

VFTE Newsletter Spring 2012

Spring Highlights and Ilene's VFTE Journal

March 31, 2012 at Tucker County High School.

Seven students competed for the 5th Annual Voices From the Earth Youth Performing Arts Competition. The categories were music, dance, drama, and storytelling. There was a wide range of choices and musical selections presented, from Johnny Cash's *Folsom Prison Blues* to a show stopping song from *Annie*. Each student presents their individual work for a live audience and a panel of judges. Contestants are scored in four areas: Technical Skills: mastery of fundamentals and command of the form; Presence: poise, confidence and grace in presentation of form; Performance: delivery of materials to the audience; and Interpretation: understanding and connection with the material. Students start getting ready in December and have at least two coaching opportunities to help refine their work and get feedback for their performance choice. The judges this year were Greg Mach, chair of the Theater department at West Virginia Wesleyan in Buckhannon; Ivonne Martinez, actor and theater technician, and Sheila Coleman-Castells, classical and Jazz vocalist. The Emcee for the evening was Ilene Evans, Artistic Director of Voices from the Earth.



Here are the names from left to right.

Heather Lantz - coach and instructor; Heather Chambers – Piccolo; Katee Moore, sign language; Abigail Rexroad, vocals; Diana Villamor – instructor and accompanist; Miranda Siler, piano; Amanda Chambers, tenor Sax; in front left to right: Chris Barnes guitar and vocals, Tyler Bolyard, guitar and vocals.

First Place Winner: Chris Barnes – Elkins High School

Second Place Winner: Abigail Rexroad – Preston County High School

Third Place Winner: Tyler Bolyard – Tucker County High School

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Who is Voices from the Earth?

Voices From the Earth is a group of teaching artists and storytellers who travel the world to build bridges of tolerance, compassion and understanding. These artists use story to build connections between people of different cultures. The team includes Ilene Evans as artistic director, Connie Rice, Francine Kirk, Joey Madia, Heather Lantz, Knight Berman, Melissa Brown, Dolores Johnson, Eddis Brown, Ivonne Martinez, and Baba Jamal Koram. Baba Jamal joined the VFTE team in 2009 and did his first residency in Tucker County schools.

2012 Quilt in Honor of the Women at Port Royal
May 5, 2012 7:00 pm The Quilt Raffle Drawing
at the Thomas Education Center
September 15, 2012 Fundraising Event will be a Dinner Theater
With A. R. Gurney's "Love Letters"
Performed by Joey and Tonya Madia.



Ilene Evans, MA. Storytelling



Ilene acts as our primary touring artist, visiting schools regularly both as a storyteller and teacher. She collaborates with other artists and projects which continue our mission to extend the reach of the arts into the community. Next, she will be working with Fran Kirk at Fairmont State as the choreographer for a new musical called *The Mountain Mother Goose*; a new piece in honor of the opening of Gabor Folklife Center on the University campus. The original musical is based on the collections of Ruth Ann Musik and will be presented at the Folklife Center June 8, 9 and 10.

VFTE Residency March 2012

Artists in the Schools Program is a community outreach program of Voices From the Earth, a non-profit organization. The 2012 Baba Jamal Koram Residency covered three days of sessions which included visits to Tucker County High School, Union Elementary and Buckhannon-Upshur High Schools.

Baba Jamal Koram, Ed.S.

Baba Jamal Koram is an African American storyteller of great distinction. He has travelled the world sharing his stories of resilience and the creative excellence of Africans in America. He has earned the title of Griot by his example of leadership and guardianship of African American culture. Baba Jamal's courage, perseverance and struggle are the building blocks for his teaching in character education. Baba Jamal uses storytelling as a way of building character and preserving the best of our culture. He is a source of inspiration and education for all ages. He has received many awards and honors for his ongoing commitment to challenging young people to be their best and attain their highest values and standards. "He's fun too." www.babjamalkoram.com

Tuesday Afternoon – The Kempton Ranch, Kempton WV

Spring blew into our highlands like a lion - a Busara Black Lion. Spring came in the form of Baba Jamal Koram, the StoryMan. He says he carries the Black Lion's spirit with him wherever he goes. So last week, He stepped away from the ocean shore, strolled over the mountains and ran down the hills till he got to the river where it all begins. The Potomac River. Here in the highlands he found welcome and respite from

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Washington D.C. - the city of hot politics and law. He breathed in deeply and the fresh clean mountain air renewed his wild Lion spirit.

Wednesday -Tucker County High School Hambleton, WV



Then he made his way to his first audience and held court. His mountain family gathered to hear how his journey would meet theirs. They listened to the sound of the Mbira, and the Djembe. He called and they answered. When I say, "Ago" – you say, "Ame!"....Ago - Ame!

Baba Jamal asked the young people three questions... Who am I? - What am I do here? - Where am I going? "There were three brothers taught to work and stay together from their early years. They were different ages, about 21, 15, 16. The time came for them to find their fortunes and they were told to remember what they had always practiced... "Never leave your brothers behind" ...They walked through the desert on their way into the forest in Africa, the youngest boy was bitten by a scorpion. The two older brothers had not listened to the elders when they were told what to do in such emergencies. The youngest boy swoll up so much that even his tongue was too thick to speak, for he had listened and he knew the cure that would save him. But his brothers did not know. They did not remember. And everything they tried failed. The two young men were discouraged and told him they were going for help, he knew in his heart that his brothers had left him in the desert to die." Here was the story a tale revealing the making of character, strength and determination. The boy not only survived his horrible ordeal, he prospered and learned ways to share that with an entire community. There was forgiveness and blessing and betrayal, second chances and repentance all in good measure.

Baba Jamal's style is warm and amiable. "I am here to let you know there are folks who care about you and how you answer those questions makes all the difference." He took the students on a journey from Bamako, Mali, to Arizona, to Washington D.C to White Plains, NY back over to Dakar, Senegal and right back to tucker and Preston count still thinking about the taste of bread fruit from the Baobab tree. We met most of his family on the way some of his teachers and coaches and that was just the first half hour.

"Baba Jamal is a powerful storyteller who entrances our students with his words of wisdom. He brilliantly weaves life lessons with humorous anecdotes from his and others lives. He is a true sage that kids from all walks of life listen to"
Jay Hamrick; Principal of Tucker County High School.

Thursday - Union Elementary School in Buckhannon, WV – Road Trip!



Union Elementary Principal, Sara Stankus

"As a National School of Character, we are focused on ways to remind students of the importance of their words! At Union we believe in the value and great impact the Arts can have on the academic success and emotional well being of our students. Voices of the Earth, through Ilene Evans used the power of the imagination to encourage students to explore their unique ability to communicate thoughts and feelings in a creative manner.

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Students were mesmerized as Harriet Tubman shared the challenges and celebrations of her life. The students enjoyed the games and the songs of long ago as Ilene led them in blue bird and rope making. These are experiences that students do not forget! In our fast-paced, media-driven world, storytelling is a nurturing way to reconnect with children and remind them of their importance as human beings, that their spoken words are powerful, that listening is important, and that meaningful communication between people is an art. "

Ilene in the Union Elementary Library

VFTE's relationship with the community of Buckhannon started long time ago, but really revved up this January when we were invited to do a storytelling residency on culture and character through an Innovation Zone grant received by Union Elementary School. Ilene told stories and saw every student twice each day



in the course of that week. She told stories from

American History, from Africa and African American traditions, shared songs and riddles and rhymes. It was a radical and intensive learning environment. "I loved it and so did the kids and teachers and parents. I thought this would be a perfect community to bring in our colleague, Baba Jamal Koram for a storytelling performance. They jumped at the chance to have him at their school."



Baba Jamal with the whole student body at Union

During her storytelling residency at Union Elementary

School in January Ilene witnessed a most profound thing. She saw it again with Baba Jamal's visit with the students this March. What she witnessed was a cultural shift within the entire school. Sara Stankus, the principal, thought it was because of the whole school's in storytelling, it happening on a daily basis. Mrs. Stankus and Ilene saw a change in both students and teachers.

"These children have come to associate the nature of the storyteller with good things. They behave in ways that show us that when they are in the presence of a storyteller they feel they are in the presence of love." They relax and open their minds. The teller and listeners almost embrace one another - as both lean in to be a bit



closer. "When 375 students lean in to the storyteller, that is something. That is a power to change the

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world." In Baba Jamal's stories the children met a lot of new characters. There was Tayvon, a young eagle and his new friend, Josephine; the old lady with the pot of soup and the boy who wanted more; and the man with the tree growing out of his head and later, there was Abiyoyo, and Sukey and a Merwoman and so many more... the story road goes ever on with Baba Jamal. His stories seem to bubble up from a deep well within him and we never get tired of hearing them again and again. One moment he was the little girl, quiet and shy, the next moment he let out an evil laugh that will chilled us to the bone. His quicksilver changes, keep all the listeners engaged.

Baba Jamal tells stories from the heart. Baba can reshape and re-member stories in just the right order. He has a way of using the stories to mend broken hearts and lives and that just makes good sense.

Thursday night after dinner Ilene and Baba Jamal went to pick up some necessities at Wal-Mart out by the four lane... and as Ilene was looking for the fabrics and crafts aisle she heard someone call out her name. they were calling from around the corner. "Miss Ilene, Ilene Evans! Hi ! It's you!" Laura and her foster sister called their mom over and introduced her to Ilene They were so proud. They had heard Baba Jamal's stories that morning at Union Elementary School. They were excited to tell her their favorite parts – ("I want some more!" –the little boy cried, the baby eagle calling out Josephine – the story of Sukey and the Mermaid. – (Ilene told them her favorites too) it was such fun. Ilene met the extended family as well. The children were all getting a chance to paint their rooms new colors. They were out shopping to pick up the last items they needed. They told Ilene the colors they picked. One girl had a lime green, blue theme going, another had and pink and a creamy chocolate gray paint. Nice. The world is small when you are a storyteller and you never know how your stories have touched someone else. "They certainly felt safe with us and the warmth they expressed reflected the joy they had as they were drawn into a world of possibility, a familiar and inviting place: the storyteller's circle of dreaming." Early that morning these same children sat close to Baba as the program began. Really, 375 children sat close – are you feeling me? That is what a storyteller makes people feel – each child feels like they are the only one there in the audience and that the storyteller was talking just to you. Everyone said, "So long." and they went off to do more shopping.

Ilene was headed toward the back of the store toward the shoes department when she heard. "Miss Ilene Evans Miss Ilene Evans!" It was one of the first graders and her family. Her sister was in kindergarten. They swooshed up to Ilene and enrapt her with arms and hugs and smiles and , you know....What a sweet greeting. This was Laura. She was with her step dad and mom and to sisters getting shoes. Everyone chatted and it made everyone feel closer. Somehow in those short moments, the world was not such a big scary overwhelming place. They could share something they learned in school with the adults - they were the expert for a moment, the leader introducing the grownups to each other.

That evening at dinner, Baba and Ilene had a wonderful conversation about storytelling and what it really takes to wear the mantle of "Storyteller." It comes with a great responsibility because the listeners really come to love and trust their storytellers with their hearts. You can see it – right there in their eyes. Ilene said, "I like looking at the faces of the audience members as I move through the story. I used to be a little hesitant to really make eye contact, having come from theater, where the audience is always in the dark." Baba agreed that there is something above and beyond expected of a storyteller – well beyond what people expect of actors. From the children's response, Ilene realized how essential it was that the storyteller can see everyone and that they can see the teller. It is part of the magic of the story. It is ok to see and be seen.

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Friday - Buckhannon-Upshur High School

The AP U.S. History class was unusually quiet and thoughtful as they came into Tristan Gray's classroom.



Each wall in Mr. Gray's classroom was filled with images, lessons and snippets of our American journey: The presidents, Civil War, the Missouri Compromise, political posters and the news Through baba Jamal, today, the 10th grade students listened to a person's personal American History; the oral traditions and family lines tell tales of courage, love, compassion, commitment and legacy that books have little time to tell amidst the battles and laws. It was how those laws affected real people in real time that Baba Jamal focused on. He could trace his people who had real children who become friends and living testimony to their work and achievements.



He warned students, especially doing research that there are two sides (at least) to every story and that one has to listen for the "sense of things." He said that when things don't make sense, you keep asking questions and following the line of the story until it does. He used folktales like "The Silent Debate" and accounts from his own life to illustrate that principle. After following the story of Dangerfield Newby he wove it into the historical events that lead to John Browns Raid on Harpers Ferry Arsenal on at

the end did we get the surprise ending – Dangerfield was his cousin. He found that out through following the line of history to tell himself the story.

"For me as Baba Jamal's storytelling host, it was an wonderful few days of driving in the beautiful mountains, watching the springtime daffodils and crab apple trees, plums, sarvis and so many blooming trees decorate the morning sunrise. We got to see some of the best of West Virginia and share more stories. My favorite was a story about a baby eagle who fell out of the nest and managed to return, with the help of a new friend. I have been exploring the concept of Ubuntu – that we shape and are shaped by our community) Ubuntu is a shortened version of a Zulu proverb, "Umuntu ngumuntu ngamantu," which means: "I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours." This connectedness is best expressed by how we grow as artists and storytellers by the company we keep. Our whole community is richer for having Baba Jamal's visits."

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So what will Ilene be doing in June in Oklahoma?

Oklahoma Chautauqua

The modern Chautauqua movement began in 1976 as a type of "tent revival" for the humanities, to evoke discussion about history. The idea of Chautauqua also answered the dilemma many humanities organizations faced: how to make it possible for scholars to interact with the public in an open and accessible forum.

Ilene will tell the story of Ethel Waters' journey to stardom in an interactive first person narrative. It is a rags to riches story and she will use her own words and songs to illustrate the ups and downs of her travels. Some of the songs I include are "His Eye is on the Sparrow," "Stormy Weather," "Supper Time," "Bread and Gravy, and Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone. The program will be about 40 minutes and have time for audience questions that she will answer both in and out of character.

Ilene's Workshops:

My Harlem: The Harlem Renaissance Through The Eyes Of Its Poets.

Ilene brings the words of the great poets of the Harlem Renaissance to life. Images from Jacob Lawrence frame the backdrop of the great migration and the making of Harlem the iconic home place for Black culture and art.

Early Black Radio: A Groundswell of Democracy

Ilene will give a brief overview of the history of minorities in the Golden Age of Radio. Then, participants will listen to excerpts of original broadcasts and finally, participants will be part of an original radio script. Featuring: Superman fights the KKK in The Clan Of The Fiery Cross

The other Scholars/Actors/Storytellers presenting will be

Dr. Doug Mishler as Jack Warner; Dr. William S. "Bill" Worley as Bob Hope; Dr. John Anderson as William Faulkner; and Charles Everett Pace as Gordon Parks.

They will be in three cities, Tulsa, Lawton, and Enid, Oklahoma in the month of June.

<http://www.okchautauqua.org/scholars.htm>

What People Are Saying About VFTE:



Your *Mirandy* story was so much fun and I loved the song about the mountains. You were a great addition to the storytelling program. One of my friends today told me how much she enjoyed your playing the musical instrument. And of course, it was fun being together around the lunch table. Thanks for being a part of the Appalachian Festival. I hope our paths cross again sometime soon!

Katie Ross

Hey there! It's Chris Barnes thanking you all once again for providing such a fun event. Every time I have the chance to do it, I remember how much I enjoy performing and being a musician. Your insights improved my skills by leaps and bounds, and my love for the performing arts has been rekindled! I can't wait for next year's event. I've got May 5th marked on the calendar! Looking forward to seeing you then.

With thanks, Chris Barnes

The world is very blessed to have VFTE sharing its beauty with it. I have been very blessed in my life to be able to say I am collaborating on an ongoing basis with Ilene Evans. She has helped me amplify my work in the realm of storytelling and Seven Stories Theater Company would not have manifested the way it has had I not worked with her.

Joey Madia

About Ilene as Harriet:

Hi Ilene,

I want to thank you again for being with us on Sunday and for the wonderful program. From the feedback I received it seems to have been enjoyed and appreciated by everyone.

Jan Chippendale

I wanted to thank the Guild for the email notifying us about the "Harriet Tubman" presentation. I called a friend and extended an invitation to go with me so, off we went. I also want to mention that this trip also involved "Big Macs" and fries a must for any road trip. The event was held in a lovely church in Waynesboro on Saturday March 24th. Followed by a small display of Underground Railroad quilts, blocks, and of course the all im-portant tasty treats (notice the necessity of nourish-ment again to have the energy to find our way home).

Ms. Ilene Evans of Voices from the Earth, a non-profit theater arts organization located in Thomas, WV presented a wonderful performance. Ms Ev-ans performs, teaches and lectures throughout the US and overseas.

I had no idea of how limited my knowledge of Har-riet Tubman was nor had I realized how much I should know about her. She was a courageous woman who led so many to freedom as the most famous guide of the Underground Railroad but there was so much more to know about her. Fugi-tive slave, spy, nurse and abolitionist leader are a few of the other careers that she would be able to list on her resume. I had to stop and think of my own resume and question if I would have had the strength and determination to do a small part of what Ms. Tubman did in her lifetime.

What I thought was going to be a dreary rainy Sat-urday turned out to be a day of truly interesting learning experience. I have continued to process how important it is to preserve the stories of the past in order to influence the present. It has also made me wonder what stories will our quilts tell about us in the future.

About Baba Jamal

"Baba Jamal is a powerful storyteller who entrances our students with his words of wisdom. He brilliantly weaves life lessons with humorous anecdotes from his and others lives. He is a true sage that kids from all walks of life listen to."

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Jay Hamrick; Principal of Tucker County High School

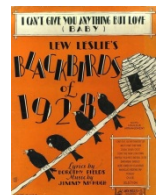
Journal January 2012

My walking tour of Upper Manhattan was my way of making a Pilgrimage to discover the Heart and Soul of Harlem. I had so many questions about where, who, why, when how many how long, what made the Harlem renaissance a renaissance? I found many answers just by walking where so many giants waked. I walked on the streets where our giants – Artistic Giants - walked. Zora, Langston, Johnson, McKay, Countee, Ellington, Calloway, and Ethel Waters.



Dr. Joyce Duncan, my hostess

Monday: My journey really started a long time ago, when I first heard the words...“Hold fast to dreams...”, by Langston Hughes. Now I am living a dream because of an invitation from Dr. Joyce Duncan to learn more about my literary and artistic heroes who touched and were touched by Harlem and its wealth of Black life, Black beauty and Black culture. This trip allowed me to come to Harlem to feel out the places where Ethel Waters honed her craft and made way for so many others to follow her onto stage and beyond the color line. Artists followed a path to Harlem in music, dance, drama, stage and film. Now, it was my turn to walk the streets of Lenox Ave and 125th St. and find the old newspaper articles with her reviews from the New York Times and the Amsterdam News (all in the collections of the Schomburg).



Tuesday – 8 hours of smooth driving, I was listening to music and stories and songs as I crossed over mountains and rivers to come to that bridge – the George Washington Bridge- that took me off the highway path (I 95) to Harlem, Uptown Manhattan, NY, NY. Harlem was the destination of so many people in the great migration from the Southern farms and plantations, from countries across the ocean and from hopelessness to hope to the streets of Harlem.

As I crossed over the George Washington Bridge, it looked so spectacular. The bridge was lit, like in all the movies, lit like a necklace of sparkling diamonds. I looked along the bridge and over the Hudson River, the water so far below, banked with bogs and stands of oat grass, blowing and shaking its tall head in the wind. Then, a quick exit onto Amsterdam Avenue, driving south along the Boulevard. As I pulled up to the 1899 Brownstone I breathed a sigh of relief. I made it. The country mouse had made it to the big city. All quiet, all well. I pulled up to a vacant spot at the park along the river by her house and, ahh, surprise... magic. There was the Moon. I watched the full moon rise shining over the Harlem River and dreamed of rivers.

Not ancient rivers, but rivers of words and music and life and love and song and freedom finding its feet. Freedom finding expression in art on canvas and moving pictures and images on film and an entire catalog of the journey of a people. They learned to make home in a strange land and raise their voices in praise of life, no matter the bitter, because they knew there was sweet. My people could make sweet out of

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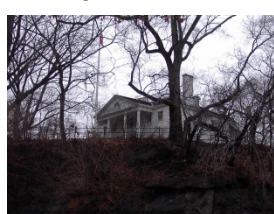
bitter. And here was their legacy. This place held the memory on every street. At every corner. The image looking back was our story.

My hostess and guide was Dr. Joyce Duncan, longtime resident of Harlem. She lived in the Brownstone built in 1899, purchased by her father in 1935. This was where she and her older sister grew up. There were four floors and two tenants, each with their own "stories."

Joyce was not back from her Chi Kung class. So I had time to gather my thoughts and watch the rhythm of the neighborhood. I took some time to walk around the block and watch the busses pull up to the stop, the dogs playing in the park, meeting friends, owners too. This was an historic district, restored and preserved like a museum. Streetlights brightened the corners and reflected on the broken stones that made the hilly sidewalks. We met at her door as I took in the colors of the heavy old stone that made these apartments and houses last. The Jumel Row houses, identical in their shared walls were made of wood, but well preserved. The lights were shining in the windows, warming the night and apartments, like safe havens awaiting the click of the switch. Streets of cobble stone made a particular sound as the wheels of the cars slowed down and waited for passengers.



Joyce and I agreed on walking as our way of my visiting Harlem. I knew that I needed to see things up close and take time in conversation to soak it all in. Dr. Joyce has an amazing memory and is strong enough to lead the way. I was so grateful for her health, her energy and her memory.



Wednesday

Old Man Winter relented and allowed us to go out walking. We started at Joyce's house, which sat across from "Manhattan's Oldest House," really it was an historic mansion, built in 1765. George and Martha Washington lived there for a year. A few steps from her home was Edgecombe Avenue, which followed the course of the Harlem river. The park sloped all the way down to the river's edge and people came all throughout the day. Some were just walking, relaxing, some were walking and playing with their dogs, others pushed their strollers with little people inside, bobbing heads and sleepy eyes. Though the cars lined the streets, there were people walking everywhere, through the cold, the wind, the rain. The sidewalks carried a lot of traffic.



Our first walk took us from 162nd and Edgecombe to 116th street. What a beautiful day. Walking down Sugar Hill (Washington Heights are part of Sugar Hill). 555 Robert Morris - was our first stop classic marble and a well-known party stop. Then 409 Edgecombe: former home of Walter White of the NAACP Jules Bledsoe, Aaron Douglas, W.E.B DuBois and

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many more, and across the street the Jackie Robinson Park with swimming pools and playground areas. There were no stores along Edgecombe to interrupt the feeling of the park. The green areas and trees and gardens were a retreat from the hurried bustle on the next block over. Soon we came to the Binziger House (circa 1880) – now serving as a home for homeless adults designed by the once famous architect William Schickel.

Then we passed the Belvedere – some of Joyce's cousins used to live there in big sprawling apartments. Shelifted her har an dpointed saying, "Over there Barnum and Bailey came to stay."

We passed more Green Thumb Parks! – Each park has its own name marked with a plaque, this was the Edgecombe Park . The city helped local residents transform empty places into something beautiful – community gardens. This was Sugar Hill Garden, tucked into a space between the 14 stories of tall apartments.

Dr. Duncan said that the parks and waterways got a lot of use. There were many green spaces running along the Harlem River along Edgecombe Avenue. They reminded me of the view of the Seine in Paris, and how the river runs through the city and gives nature a strong presence even in the heart of the urban complexes. The parks and river give people a place to enjoy. I was glad they were so well used.

Oh, My! And the Churches! Lots of churches – I was told... more per block than in all of Brooklyn, and we were walking... 145th and Edgecombe, we were counting off the blocks.



What a magnificent sight! - Citi College, Shepherd Hall – huge spires of black and white stone block that resembled a castle on the hill. At the 135st subway exits, there were lots of folks climbing up the narrow stairs with backpacks. When we looked up the hill, The Grand Shepherd Hall was towering over us. It overlooked the entire avenue below. City College covered ever so many city blocks. I mentioned the narrow wooden stairs that went from our streetside ground level and went all the way up the steep cliff to the towering Shepherd All above. That was a lot of steps. As a girl, Joyce remembered that she and her older sister, Thelma, would run up those steps, racing up

that long flight of stairs to see who would reach the top first. While we were still in sight of the City College high on the hill, we were delightfully surprised to come upon the St. Edwin's Chess and Backgammon Club. We looked in the wide open glass windows set at street level that allowed anyone to look in on the pairs of players - intent on perfecting their strategy. The chess club had advertisements on the window from the *Uptown News* – "NY Home Town Newspaper". Joyce told me that chess was and is an African game. I didn't know that. Maybe she will can come and play chess here when she has the notion. With so many wonderful things in walking distance, Harlem feels more like a village than the big city.

And oh, more churches: St. Marks. The plaque on the front says: Open hearts, Open minds, Open doors. Ashe! May it be so! Amen! and Hallelujah! We both wished that churches lived up to what they were supposed to do. Alas...

At 125th St. we turned into a windy corner at St. Nicolas Avenue and headed into a Photo shop where there was an optometrist who also repaired glasses. Photos and glasses – a one stop shop. Who would have guessed? In the past week, Joyce had run into a wall, broken her glasses and needed to get her them repaired. The tiny shop was a very popular place. She waited her turn as others picked up their prescriptions and photos.

Then, we were back on the busy avenue 125th St. We walked about half a block to a favorite stop of hers on 125th street right next to the Apollo theater– an ancient walkup vintage film and movie shop.

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Street vendors lined the street selling perfumes and hats, CD's and posters, purses and shoes. We climbed the narrow stairway, passing other tiny shops to a corner room filled with movie titles. There were wall to wall and floor to ceiling vintage films –their specialty? You guessed it – black films from now and then, old and new – Abe, the proprietor – was quite eccentric looking, like how men dressed in 1965. He had films of Robeson, Waters, Dandridge, Belafonte – so many familiar names long gone. It started to sink in - that we were right next door was the Apollo Theater. It was dark that night, so it was all closed up – no action today alas. Maybe I would plan that stop on the next trip.

Next, we walked over to 7th Ave and on to the famous Lenox Ave. I spotted the Lenox Lounge. There was the old red and black Art Deco design, so inviting. We both needed a stop – so this was perfect timing. Inside, we looked at the bar and the posters of the famous, then into a second room through the old frosted glass windows. Who had come through these very same doors, looking at the etchings and then to their friends waiting for them inside? We pushed open the doors that lead to the inner room and saw more tables and posters from long ago. Friendly folks at the bar made us feel welcome. Then back to the sidewalk and onto her new favorite restaurant. Refreshed, we stepped out for the next part of our journey.

We made it to a wonderfully delicious living foods restaurant on 116th. Supper at last, baked fish and quinoa, and blueberry tea, ahhhh..... Then, we took the #2 bus home to Washington Heights and talked all into the night. I found out that Dr. Duncan is a total night owl, doing her writing and editing in the wee hours when all is quiet. I had lots to think about and absorb. Sweet Dreams, Harlem. Tomorrow - the Schomburg library...

Thursday

I spent the morning going over my notes, writing and got ready for our afternoon walk. Wednesday we walked along Edgecombe. Thursday, we took the walk down St. Nicholas Street - there even more parks and lovely homes.



Sisters Uptown Bookstore on Amsterdam Avenue was the first stop on the list for Thursday. It was a short walk from her Brownstone on Jumel Terrace.

<http://www.harlemonestop.com/organization.php?id=205>

So much of Harlem accommodates the Spanish speaking folks who are now a major part of the workforce. Hispanic families have found refuge in Harlem as so many other immigrants over the long history of the borough. We stopped in a little store that had a variety of baked goods and canned goods and candies, kitchen needs and juices familiar to Latin cultures, deli, sandwiches and tortillas. There was not

one inch of empty space. Two doors down was the most quiet peaceful respite on the block. The Sisters Uptown Bookstore, with juice bar, places to read and get away from the sidewalk crush. Added to the walls filled with books were jewelry, book supplies and Kwanzaa items. I purchased a Kwanza set to take home: the kinara and the mat and cup and candles. The candles are really lovely. The young man at the desk was meticulous and wrapped each one with love and care. I felt like he was blessing my items before he put them in the bag. Kwanza has a long tradition here.as does the red, green and black flag. Even in the 20's people used the flag to distinguish their sense of national pride and claim the dignity of being a people with a culture. Sisters Uptown Bookstore patrons pushed the door open and were welcomed by a soft bell and a friendly hello. A mother and daughter arrived, then three young radicals handing out flyers to get the police to stop frisking folks. They said it the yet another example of police brutality. There did seem to be a

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lot of police around the neighborhood, but I did not see anyone getting frisked, but then, I may have picked a quiet time. Hummm.

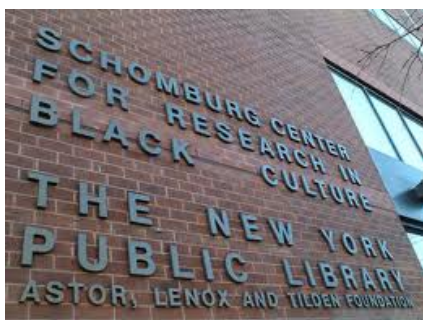
I left my items at the store to pick up on the way home. There was going to be an open mic tonight – hosted by their favorite singer/poet, Steve, and I was to return to tell a tale or two after we had spent our time at the library. It was like being invited to the Black towers by Amelia Walker back in the 1920-s. That would be lovely. More stories and storytellers.

So on we walked. The cold brisk day made walking feel good. I spotted the masonic hall up ahead and across the street. Joyce remembered telling stories there as part of the African Folk Heritage Circle – the NY affiliate of NABS, of which she is the president. The Masons have storytellers at some of their events and Check it out. <http://www.nabsinc.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=63252&orgId=nabs>.



Next door to the Prince Hall Masonic Hall and Lodge was a very large apartment building also owned by the Masons. The Masons run it in order to assist people in need as part of their outreach and service to the community. We decided to see if anyone was in and to take a look around the lodge. The cool breeze had ignited my adventurous spirit again. The huge heavy doors opened smoothly and we climbed up the marble stairs to see more doors and old placards. There were three men in the office facing the street. One of them, a mason, introduced himself and the others to us after Joyce told them about my project and why we stepped in off the street. His name was Mr. Bradley, a 33rd degree mason. He invited us into the large office. There, he told us he had grown up there and all about the history of the neighborhood of Harlem and how it had changed over the years. When Joyce told him that she had grown up there too,

but moved out of Harlem as a young lady to her own apartment in Inwood, he listened intently. Mr. Bradley made his living as a post man. He told her what her address was - while she was living in Inwood – He had been her mail carrier and knew both her name and address. What a feat! It proved just how small the world can feel. We were both quite impressed. And it sure made the world feel a little less hostile and scary. He was proud of the memory he had of people there and their accomplishments.



We trekked onto the Schomburg 515 Malcolm X BLVD.... Doing research at this library has been a dream of mine for a long time. It is a repository of all things pertaining to the survivors of the holocaust of slavery in this country. The collection is a monument to the intelligent gathering and archiving of our great beauty – beauty and intelligence that still seems to miss the eyes and ears of mainstream America. Photos, audio, microfilm, newspapers, magazines, documents and papers all housed here. We just took time to get the hours and a brief look around at the layout and make a plan for my visit.



What a beautiful building.

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Next, we passed the Harlem School of the Arts. She was one of the folks who helped make this school a reality. There are some 1500 students attending the programs and special events. A young film crew from Japan was just loading up a van as we came by and their instructor had a birembo on one shoulder and a large Djembe on the other. The instructor?



It was no other than her longtime friend and musician/educator, Don, (one of the founders and percussion teachers at Harlem School for the Arts). He stopped what he was doing, turned around and paid homage to Dr. Duncan and offered to give us a tour of the facility. There were so many classrooms, dance studios, practice rooms, musical instruments, performance spaces, offices - a great facility to house so many teachers and fine artists. Nice. We thanked him for his time and he invited us to a gig he was playing on Friday – alas, we could not make it – but that would have been great.

Time to get walking again... it was getting dark. We thought we could pass by several more important historical stops important for both artists and culture before it got too late. One place we were aiming for was the Lafayette Theater – famous for the Tree of Hope and then we would stop by the Abyssinian Baptist Church, famous for its spiritual guidance of leaders– home church of Adam Clayton Powell Sr. and Jr.

We were surprised when we came by the place where the Lafayette Theater was supposed to be because the buildings on the block were all abandoned and boarded up – I thought I must have had the wrong the address – or maybe it was a different Lafayette. Hummm.



So we kept on walking to the church – the Abyssinian Baptist Church (132 O'Dell Clark Place)– oh, now, that was something to see!- Fabulous – intricate stained glass windows shining bright– back light shining

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through to the outside, framed by dark stone pillars. Regal. Now, the Reverend Dr. Calvin Butts led the flock of this historic congregation. There was to be a special speaker that night. Michelle Alexander on *"The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness"* She would also be signing her new book. We thanked them for the invitation and headed back out on our mission.

Once again, we walked by the place where the Lafayette Theater used to be. This time we read the signs on the building more carefully. Demolition. The signs on the red brick and stone were warning of its impending demolition. They were going to tear it completely down. Sad to see. This was the spot; the spot where the "Wishing Tree" - the Tree of Hope once stood proudly and had encouraged new actors and artists to pursue their dreams with confidence and courage. The tree was cut down in 1934 to make the street wider. A stump from the original tree was salvaged, well really, many people came the day it was cut down and took a piece of it home for a keepsake. But one piece is preserved at the Apollo Theater and performers keep the tradition to this day: they touch it before they go on stage and say their humble prayers.



As we came round the corner of old Lenox Avenue (now named Malcolm X BLVD) we saw one of the Murals of the Harlem Hospital – Aaron Douglas artist. Joyce pointed out the places where the Red Rooster Club was and the Dark Towers– frequented by the Harlem Renaissance artists and politicians.

On we walked, at last, to the Schomburg – Two hours before closing (yes!)- to study, read, organize my thoughts and plan for the next day's searches. Schomburg is part of the New York Public Library (NYPL) system - it is one of four research libraries and does not circulate books. I found a micro film file on Ethel Waters that had many of the clippings of her reviews and activities. Most helpful. The *New York Times*, the *Amsterdam News*, the *Chicago Defender*. I took notes and made copies where I could – I was so disappointed that the copies were not a good enough quality to read. Yet, it will help me in my searches when I returned home. I mentioned this to one of the librarians as we are leaving and who should come down to the desk but, the chief librarian, Sharon Howard, who had helped an Don Bogle with his research on Ethel Waters for his book *Heat Wave*. It was fun to chat with her and share stories about our many journeys. Of course, she knew Dr. Duncan, who doesn't know her in Harlem because of her long involvement with the community and its scholars, bringing African and African American scholarship to the people through its stories and beautiful art. Her presence and spirit opens many doors. I am honored to be introduced by her as we go to these important places – our Mount Vernon, our Monticello, our living museum.

For supper, we shared a simple American (as in non-exotic – omlette and waffles) dinner around the corner at Café 22. Then she put me on a bus and gave me my directions to get back to the Sisters Uptown Bookstore for open mic night. I would be late, but she assured me they would most likely still be going strong. I thought of a tale to share.

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When I got there, they had just finished making the last smoothie and only a handful of the group remained. But there was Steve and Janifer and Alika – it was enough to have a few more stories and get to know the stranger that Dr. Joyce had been telling them about (me). So we had a great time getting to know one another. They have a strong community that is caring and helpful. It is good to see that city folks can be like that. Alika offered to give me a ride home with all my packages, a welcome offer at 11pm. I will never look at NY the same way. Before this trip New York was just buildings, the hurry, the noise, the dirt... Now, when I think of New York, I will think of Harlem and the people I know, caring people who are devoted to making the world a kinder gentler place one smile at a time. Ashe – May it be so. Back to the Brownstone home to rest - at last. What a great day.



Friday

It was a bright shining crisp morning and Old Man winter was revving up the engine. At last, I was on my way to the Schomburg on my own! I found myself walking against that mighty North wind. Now, that was wind! It was a long chilling trip, but once I got to the library, I started to unthaw. I was not the only one feeling the chill. It is kind of fun to me to see all the other black folks with red noses and cheeks – like me. (We are so many different shades and hues of wonderful). I was ready to greet the hat check clerk, the, off with my coat, pack up the laptop and down the waiting elevator to level C. This was research library within the larger system, so there were no circulating items, it is a library of databases and search engines that can only be accessed while there - in the building, so I got out my laptop and got to work. Dr. Joyce said she would meet me about 3 pm or so and then we would do some more exploring around the neighborhood. The library was a quiet and busy place; all the computers were being used. People came and went all day, all ages. In my imagination, I pictured question marks over everyone's head. I had the feeling that questions of all sorts were being explored and these were miners, fellow minders searching for nuggets of gold, making something beautiful from their findings. The librarians at the Schomburg are top notch. They are so efficient and helpful. A woman at the desk took me over to the computer to show me how to download each item I needed as a PDF file - A little complicated, but manageable. I found my way to periodicals which were much better preserved and clear to read than some of the microfilm. I had no

problem with copies doing it this way. After my long session searching periodicals for Miss Ethel Waters, I stopped in the gift shop and looked at the exhibit while I waited for Dr. Joyce.



She met me downstairs as I was closing my laptop and we started to talk about her work with the National Black Theater. She was friends with so many dynamic cultural groups. Her work overseas as a

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negotiator had honed her many skills of helping people reach their goals and keep their identity through entrepreneurship of all sorts: arts, crafts, theater, music, dance, and the natural world. As we left the Schomburg, she was encouraging Ms. Howard to - "Take that trip to Africa"...she had never been there.

The National Black Theater once owned and filled the entire city block with activities. Joyce wanted me to see the area. She was head of their school for a long time. So, once again we headed into the bitter wind, growing colder as the sun got lower. I welcomed the open doors as I pulled my scarf closer around my face. We were warmly greeted by the managing director, Nabbi Faison. He took us into the office area and we spoke for a long time about the mission of the theater and its connection to the community. They are now a part of a collective of Black theaters, able to leverage more funding and share certain kinds of resources. The Coalition of Theaters of Color. CTC.



National Black Theater – this place felt like a the heart of the entire village of Harlem, its past and present and future. The theater is filled with living sculptures, guardians and guides made a by traditional artists from the Yoruba tradition. The figures of Oshun and Ogun made the air shiver with ancient power. The facility has two large performing spaces, one open arena and one Black box. The entire place is full of art by the hands of artists from Senegal hewn from trees of cherry, oak and black

walnut holding the power of Oshun and Ogun to guide, lead, and strengthen those who work and enter there. These figures stand as a living connection to the African root of America. They served as a beacon calling folks to see what they left behind and give some grounding to those who were only living in the shadowed memory of a homeland. There were bronze etchings and paintings and impressions of village life. I was deeply moved by the attention to detail and the spiritual component of the work. Each piece was stunning. Theater is the place where the messages of the divine to speak to us humans - gravity bound servants and shepherds. That mission is honored at NBT.



When Joyce introduced me to Nabii and showed me the photos of their founder and mentor, Barbara Ann Teer, she mentioned my work on Ethel Waters and other grand women in our history. Joyce asked Nabbi to help her remember Ethel Waters address, she held it as a childhood memory while growing up in Harlem. He owned that building now.



Nabii Faison, director of the National Black Theater, was able to give us the actual address of Ethel Waters as 204 135th St. , it was one of the places she lived. She was a great influence on his life in theater. His recounted memories encouraged me to keep searching beyond the legends.

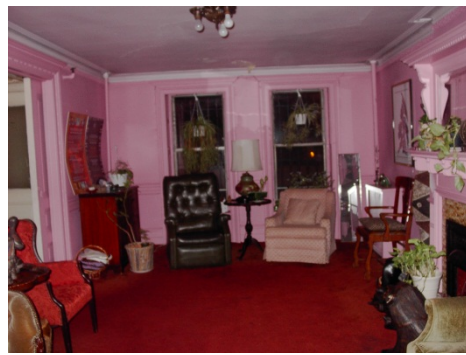
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Outside the front door was a wishing well made of stones and all along the edge of the building, lining the entire length of the street is the artwork of interlaced statues. We made as many wishes as we had coins. What a lovely and distinctive sight.

Undaunted by the cold winds of New York, we scoured the next streets for a new Caribbean restaurant called Sisters restaurant – very delicious and reasonable Caribbean cuisine. Joyce liked to say that Lenox Ave was our Fifth Avenue now renamed Malcolm X Blvd.

Later that evening, there was an incident with a cat. All I could say was that it ended with Senegalese food and a cab ride. What a treat – the Senegalese food and the cab ride.

Dr. Joyce's home reflected all of her worldly experiences as well. Her home is filled with pieces of fine art that she was given from her labors. The Asante stool, the lion, and elephants. Then there was the garden she tends in her back yard and her passion for frogs. From the simple to the sublime, in her friends and her associates – what a wide experience and refined taste in all things home and abroad.



Saturday

I packed my things and got ready to close the door to the Brownstone. We had said our goodbyes and exchanged keepsakes. Time to travel home again to my beloved mountains. I carried more memories than my suitcase could hold, new stories I can recount and wonderful new friends.

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Calendar- 2012

January 2012

January 8 VFTE Board Retreat Brookside Inn 9:30- 4:00 pm

January 9 – Grandview Elementary School Charleston, WV

January 17 - 20 ---Union Elementary School Buckhannon, WV Teaching Artist Residency

January 21 – MLK Oratory Contest – Ilene gives Keynote, Ohio State Lima, Lima, OH

February

February 4 - VFTE Youth Performing Arts Coaching Day Joey Madia

February 10-13 – Timpanogas – Storytelling Seminar and Performance, Utah

February 13-18 – Loudoun County, VA Behind Enemy Lines Public Library Tour (7 libraries)

February 19 Unitarian Universalist Church of Cumberland -

February 21 Hardy County Public Library- History Alive Programs

February 27 Arts Day at the Capital – Sheila and Ilene

March

March 3– VFTE Youth Performing Arts Coaching Day Joey Madia

March 3 – Ilene - History Alive for Harambee conference and Book Festival at Shepherdstown University,

March 8-11 Oklahoma’s Humanities Council Chautauqua rehearsal weekend, Ilene away to OK

March 14-19 History alive tour to Kingwood, West Union, Bridgeport and Charleston, WV

March 21-23 - Baba Jamal Koram Tucker County Artist Residency Thomas, WV

March 27 – Mountain Mother Goose Ilene Leads dance auditions at Fairmont State University

March 31 – 7-9 pm - Youth Performing Arts Competition TCHS Judges: Greg Mach, Ivonne Martinez, Sheila CC

April

April 26, 27 – Mountain Mother Goose rehearsals begin Fairmont State University

April 28 - Marion County Public Library, Fairmont – Behind Enemy Lines (HA)

May

May 5th – VFTE Annual General Board Meeting

May 13 – Storytelling – *Brave Children* at Cumberland Unitarian Church

May 16 – 19 – Storytellers Retreat Whitakers, NC

May 20 – 2 pm – Prickett’s Fort History Alive – Harriet Tubman Program Civil War

May 26 – Old Time Radio – Read through of The Files of Sherriff McClane Thomas, WV for ArtSpring

June

June 3- 24 – Oklahoma Chautauqua – Portrayal of Ethel Waters

June 25-29 - Mountain Top Public Library – Summer Reading Program – *Dream Big!* Thomas, WV

June 28-31- NSN Storytelling conference and festival Cincinnati, OH

June 30 – Mountaineer Days Thomas, WV – Storytelling Tent

July –

July 6 – Fayetteville Theater Chautauqua - Harriet Tubman in the Civil War History Alive

August –

August 8 – WV Volunteers Conference , Charleston, WV– Ilene Keynote and workshop

September

September 15 - Fundraiser Event Dinner Theater *“Love Letters”* by Joey Madia

September 27-30 - Moab Women's Conference for Future Generations

September 30– Leaf Peepers – Storytelling Tent

October –

October 20 - Preview of the VFTE Civil War Commemoration: *The Women of Port Royal*

October 25-27- VFTE at M.T. Pockets *Women at Port Royal*

November –

November 3 - Halloween Children’s Storytelling Program *The Princess, The Knight and the Dragon* - Story theater

November 14-18 NABS Conference - Baltimore

December –

December 8 - VFTE Community Theater Winter Program – Christmas Carol

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Voices of Freedom Series



The Story of the Civil War Quilt... “Women of Port Royal”

This was considered a “Nurses Quilt.” Ours is a replica of the 1879 quilt by Betty West, currently held in the Smithsonian collection, donated by the children for whom Ms. West made the quilt. For Ida Murphy, it honors the thousands of African American and their struggle for freedom. Ms. Ida named her reproduction “Women of Port Royal” as it represents their struggle to establish a new kind of American society based on racial equality and social justice in Port Royal, South Carolina from 1861-1865. The themes of flying geese and the Ohio star to symbolize the many different people who supported a radical reconstruction of the Southern aristocracy no longer based on privilege and race. The triangles represent the flying geese, people flying to freedom any way they could. The stars represent the leaders who brought them together and coordinated their efforts.

“Women of Port Royal” Nurses Quilt 87”X 88” by VFTE African American Quilter: Ida Murphy 2012

Voices From the Earth, Inc. www.vfte.org

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Ilene Touring with Harriet Tubman Program

Photo by John Warner

