used to supplement feeding and shelter programs in Forsyth County.

Applications will be accepted by Forsyth County's local board, from non-profit organizations in areas relating to:

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The deadline for submission of proposals is **12 noon on Wednesday, January 21, 2004** (no late applications accepted). Please contact (336) 723-3601 for additional information and/or an application form.



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Disrespecting the D.C. Primary



Ron Walters
Guest Columnist

On Tuesday, the District of Columbia hosted the earliest presidential preference election featuring the Democratic candidates for president. More accurately, it featured some of the major candidates who believed that the vote was important enough to show up. They were Howard Dean, whose name was first on the ballot, Rev. Al Sharpton, former ambassador, Carol Moseley Braun and Congressman Dennis Kucinich.

Although no delegates were chosen, the election was devised as another way of illustrating that the District of Columbia is still in the shadows of democracy; it has no voting representation in either the House or the Senate, although it has a non-voting delegate, Eleanor Holmes Norton, in the House. The only question is whether the District was able to capitalize on the opportunity to make its point about the disenfranchisement of the city in national politics.

The absence of Dick Gephardt, Joseph Lieberman, John Kerry, and Wesley Clark was an insult to the citizens of the District and to the major political purpose for which the vote was proposed in the first place. Their behavior continues to illustrate that they are woefully out of touch with the core of the Democratic Party. If Howard Dean, the front-running candidate could show up, why couldn't they? I'll tell you why. They still subscribe to the conservative Democratic Leadership Council's (DLC) view that one of the problems with the Democratic Party is that it is too Black and that by coming into the District of



Rev. Al Sharpton

Columbia, a predominantly Black city, it would have continued to link them with an image that is alienating to many conservative White voters.

Another reason they didn't come was that they felt by "wasting" money on the District election, they would be jeopardizing their national campaign. But that just means that they are running scared, and that Dean, who is flush with funds, is taking the District seriously. Another possibility is that they had conceded Washington as Dean country and did not want to get embarrassed.

The District election was important because it helped determine who is preferred by an overwhelmingly Black and liberal White electorate, which looks very much like the base vote of

the Democratic Party nationally.

Going into the race, Rev. Al Sharpton had the most to lose because the demographics of the District of Columbia favored him. If he loses to Howard Dean, the thinking went, that would free others in the Black community to jump on the Dean bandwagon. One reason Dean is doing so well with Black voters is that Sharpton hasn't challenged him effectively.

Sharpton began his campaign by saying that he wanted to take the Democratic Party back to its traditional roots, but Dean has trumped him on this. Sharpton should have countered by rolling out some of the issues that run deeply in the Black community, such as the repeal of punitive mandatory minimum sentences

and three-strikes laws. But Dean has beaten him to the punch on these issues.

This is dangerous for Sharpton because hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons is running a campaign in New York State against the Rockefeller drug laws that were used as the basis for the draconian sentences that have imprisoned thousands of Blacks who might otherwise be free. What happens if Simmons now throws his considerable weight behind Dean in Sharpton's own back yard?

There was little chance that Sharpton would be knocked out by a Dean victory in the District primary election, but the fear was that he might be wounded enough to make it difficult for him to gain momentum in South Carolina where he hopes to do well. After the big shows in Iowa and New Hampshire, the spotlight shift to South Carolina.

Carol Moseley Braun would have more standing had she been more impressive in the District of Columbia. But in most face-to-face contests, she usually does much poorer than Sharpton among Black voters.

What can you say about Kucinich? He's often tagged a "spoiler," a tag usually pinned on Black candidates. Dean's showing should not be surprising, considering he has spent money and time in the District and half of the City Council has already endorsed him.

The District of Columbia was just the beginning. South Carolina, with half of its electorate Black, will be the next major test.

Ron Walters is the Distinguished Leadership Scholar, director of the African American Leadership Institute in the Academy of Leadership and professor of government and politics at the University of Maryland-College Park. His latest book is "White Nationalism, Black Interests" (Wayne State University Press).



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