“We work hard to build their self-esteem. These kids have amazing brains, something they don’t know. I will tell them, ‘Did you know you were smart? Did you know you were amazing?’ Sometimes what I hear back is ‘Oh, you mean me?’ I want them to know how far they can fly.”
G. Asenath Andrews: Proving Daily That Teachers Can Change the World

By Alan Abrams
Sojourner’s Truth Reporter

Talk about contradictions: while Detroit’s public schools took hit after hit in the local and even national media during 2004, one alternative school in the district that offers both middle school and high school courses became one of only eight schools nationally to be named a Breakthrough High School by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

How did that happen? The success of the Catherine Ferguson Academy (like The Sojourner’s Truth, named after a famous former slave) is closely linked to the determination and drive for success of its principal, G. Asenath Andrews. Most, but not all, of the students at the Academy are pregnant or are single mothers. It is that factor that convinced The Links, Inc. to bring Andrews to Toledo on Thursday, Sept. 27 to be the annual speaker at their Polly Fox day, Sept. 27 to be the annual speaker at their Polly Fox day, Sept. 27 to be the annual speaker at their Polly Fox day, Sept. 27 to be the annual speaker at their Polly Fox day. It is that factor that convinced me.

As founding principal of the Academy, Andrews is out to change the status quo and one way is to make sure that the babies are with children of their own age. Andrews explains that girls without babies must write a letter stating why they want to attend the school and then behave once they are accepted. Enrollment is first come, first served. There is no academic requirement; most of the girls are in the process of dropping out when they enter. As many as 20 percent drop out each year. The 90 percent graduation rate is based upon students who make it to their senior year. The school is also Detroit’s only site for the Early Head Start program, which focuses upon children under the age of four. One of the programs concentrates on making sure that the babies are talked to and read to so that they have high word-recognition skills. After the babies reach the age of four, they go to a nearby nursery to be with children of their own age.

Did we mention the Academy’s small farm? Yes, right in the heart of Detroit’s inner city and in one of its poorest neighborhoods is a red barn built by the students. It flanks a yard that is home to several goats, a huge sheep, dozens of hens and roosters.

The result is a working goat milk, egg and honey farm as well as a fruit and vegetable garden with one plot for each student in the program. The farm and orchard teach the teen moms and their children about the cycle of life, taking care of animals and growing their own food.

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Free the Jena Six: A Journey into the Heart of a New Civil Rights Movement

By Annette Wright
Special to The Sojourner’s Truth

It’s 9:36 p.m. on the evening of September 18 and Raven and I are packed two hours early for our midnight departure from Detroit to Jena and then onto Jena, Louisiana.

Jena Louisiana....never even heard of the place prior to several months ago, when Reverend Al Sharpton, whose syndicated radio program, “Keeping It Real” received a call from a listener who turned out to be the mother of Mychal Bell. It was a plea for help. Immediately drawn into the conversation, my heart sank as I listened to this mother describe the unbelievable situation involving her then-16-year-old son and some friends at their school in Jena, Louisiana. Well, by now, most people know about the “Jena Six.”

What stuck out most in my mind were the words “white tree,” “nooses,” and “colored.” Like most blacks in America, I have a particular sensitivity to words such as these. I find it profoundly saddening that some people cannot understand or simply refuse to understand why black people, even in 2007, are deeply hurt by these types of hateful words.

This isn’t the first time that I’ve allowed my daughter, Raven, who is now 17 and a senior in high school, to partake in non-violent rallies and protests. We marched on the steps of the United States Supreme Court a few years ago in support of affirmative action and she thoroughly enjoyed the experience. But that was Washington, DC. Not Jena, Louisiana. Like a lot of blacks, our family made the exodus from the South (Demopolis, Alabama) to Ohio and some town in Michigan and Canada back in the 30’s, 40’s and 50’s. They were seeking a better life, a better education for our children, a better life for us and our families.

We arrived in record time and purchased the candy and now loaded with sugar, we ran and played on the “American Dream.” I, like my seven siblings, were born in Toledo. As a young girl, I knew about Dr. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks. At Washington Elementary school we had a good number of black teachers and my older brothers and sisters taught us about our history as a people. However, my mother obviously did not think that to be enough as she somehow connected the grand notion that my two younger sisters and I would benefit from spending a summer in Demopolis, Alabama. The year was 1968.

We stayed in Demopolis with my great-grandmother, affectionately called Ma’Dea, and my great-uncle Reuben. Talk about night and day! Ma’Dea’s house consisted of three rooms. There was an outhouse, a well from which we had to draw water, hogs to slop and a horse that was so old that he could have been criticized from having a horse to ride himself. A vegetable and fruit truck would come once a week, as well as a dairy truck.

The nearest neighbor to Ma’Dea’s little shot-gun house was a lady named Ms. Lizzie, Uncle Reuben’s sweet-heart. During one of Ms. Lizzie’s visit she asked that she be able to take us to the store. My first thought was “there’s a store around here?” A real store? But of course, I didn’t dare say that aloud. (Some of you know what I’m talking about). The store was about two miles or so away. After going to the store with Ms. Lizzie on several occasions, I memorized the route and convinced my Uncle Reuben of that fact, pledging with him to allow me and my sisters to go to the store on our own.

So off we went, me and my two sisters, Mary and Cynthia, 8, 7, and 6 years of age respectively. The trek to the store and back took a little less than an hour. We left that morning about 10 a.m. or so. And with our little pennies and nickels in hand, we took off running for the little country store, candy calling our names.

We arrived in record time and purchased the candy and chewing tobacco for Uncle Reuben. We devoured the candy and now loaded with sugar, we ran and played on the way back to Ma’Dea’s. It was a particularly beautiful day. I’ll never forget how the bright blue sky and red dirt contrasted so beautifully.

We were a little less than amile from home, when seemingly out of nowhere, a pickup truck appeared. It was traveling at a high rate of speed straight for me and my sisters. We were terrified. My first thought was perhaps this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized that it was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first time thought that was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized that this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was perhaps this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized that this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much first thought was indeed this was the vegetable or dairy truck. I soon realized this was not. I grabbed my sisters and we jumped into the back of a mobile home and I tried to put my arms around them, drawing them as close to me as possible. We were pretty much