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Young And Gifted

She's a master storyteller at the ripe, old age of 7

By ROBIN ADAMS
Staff Writer

At 3:15 every weekday afternoon, a vibrant 7-year-old with long, swinging braids skips into her mother's office in normally quiet Hill Hall at Winston-Salem State and brings it to life.

"She is what keeps me going," Melva Daniels says.

"She" is a bundle of energy named Melinda, a second-grader at Moore Alternative School, and a very active child who enjoys talking -- something she does a lot of -- and telling original stories.

"I just tell stories," Melinda says, "but I don't know why. I write some of them down, but usually I forget them when I finish telling them."

But Melinda does not simply tell stories. She acts out each character with a different voice and brightens her narratives with detailed descriptions of children, pets and scenes.

Before beginning a story, she introduces the characters. "Hello,

my name is John," Melinda says in her version of a deep, masculine voice, "and my name is Sue," she continues, in the most feminine, childlike tone she can muster.

"I like to use different voices," she says. "Sometimes I talk like Sue (her favorite female heroine) and sometimes I like to talk like a boy. You know, sometimes I talk in so many different voices, I forget what my real voice is."

But whatever voice she uses, Melinda uses almost non-stop, a trait her mother says she inherited.

"I'm a talker, so that has caused her to be a talker," Ms. Daniels says. "We have always talked to her, even as a child. When she was an infant, I talked to her as if she might have been an adult. Melinda was also the youngest child in our family and was treated like an angel. She was so verbal and personable that she was passed around from person to person like a plate."

During the interview, a professor comes into Ms. Daniels' office.

"Spell 'understanding,' Melinda," he challenges.

Melinda repeats the word slowly several times and reaches for a piece of paper and writes the word down, sound by sound and syllable by syllable. When she's finished, the word is correct and Melinda says in triumph, "You thought you could get me. Now you owe me one."

Later, a janitor arrives and asks Melinda what she's doing. "I'm being interviewed for the newspaper," she says like a true celebrity. "I don't have time to talk."

But Melinda's antics just don't stop with talking. She's got a generous supply of charm to boot.

"When Melinda was only four, we went to Miami. Instead of her sitting in her seat on the plane, she flew the whole trip in the cockpit with the pilot," Ms. Daniels says. "She knew the captain personally by the time we disembarked."

Then there's Melinda the 7-year-old entrepreneur. During one workshop Ms. Daniels attended,



A Bundle of Energy

At the tender age of seven, Melinda Daniels is already becoming an expert storyteller (photo by James Parker).

Melinda became so restless that she made toys out of drinking straws and sold them to the workshop participants.

"She meets challenges well," Ms. Daniels says. "But she's not competitive. She likes competition

just for the fun of it. She surprises me with the things she's interested in."

Lately, Melinda has shown an interest in soccer and computers and likes to try her hand (usually through guesswork) at student

math tests on the computers at WSSU.

Melinda likes to sing, too, "but I only like to sing one song -- 'Ebony and Ivory.' That's the only song I know all the way through." Please see page 16



Family 'Tais':

They've been big asset to Olympian

By RUTHELL HOWARD
Staff Writer

Many young children sit in awe of the graceful, poetic movements of champion ice skaters on television, dreaming of gliding over the ice someday themselves.

One such young black child not only grew up to become one of those skaters, but also a U.S. and world champion, and a contender for a gold medal in the 1980 Winter Olympics with her partner, Randy Gardner.

The two now skate together professionally, headlining the Ice Capades.

That child, Tai Babilonia, 22, woos the audience with her exotic beauty and skill as a professional skater. Tai is a native of Sherman Oaks, Calif. and the daughter of a Filipino and a black woman.

She is one of the few black skaters to excel to the Olympic level of competition. While Tai said there are no major differences in being a black or a white skater, she said that many black families may not be able to make the financial sacrifices necessary to make their children champions.

Funding training for a skater can cost a family up

to \$14,000 a year, Tai and 24-year-old Randy estimated.

"My father was working three jobs to support me while I was competing," Tai said last week while the Ice Capades show was settling into the Winston-Salem Memorial Coliseum.

Once Olympic contenders, Tai and Randy lost their bid for a medal in 1980 when Randy's leg gave way weeks before the Olympics.

Tai and Randy later decided to become professional skaters rather than train an additional four years to compete in the upcoming 1984 Olympics.

So the two turned their skating uniforms over to the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of American History in 1982 and joined the Ice Capades.

"I don't think we really wanted to compete that badly in 1984," Tai said. "Mentally, it would have been very difficult, plus another four years of training. And if you're not willing to put 100 percent into it, it's a waste of your time, your parents' time and your coaches' time."

Randy agreed. "It was a good decision. We've had a lot of fun together," he said. "I've enjoyed it a lot and I'm glad that we did get together and skate"

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Kimberly Park: What it lacks in material riches it makes up in pride

By EDWARD HILL JR.
Staff Writer

This article is the third in a series profiling neighborhoods in the black community.

Despite being primarily a low- to moderate-income area, Kimberly Park ranks among the most active and tightly-knit neighborhoods in the city.

Located northwest of East Winston, the area takes in parts of Cherry Street, Underwood Avenue, Northwest Boulevard, 14th Street and the Kimberly Park

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-- Lorraine Thomas

housing projects.

The neighborhood has a mix of modest homes under the Section 8 Turnkey federal housing program, but the majority of the residents live in the Kimberly Park projects.

Economically, the residents mostly fall into three categories: blue collar workers, the underemployed and the unemployed.

Larry Little, alderman for the Kimberly Park area, says the community has undergone major change over the years.

"Outside of the project area, a lot of slum housing

has been torn down," says Little, who grew up in the neighborhood. "Some apartments and new houses were built in its place. There is a lot of vast acreage of land in this area. In fact, Kimberly Park has some of the largest tracts of vacant land in the city."

Lorraine Thomas, who has lived on Derry Street since 1968, says that there are many clubs and activities in Kimberly Park to keep most residents involved.

"There are 556 families in Kimberly Park projects," says Ms. Thomas, president of the Kimberly Park Residents Council. "The residents have more sayso about what comes in and out of this neighborhood than in any other in the city. We have the Boy and Girl Scouts for the kids, the Homemakers' Club and a senior citizens club that has 92 members who actively participate."

Community services worker Audrey Lowery agrees: "The thing that separates Kimberly Park from other neighborhoods is that it is activity-oriented. There is something for everybody over here. We have a 4-H club, a basic adult education program, a concerned parent organization that has 45 parents and, of course, everyone knows about the Boy Scouts program out here."

Ms. Johnnie Ingram says the residents' efforts have brought two significant additions to the community.

"A parking lot and a basketball court have been built as a result of the residents of Kimberly Park working together," says Ms. Ingram. She adds that other vacant land has been slated for future use in the

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Clean-Up Crew

The Kimberly Park neighborhood has a number of ongoing projects and activities for its residents and Boys Scout Troop No. 857's cleanup program is one of the more visible in the community (photo by James Parker).