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was being prepared, even as a child, for a future career that would benefit the most vulnerable members of society. As a very young woman, she would bear three children, two of whom survived childbirth. She would carve out a life for them and herself, working diligently at her education. And then she would hear a voice that could have come from a burning bush. The message was clear, and Valerie Slater would answer the call. *continued on page 12*

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH by REBECCA D'ANGELO

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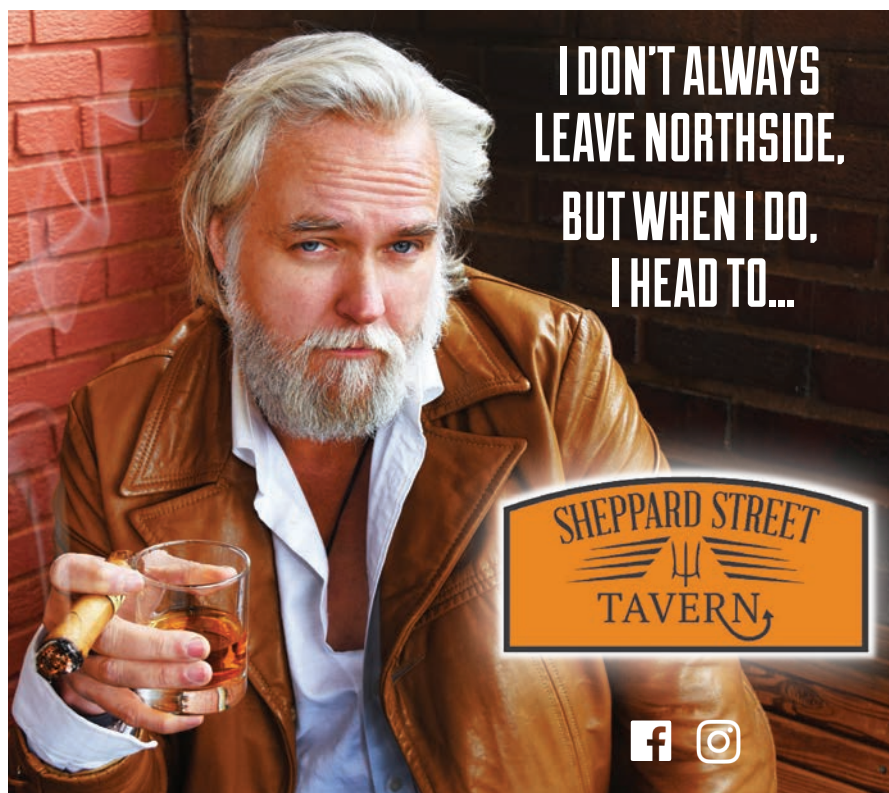
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## EVENTS

# National Night Out On MacArthur Avenue



*Top: Jonathan the Juggler entertains the crowd.*

*Above left and right: Paella compliments of Demi's, and garlic knots provided by Zorba's.*

*Below: The ever-popular misting tent.*



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The merchants of MacArthur offer a wide range of taste treats for kids and adults alike—root beer floats compliments of Once Upon a Vine; popcorn from snow cones at Decatur's Garage; Key lime pie cups at the Mill on MacArthur; iced tea and cookies from Stir Crazy; paella from Demi's Mediterranean Kitchen, and something equally sumptuous from Dot's Back Inn; bite-

size cookies and other sweets from Morsels; garlic knots from Zorba's; popcorn from Classic Touch Cleaning and The Painting Class; chips and dip from Mi Jalisco; dog treats and a wading pool for your dogs from David Schieferstein and Teri Phipps; bottled water from Rich's Stitches; watermelon from Little House Green Grocery; face painting from Paint Crazy; samples from Gallo Blanco Pizza + Things; activities at True North Yoga; and much, much more.

The Northside's own Jonathan the Juggler will be on hand working his magic, along with the Northside YMCA and All Dog Adventures. It's all family oriented and kid-friendly. **NJ**



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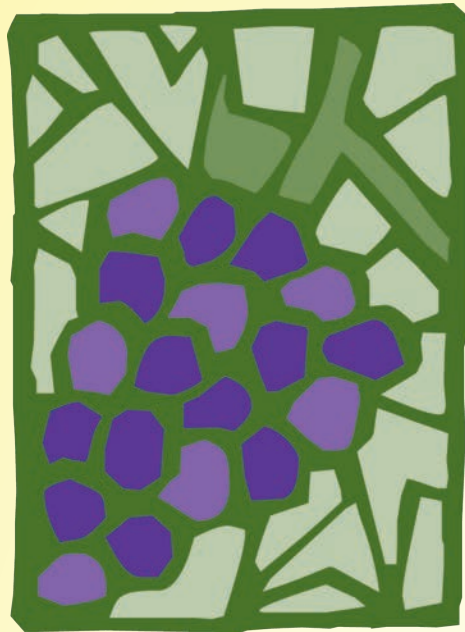
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# Arthur Ashe Boulevard: And Rumors of War

by CHARLES MCGUIGAN

**S**ATURDAY JUNE 22 was a day for the ages, a moment of historic significance. The Boulevard's name was formally changed to Arthur Ashe Boulevard, the culmination of a thirty year-long battle. Hundreds clogged the grounds surrounding the Virginia Museum of History & Culture (formerly the Virginia Historical Society) and spilled out into the broad boulevard that now bears the name of one of Richmond's most beloved native sons. Arthur, of course, was one of the world's greatest tennis players. He was the first African-American selected for the United States Davis Cup team, and the only black man ever to win three Grand Slam titles—at Wimbledon, the US Open, and the Australian Open. In 1968, he won both the US Amateur and the US Open championships in the same year, something no one else has done before or since.

But Arthur was much more than an outstanding athlete. He was a teacher, a social activist, and a humanitarian. He was a major force in pressuring South Africa to end its despicable policy of apartheid, and was awarded, though posthumously, the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was a tireless advocate for civil rights and racial equality, and was loved by the global community. This, too: he was a gentleman, and he was kind. As a boy growing up in Richmond, Arthur was prohibited from playing the sport he loved on the courts just a mile south of this spot where he was now being honored.

The Elegba Folklore Society's percussion band played on traditional African instruments throughout the day, and if you listened closely, above the rhythm, you could hear a buzz and a hum that grew louder and then softer. It was neither cicadas nor swarming bees. High above the crowd, a military-sized drone swooped and hovered, circling the people below, sometimes moving rapidly as a hummingbird from one end of the gathering to the other. And on the roof of the old VHS two men, dressed in camouflage, stood stoically, surveying the crowd with binoculars. All to ensure, I'm guessing, that white supremacists or American-grown Nazis did not disrupt the proceedings.



*Above left: David Harris, Jr., nephew of Arthur Ashe, at the podium, while men dressed in camouflage survey the crowd from their perch on top of the former Virginia Historical Society.*



*Above right: Elegba Folklore Society percussion band performing for the crowd.*

Keynote speaker Congressman John Lewis, a freedom fighter who shed his own blood in the war for equality, said, "We cannot remake what happened 400 years ago, but we're here today as one people, as one family." Later in his speech, the Congressman from Georgia spoke of the power of nonviolence, but encouraged people to stand up for what they believe. "It's time for us to get into trouble again," Congressman Lewis said. "Good trouble, necessary trouble."

Congressmen Bobby Scott and Don McEachin, of Virginia's delegation, also spoke. Senator Tim Kaine remembered the controversy surrounding the placement of the Arthur Ashe statue on Monument Avenue a quarter century ago. "The decision to place the Arthur Ashe statue on Monument Avenue was a healing in a city, commonwealth and country that still needs healing to this day," Senator Kaine said.

Later in his speech, the Senator added, "Naming is important. This is not a minor thing we are doing today. So many of the names that we live with were chosen by a tiny, tiny subset of people who do not represent the full community of our city, or state, or nation today. This is an act to rectify that."

Governor Ralph Northam was there, and his speech sounded earnest, and in keeping with the promises he made after his blackface scandal. "African

American history, black history, is American history," he said. "And the way that we teach that history is inadequate and inaccurate."

Throughout the seated audience there were scores of members of Arthur Ashe's extended family. Perhaps the most moving words spoken from the lectern that day came from Arthur's nephew, David Harris Jr. "Today," he said. "We are letting the world know racism, discrimination, exclusionary tactics, lack of investment in our children, education and people is bankrupt." The applause was long and deafening.

Mayor Levar Stoney mentioned the statue of Arthur Ashe created by sculptor Paul DiPasquale that stands at the intersection of Roseneath and Monument, and noted that Ashe is the only "champion" memorialized on Monument Avenue. "Our city is transforming," he said. "It is changing its future, and triumphing over its past."

Levar, and a number of other speakers, also thanked Second District City Councilwoman Kim Gray for her role as the prime mover in the boulevard's name change.

This all came on the heels of the VMFA's announcement the week before the dedication that the museum would soon be home to a thirty-foot tall bronze equestrian sculpture by Kehinde Wiley. Called Rumors of War,

the sculpture, which will be unveiled in New York on September 27 and arrive in Richmond in the late fall, features a contemporary African American man astride a massive horse. It was inspired by Kehinde's encounter with the J.E.B. Stuart monument while he was in Richmond during an exhibit of his work at the VMFA three years ago.

"The inspiration for Rumors of War is war is an engagement with violence," Kehinde wrote of his work. "Art and violence have for an eternity held a strong narrative grip with each other. Rumors of War attempts to use the language of equestrian portraiture to both embrace and subsume the fetishization of state violence."

It seems fitting that the statue's final resting place will be on Arthur Ashe Boulevard at the entrance to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. There are only two other statues along the entire length of Arthur Ashe Boulevard, and its extension, Hermitage Road. Each memorializes one of America's two Original Sins. Standing at the southern end of Arthur Ashe Boulevard is Christopher Columbus, whose supposed "discovery of America" indirectly led to the diaspora and genocide of Native cultures. On the opposite end of this boulevard there is a statue honoring General A.P. Hill who fought to preserve the enslavement of people of African origin. **N9**



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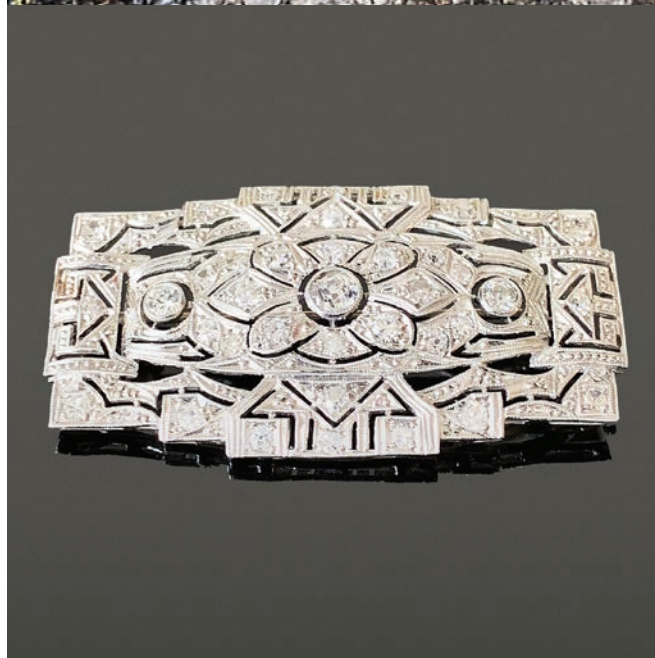
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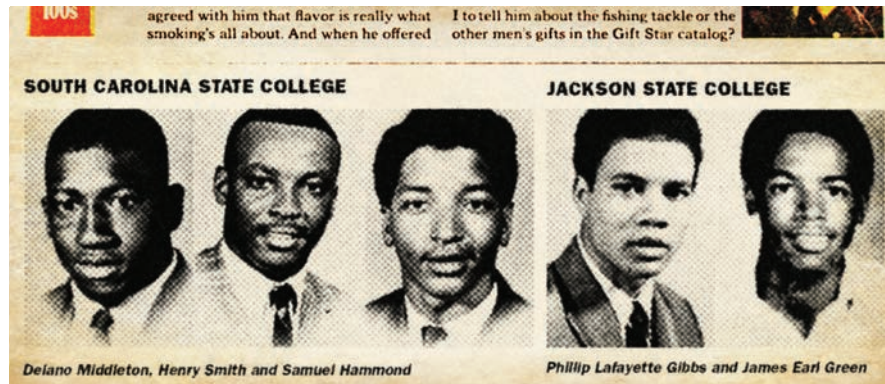
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## HIDDEN HISTORIES

# The Other Kent States Did Black Lives Matter?

by JACK R. JOHNSON



**I F YOU GOOGLE JACKSON** State today you have to work to even catch a glimpse of the violence that happened on their campus between May 14 and 15, 1970, just ten short days after the Kent State massacre. Perform that same Google search on Kent State, of course, and there's no doubt that something horrific happened. History has swallowed the incident at Jackson State College Mississippi, but it's no less noteworthy than the massacre at Kent State.

On May 14 and 15, 1970, Jackson State students were protesting the Kent State killings, as well as agitating for civil rights. A few students set several fires and overturned a dump truck that had been left on campus overnight at a sewer line construction site. Jackson firefighters, dispatched to put out the blaze, met a hostile crowd. Fearing for their safety, the firemen requested police backup.

Seventy-five city policemen and Mississippi State Police officers armed with carbines, submachine guns, shotguns, service revolvers and some personal weapons, responded to the call. After the firemen extinguished the blaze and left, the police and state troopers marched along the unfortunately named Lynch Street toward Alexander Center, a women's residence, weapons at the ready. No one seems to know why.

The officers deployed into a line, facing the students. Someone in the crowd either threw or dropped a bottle which shattered on the asphalt with a loud pop. That's when the police opened fire on the unarmed students. Over 200 hundred rounds were discharged. Miraculously only a dozen or so were wounded, but two students were killed.

Twenty-one-year old Phillip Lafayette Gibbs, a Jackson State College student, and 17-year old James Earl Green, a Jim Hill High School senior, were murdered on May 14, 1970 just 6 short days after the Kent State killings. It would be the second time in less than a week that U.S. authorities had murdered unarmed U.S. students, yet hardly any one remembers the Jackson State killings. Nor do they remember yet another time U.S. authorities murdered unarmed U.S. students, though it was at least as horrific as the Kent State massacre.

That incident began two years prior to Kent State, on the night of February 8, 1968, when South Carolina State University students started a bonfire near the entrance to the Orangeburg, S.C. campus. As police and firefighters attempted to put out the fire, officer David Shealy was injured by a heavy wooden bannister thrown in his direction.

Shortly thereafter South Carolina Highway Patrol officers rolled up to the campus grounds and began firing into the crowd. There were around 200 protesters. Eight highway patrol officers fired carbines, shotguns, and revolvers at the protesters, firing for around 10 to 15 seconds. Twenty-seven people were injured in the shooting, most of whom were shot in the back as they were running away, and three African-American men were killed. The three men killed were Samuel Hammond Jr., Henry Smith (both SCSU students), and Delano Middleton, a student at the local Wilkinson High School. Middleton was shot while simply sitting on the steps of the freshman dormitory awaiting the end of his mother's work shift.

In all three incidents—Kent State, Jackson State and South Carolina

State—no one was ever convicted. In the succeeding years, many in the anti-war movement rightfully referred to the Kent State shootings as “murders,” although no criminal convictions were obtained against any National Guardsman. In December 1970, journalist I. F. Stone wrote the following:

“To those who think murder is too strong a word, one may recall that even Spiro Agnew three days after the Kent State shootings used the word in an interview on the David Frost show in Los Angeles. Agnew admitted in response to a question that what happened at Kent State was murder, ‘but not first degree’ since there was – as Agnew explained from his own training as a lawyer – ‘no premeditation but simply an over-response in the heat of anger that results in a killing; it’s a murder. It’s not premeditated and it certainly can’t be condoned.’”

Another question: you know about Kent State, of course, but why were Jackson State and South Carolina State never given the same level of coverage? Those incident were never featured in national news magazine covers, Pulitzer Prize-winning photographs, or popular songs memorializing the deaths, as Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young’s “Ohio” did for Kent State.

According to CNN, for those who lived through the time, the reason for the lack of coverage on the other campus shootings is pretty simple: “Kent State was four white students in Ohio,” said Gene Young, a former Jackson State professor, when asked by NPR why the tragedies at Jackson State and South Carolina State aren’t as prominent in the nation’s memory.

“Jackson State and Orangeburg were black colleges in the South,” Young continued. “Black students on a black college campus in Mississippi that had the history of Emmett Till, Medgar Evers, Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner. It was just another day of business as usual, racist law enforcement officials victimizing black people.”

So it’s not really a mystery. They weren’t covered nationally because—for their community—a violent assault by establishment officials was not even news. **NJ**



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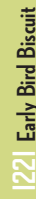
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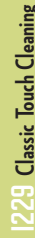
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# Valerie Slater

ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM, DIVINE CALLINGS

**IT WAS AS CLEAR A VOICE AS VALERIE SLATER** had ever heard, sharp as cut crystals, and the words resounded in her skull and they rolled down into her gut. On Thursday nights she would gather with three other women in her home where they would sing and rap and worship. A question had been nagging at her for some time. “What do I do with my life now? I can’t be this stay-at-home mom because I’ve got children to raise.” She’d asked the question of God, but there had been no response. That is until this particular Thursday night when she clearly heard the following words: “I have anointed and appointed you to snatch my young people out of the hands of the criminal justice system and place them into my just hands.” Valerie wrote the words down, memorized them, and began a quest that would lead her into a life committed to activism and advocacy, always defending the rights of the least of her brethren and sistern.

“When I think back on that night, I’m not even sure that I knew that those words were my heart’s cry,” says Valerie Slater, who sits at the far end of a table. “What I realized is that’s what my soul was pouring out, what God was telling me.” She pauses, and looks out the window at the spears of lush pink flowers just burst open on a crepe myrtle. “Every time I hear about a child who is hurting, my heart breaks because I know what that’s like,” Valerie says, inviting me to become unstuck in time and travel back to her childhood.

She was born in Newport News, Virginia. Her father, a lifer, who served as a helicopter pilot and mechanic during the Korean and Vietnam wars, was, at the time of her birth, stationed at Fort Eustis. When Valerie was less than a year old, the family moved to her father’s next tour of duty. Over the years, they would live in Alabama, Texas, Germany, Panama and Georgia. While on base, Valerie and her siblings were cushioned from the overt racism that raged outside the gates of American military reservations.

“When you are on base it’s very integrated,” says Valerie. “But when you are out interacting with the locals in the cities and towns, you start feeling and experiencing things that are incredibly foreign, even though we are still in the same country, America.”

After retiring from a twenty-plus year military career, Valerie’s father moved the family to Spanaway Washington, a suburb just outside of Tacoma. “It wasn’t at all integrated.” Says Valerie. “And I remember crying, thinking my identity is being shaken and civilians don’t really like black people. I didn’t want to lose the protections of the military.”

Valerie recalls how her parents would constantly warn their six children about the inherent dangers of a racist society. “If we got a spanking, and my parents were all about that switch, they would tell us, ‘We use this switch so that you’re not beaten with a billy club by a police officer,’” Valerie says. “Don’t you forget that the color of your skin will often determine the outcome of any interaction that you have with law enforcement. Don’t be deceived to think that right and wrong is always going to save you just because you are on the side of right. There are times that your skin color will speak so much louder than your actions.”

When she was just seventeen, Valerie met the man who would become father of her three children, two



of whom lived. Not long after giving birth to her eldest daughter, Antoinette, Valerie became pregnant again. Her baby was due on Halloween, but on October 3 the placenta that held her unborn daughter broke away from the wall of her womb. The unborn child bled to death almost immediately.

Valerie inhales deeply, and a sob escapes her lips. “I woke up three days later and I was asking for my baby,” she says. “They let me hold her. They held her in the morgue for three days.”

Three years later, Valerie was pregnant again. She was three months from term when she had another placental abruption. Because there were no anesthesiologists at the hospital, they performed a Caesarian without the benefit of anesthesia. “I screamed a lot,” says Valerie. “And my little girl was born dead.” But the doctors and the nurses were able to revive the premature child. “Her medical records actually say: ‘death under 48 hours, Yes; death under 48 hours, No’” Valerie tells me. “They’re unsure how long she

BY CHARLES MCGUIGAN  
PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DOUG DOBEY

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went without oxygen on her brain, so she has an intellectual disability. My sweet girl. My Annalise. She's a beautiful and amazing young woman now. Right now she volunteers with me and her sister sometimes, and she wants to work with animals."

Sometime later, Valerie would leave her children's father, taking her two daughters with her. At about that time, she began developing a personal relationship with her God. "God literally became my best friend," she says. "I think I grew a backbone because I had something that was truly mine, my faith, and I truly began becoming this independent woman."

And then came that Thursday night when God spoke directly to Valerie.

"I knew I had to do something," Valerie says. "So I went to Tacoma Community College because I had to start somewhere." She aced every class and earned an associate's degree in youth psychology, and was then accepted into the psychology program at Colorado State University. But she ended up changing her major to social science with a minor in criminal justice. Her vision for her future was becoming clearer.

Even before earning her bachelor's of science degree in sociology from Colorado, Valerie was further refining her vision for the future. "Before I got done, I was already looking for a law school," she says. "I realized I can be the best sociologist or counsellor, but ultimately law is where the power is. I found U of R, which has this amazing juvenile law clinic program, and I said to myself, 'Oh my gosh that's where I want to go.'"

She applied and was accepted, and her eyes widened, free of moles or beams. "I took the Education Rights Clinic under Adrienne Volenik, the most amazing special education attorney in our nation," Valerie says with rising enthusiasm in her voice. Her future course became clearer and clearer. "I'm an advocate at my core, so I immediately went to bat for these children," she says. "I would read up on whatever their diagnoses were, and the issues these parents and children were facing in school, and what does the law say about it."

Valerie pored over "Wrightslaw" by Peter W.D. Wright, memorized its contents as if it were a Bible. "I devoured it," she says of this book devoted to special education law, and advocacy for children with disabilities.

Advocating for children was nothing new to Valerie. "I've always been an advocate for my own daughter," she says. "She will be a perpetual pre-teen with adolescent tendencies. I have a

little girl forever. How amazing is that? I'm so fortunate. I'm so blessed. I'm a fierce advocate for my children."

When her oldest daughter, Antoinette, was attending kindergarten at a private school, she told Valerie one afternoon that she was told to sit on the floor because she had misbehaved.

"Wait, wait, wait, wait," Valerie told her daughter. "Help mommy understand. You were sitting on the floor, and everyone else was sitting at their desk?"

Antoinette nodded and said, "Well we have chairs, and they scoot up to the table."

"But you were sitting on the floor?" Valerie said.

Again, Antoinette nodded, and said, "Yes, momma."

"Well, mommy's going to go to school with you tomorrow."

The next morning she loaded her daughter and a small blue chair into the family car. As her daughter took her seat in the classroom, Valerie approached the teacher's desk and lowered the small blue chair to the floor.

"I need you to help me understand what my daughter did that made you think it was ever appropriate to sit her on the floor, as if the black child is in some way inferior to the other children in the classroom," she told the teacher. "Surely, you don't think that. Do you think that? Do you think black children are somehow inferior?"

The teacher was taken aback, and remained speechless.

"What I need you to understand is that this chair here belongs to my daughter," Valerie continued, indicating the small blue chair at her feet. "If you ever feel that she cannot sit in your chair, you will not put my child on the floor. She will sit in her own chair. If you feel that chair needs to be in the corner for some period of time because of her behavior, I might be able to tolerate that. But don't you ever put my child on the floor, again, as if somehow she is beneath other children."

Valerie is smiling now. "That woman didn't know what to do with me," she says. "But I'll tell you one thing, she never sat my child on the floor again. I'm a bear when it comes to my children. I'm a bear when it comes to all children."

While still in law school, Valerie interned at the Virginia Poverty Law Center and then at the Virginia Indigent Defense Commission, where she sharpened skills as both an advocate and a litigator.

After receiving her law degree, Valerie continued interning, but funds were rapidly running out. "We were almost homeless," she says. And then she got

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a call from Disability Law Center of Virginia. "Professor Volenik spoke with their executive director and said, 'You've got to hire Valerie Slater,'" Valerie tells me.

Valerie went through a succession of interviews and was ultimately offered the job. She met with the executive director. "So you've impressed my staff, and you have a stellar recommendation from Adrienne Volenik, the premier special education advocate," this woman told Valerie. "Why does she love you so?"

"I don't know why she loves me, but I love her back," Valerie responded. "What I can tell you is, I'm passionate about the rights of children and I will defend them with every fiber of my being."

Valerie worked with the Law Center for the next four years, and while there co-authored the Special Education Manual that DLCV uses to do their training to help advocates become more proficient.

Valerie then went to work with the Legal Aid Justice Center and joined the JustChildren team, which works for children's advocacy. "I was one of the juvenile justice attorneys and I became the coordinator of RISE For Youth," she says.

Less than a year ago, RISE For Youth became an independent entity, and Valerie became its first executive director.

"We assess the state's juvenile justice system," she explains. "We advocated for the closing of Beaumont, and it finally closed. We don't like the idea of a child being behind bars. You shouldn't cage children. We just shouldn't put kids in cages. What a concept, right?"

Children should not be warehoused in large penal institutions. RISE For Youth advocates for smaller facilities with a multitude of services offered. "It ought to be homelike, and it ought to be filled with counsellors who have the resilience and the strength to deal with whatever

comes their way," says Valerie. "The counsellors should know every child. And there should be no more than thirty children housed there."

It's an uphill battle to reform these entrenched institutions, but inroads have been made, and Valerie's up for the fight. "We will win," she says.

And what will help them win these battles are weapons that we all possess, weapons that neither maim nor murder, weapons that destroy the evils of racism and injustice. They are weapons of advocacy, lending your expertise to combat the depravity of a corrupt system of justice.

"Advocacy is important because each and every one of us at some point in our lives have found ourselves struggling with something," she says. "Advocacy is important because not everyone is able to do it on their own. And if you have the strength, the knowledge, the influence, use every bit of it to make sure that everyone makes it. Because we don't make it, until we all make it."

Regardless what Ayn Rand devotees may think, there is no virtue at all in selfishness. "We cannot have this me, my, mine mentality because it gets us where we are today, where hate is the commodity of the hour," Valerie says. "How sad is that? How sad is it when we are so quick to push others aside so that we can quickly get to the finish line. We're at a place now where there are entire communities—Latinx communities, LG-BTQ communities, African-American communities—that are hurting. And how dare we turn a blind eye."

Everyone can join this fight for justice and equality, according to Valerie Slater, ESQ. "Take stock and inventory of yourself," she says. "Ask yourself, 'What is it that I have?' Because everyone has something. And now how can you take that thing that you have and use it so that it brings about a greater good, a good beyond you. We will win." **NE**

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## BOOK REVIEW

# The Obamas A Literate First Family

by **FRAN WITHROW**

**D**EAR FRIENDS, YOU are getting a “two-for-one” this month! Here’s the story: I finally began reading Barack Obama’s intriguing book, “The Audacity of Hope,” published in 2006 when he was a U.S. senator from Illinois. Obama casts a wide net by discussing a variety of topics of national importance while also sharing more personal stories about his life.

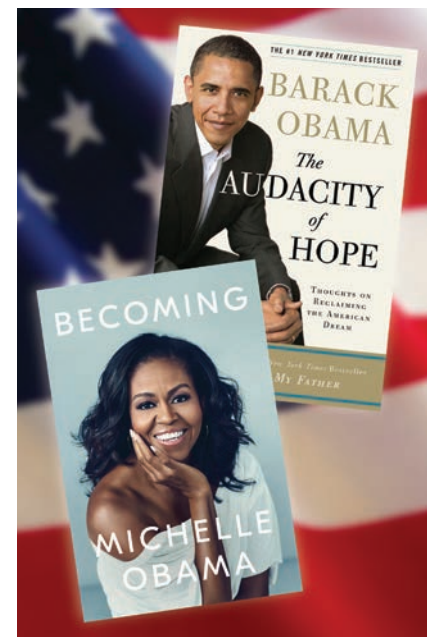
I eagerly read Obama’s views on education, foreign policy, and the role of faith in his life. His description of the struggles facing members of Congress is eye-opening. Equally compelling are his observations of how gender roles in the traditional nuclear family as well as current economic parameters have altered the ability of parents to support their families. His insights about ongoing racism in American society are penetrating and astute. His book is strong, intelligent, and thoughtful, and I appreciated the underlying tone of humility he maintains throughout.

I was hooked.

When I was halfway through Barack’s book, a friend said, “Fran, you have to read Michelle Obama’s book, ‘Becoming?’” She handed me her copy, and because giving me a book is like giving an alcoholic a glass of wine, I took it home and dove in. I typically read more than one book at a time, so I found myself dipping back and forth between Michelle’s book and her husband’s. I highly recommend this: it was fascinating to read Barack’s thoughtful insights about Senate politics and juxtapose them with Michelle’s view of Barack as president.

“Becoming” is a charming memoir, beginning with Michelle Obama’s childhood as a beloved daughter growing up on the south side of Chicago, tracing her rise through Princeton and Harvard and an impressive career before setting that aside to campaign for her husband. Michelle is reluctant to partake of political life but she knows Barack has a passion for politics and wants to be an agent for change.


Her glimpses into White House life are compelling, and she is honest about



both its joys and frustrations. She finds a way to make meaning for herself during her eight-year tenure by supporting children’s nutrition and fighting childhood obesity. She makes it work.

But everything must end at some point. Tears welled in my eyes as Michelle describes the dismay she feels at Trump’s presidential win. She sees his attitude as that of a bully. “I can hurt you and get away with it.” This certainly appears to be true as Trump stalks Hillary onstage, derides the disabled, disrespects women, and is still elected. Michelle puts into words the feelings that have smoldered in my heart ever since Trump took office.

But all is not gloom. Michelle reminds her weeping staff, “Everything is not lost,” and her optimistic tone gives me hope as well.

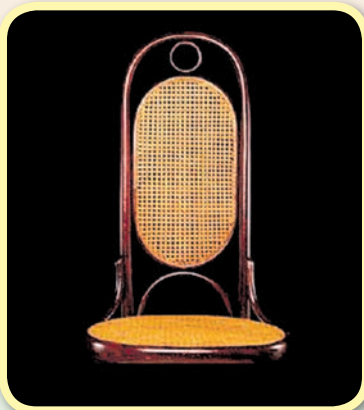
Ah, me. I miss having the Obamas in Washington, but I am grateful for their continuing presence through their articulate, heart-felt books. More, please! 

**Becoming**  
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**The Audacity of Hope:  
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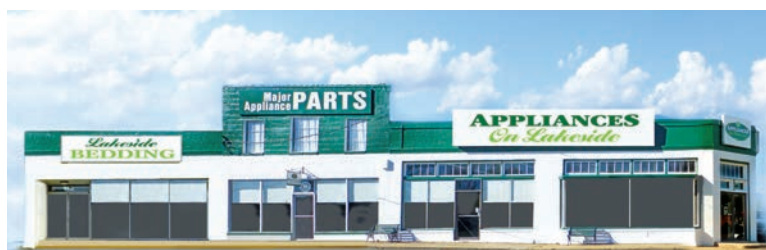


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