

# blues notes

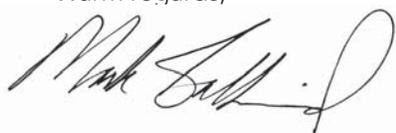
December 2006

## Happy Holidays & Welcome to the Inaugural Issue of *Blues Notes*

Happy Holidays from all of us at The Urban School of San Francisco. Welcome to our first edition of *Blues Notes*, Urban's new alumni newsletter. We are delighted to launch this new communication, and share with you the many exciting programs and opportunities at the school. It is an exciting year for Urban as we celebrate our 40th Anniversary and reflect on our legacy of academic excellence, extraordinary teachers and incredible students.

We hope you enjoy perusing *Blues Notes*, and we invite your suggestions and feedback.

Warm regards,



Mark Salkind ('70)  
Head of School

This newsletter was sent to Urban alums. To remove yourself from this list, please contact [alumni@urbanschool.org](mailto:alumni@urbanschool.org). If you hear of someone who did not receive a copy, please forward us their email address.

## Alum Spotlight Aisha N. (Lowe) Toney, PhD ('95)

A new member of Urban's Board of Trustees, Aisha N. (Lowe) Toney, PhD ('95) recently spoke with Director of Development Brisen Brady.

**Brisen:** What was one of the most memorable Urban experiences you had as a student?

**Aisha:** Picking one is nearly impossible. Three that stand out in my mind are river rafting, serving as a student representative on the Board of Trustees and camping trips. Each of these experiences is memorable because they exposed me to new things that I hadn't done before coming to Urban. They were also opportunities for growth, and required me to think in new ways and stretch myself in different directions. For example, river rafting, while being lots of fun, also requires technical skills and concentration. Being on the Board also expanded my learning as I helped write and present the strategic plan the school was working on at the time.

I'd also like to add that the relationships I established with the teachers, being able to call them by their first names and call them at home, is something that I remember with great fondness.

**B:** Is there a "nugget" of wisdom you gained at Urban that continues to hold meaning for you?

**A:** One learning lesson that had a profound impact on me, and continues to now, was something that occurred outside the classroom and was actually born out of difficulty and conflict. When I first started at Urban in 1994, the school was beginning to expand its enrollment of students of color and in all honesty there was some racial tension. I had attended a predominately African American school before and had been surrounded by my community, so Urban was somewhat of a culture shock to me. As a result, I withdrew initially. At times, it can be easy to get consumed by race and hard to get past the veils that people put up to protect themselves.

However, Urban stepped up to address these issues and racial tensions, and brought in a specialist, Zina Jacques, to work with students, faculty and staff. As tired as the cliché might be, it's true that you can't judge a book by its cover. Through the many conversations and exercises we had as a school community, understanding and tolerance grew at Urban, and we shared in a collective enlightenment. We all learned that there is something to appreciate about everyone – beyond all racial lines, gender lines, socio-economic lines, etc.

I believe whole-heartedly that this is a lesson that I probably wouldn't have learned in college, and that as a result, I built relationships and friendships at Urban beyond what I was used to, and that they are deeper and stronger as a result.

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## New Classes at Urban

Our beautiful new building has opened up tremendous opportunities for teaching and learning at Urban. As a result of the additional eight new classrooms and four science labs, Urban is able to augment its rigorous curriculum to offer Mandarin, Calculus-based Physics, Geology and Art History this year. Thank you to all our generous *Building Our Future* donors who helped make this extraordinary expansion in our building and program possible. We hope you will stop by to visit soon.

## Urban at 40 Auction and Celebration

Urban is turning 40! Please save the date for Saturday, March 24, 2007, for *Urban at 40* – our special anniversary celebration and auction at Bimbo's 365 Club in North Beach. The festive evening will include cocktails and a delicious sit-down dinner, super silent auction, entertainment by Urban's talented students, live auction and an intimate performance by Luce – a renowned San Francisco-based band. Don't miss this opportunity to join the party and benefit Urban's Tuition Assistance Program!

New this year: Urban's silent auction is going online! Stay tuned for details.

Invitations will be sent shortly. If you are interested in volunteering for the auction or contributing to the event, please contact Karen Swing, Assistant Director of Development, at 415 593 9539 or [kswing@urbanschool.org](mailto:kswing@urbanschool.org).

## Faculty Spotlight LeRoy Votto, History Chair

LeRoy Votto has been teaching history at The Urban School since the 1980-81 school year. Each year since, he has taught the US History Civil War required course. LeRoy estimates that he has taught 95 percent of all students who have ever attended Urban.

LeRoy recently spoke with Kris Bailey, Director of Communications.

**Kris:** What brought you to Urban in the first place?

**LeRoy:** I came from teaching part time in the community college system, at both Merritt College in Oakland and Skyline College in San Bruno. I was the executive secretary of the teachers' union and was organizing collective bargaining and doing grievance work. I also was working with the teachers' union trying to get tenure for part-time teachers. But I ended up not being one of them! So I was at the point where I needed to figure out what to do next. Mostly I needed a full-time job!

A friend, Lisa Rubens, was going on maternity leave from Urban and she recommended me. I interviewed with the head of school and with Dan Murphy, and I've been here ever since!

**K:** What have been the most significant changes you have seen throughout your time at Urban?

**L:** There have been quite a few changes and most of them exceedingly good. I'll list just a few.

- We have a real library – with books! I don't think you can be a decent school without a real library. We have a wonderful librarian, Carolyn Karis, who works so well with students and faculty.

- We have more consistently high performing sports teams, and I believe that's imperative for schools. We often had good teams before, but I think recently, our kids are taking their sports more seriously while still having fun and doing well in school.

- There have been profound changes and improvements in the music program. It's so wonderful to have a chorus and an orchestra and a variety of bands. I love being able to walk around campus and hear music.

- We still have great teachers. And these teachers are committed to their craft. And we have a great administrative team. Mark, Charlotte, Suzanne. They know kids, they understand teaching and they know what it takes to create a successful school. There is a real support network behind all the great teachers who work at Urban – people who reach out and work to make this the best school and to ensure that the kids are getting the best education.

**K:** What are some of the pressures on students that you see now that you didn't before?

**L:** I've never thought that each successive year of students were any better or worse than previous. But what I do see is that students today are a little less willing to take risks with their ideas; they tend to be less adventurous in their thinking. But they generally write essays that are clearer and more organized than I used to see!

## Register Online for the Alumni Community

Your classmates are just a click away! Hundreds of alums have joined our Online Alumni Community, and we hope you will do so, too. To register or log in to the Online Community, visit [www.urbanschool.org/alumni](http://www.urbanschool.org/alumni). Once you have joined, you will have access to your class' email addresses, photos from recent events and the opportunity to write updated Class Notes.

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## Class Notes

Please feel free to drop us a line and let Urban know what's new with you. Class Notes and photos are published bi-annually in our *Urban Community* magazine. Class Notes can be written online [www.urbanschool.org/alumni](http://www.urbanschool.org/alumni) or sent via email to your Class Correspondents or to [alumni@urbanschool.org](mailto:alumni@urbanschool.org). We hope to hear from you soon!

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## Donate Online to Tuition Assistance

Visit [www.urbanschool.org/alumni](http://www.urbanschool.org/alumni) and click on the secure "Donate Online" button. We appreciate your support and consideration. We are pleased to designate all donations from alums to support tuition assistance during 2006-07.

## Reunions: Reconnecting with Classmates & Faculty

### Recent Grad Reunion for the Classes of 2002-2006

Thursday, January 4, 2007  
3 - 5 p.m.  
Urban Student Center

Please join fellow alums, faculty members and the Class of 2007 for food, drinks and catching up with friends. Kindly RSVP by December 29 to Alison Brand, Senior Development Coordinator, at 415 593 9540 or [abrand@urbanschool.org](mailto:abrand@urbanschool.org).

### 10-Year Reunion for the Classes of 1995, 1996 and 1997

Saturday, May 12, 2007

Please mark your calendars for this special 10-year reunion. Details and invitations will be forthcoming. If you would like to help plan this memorable day, please email [abrand@urbanschool.org](mailto:abrand@urbanschool.org) or call 415 593 9540.

### Wrap-Up: 20-Year Reunion for the Classes of 1986 and 1987

On Saturday, September 30, alums from 1986 and 1987 gathered at the Tonga Room in San Francisco to reunite and reconnect. More than 30 alums attended, traveling from as far away as New York to see their friends. Many thanks to Ina Elliott Ables ('86) and Sara Martin Breindel ('86) for their efforts in leading the reunion. You can see photos from this event at [www.urbanschool.org/alumni/photo\\_album](http://www.urbanschool.org/alumni/photo_album).

### Alumni Basketball Game

Special thanks to all the alums who joined in the Varsity v. Alumni Boys Basketball game on Saturday, November 25. Sixteen alums, ranging from the classes of '86 through '06, played a spirited game against the varsity team. In the end, the experienced alumni pulled away from the younger squad and took home a 68-60 victory. Congratulations alumni! The camaraderie continued as both teams enjoyed a pizza party together after the game. Much reminiscing occurred, or so it was reported...

To see photos of the game, please visit [www.urbanschool.org/alumni/photo\\_album](http://www.urbanschool.org/alumni/photo_album).

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## Admissions Update: Another Banner Year

Since opening the doors to our beautiful new building in September 2005, Urban has seen an impressive increase in the number of admissions applications. Last year, we experienced a 33 percent increase, and the 2007-08 admissions season looks to be another banner year. The October and November Open Houses both had record attendances with 500 guests visiting our campus on each of the two event dates. Our Visit Program will host more than 600 8th graders on their shadow visits, and 500 prospective applicants have already scheduled interviews. The Class of 2011 is sure to be another wonderful combination of students from all backgrounds, interests and talents.

**Arts Alive at Urban**

The fall theater production of *The Conference of the Birds* (November 8-11), directed by Wendy Parkman, was a moving performance about undertaking a spiritual journey and quest for truth. The play is based on the Sufi poem by 12th century Persian mystic Farid Uddi Attar and adapted for the stage by Jean-Claude Carriere and Peter Brook. Actors included Katie Bondy ('08), Carolyn Cohen ('08), Boone Epstein ('09), Sam Kronish ('09), Olivia Molineaux ('08), Rachael Monosson ('07) Anya Rome ('08), Claire Turner ('07) and Mel Zelikovsky ('09).

**Upcoming Events - Alums Invited!**

*Winter Concert*

Thursday, December 7, 2006  
Herbst Theater (401 Van Ness Avenue at McAllister)  
7 p.m.  
Tickets are \$5 and available at the door.

*Winter Art Show*

Thursday, February 15, 2007  
Urban (free)

*Winter Theater Production:*

*The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov  
Tuesday-Sunday, February 20-24, 2007  
Gumption Theater  
Dress Rehearsal February 20 at 4:30 p.m.; Performances February 21 at 4:30 p.m. and Thursday-Saturday, 22-24 at 7:30 p.m.  
Tickets are \$5 adults/\$3 students and are sold at the door beginning 30 minutes before the show.

*Circus Performance*

Thursday, March 1, 2007  
Gumption Theater (free)

**A Great Season for Athletics: Go Blues!**

Urban's varsity and junior varsity teams had a great fall season. More students than ever before are playing sports at Urban. We also added a new Fitness Room this year which is open to all students, staff and faculty. Many thanks to all the donors who contributed toward this fantastic new resource through the 2005-06 Auction's Fund-A-Need.

Highlights of fall sports include:

*Boys Soccer:* The team made the playoffs, with a 4th place finish in the league, which included a close 0 -1 loss to UHS toward the end of the season, and a thrilling 2 -1 playoff victory over Stuart Hall. The Blues season came to an end in the BCL semi-finals, with a loss to eventual NCS champion Marin Academy.

*Girls Volleyball:* There were a record number of volleyball players this fall at Urban, so much so that two JV teams had to be created. Building on this enthusiasm, the varsity team rolled to a 4th place finish in the BCL-West. The post-season saw the Blues defeat UHS in the first round of the BCL playoffs. In the semi-finals, they ran into Marin Academy, and lost in four games. But the Blues overall record was strong enough to earn another berth in the North Coast Section playoffs, where we went up against a strong team from St. Helena High, and lost in four games.

*Cross Country:* The girls and boys teams both finished with a strong showing at the BCL Championships held at Lindley Meadow.

*Girls Tennis:* Injuries in the middle of the season hurt our playoff chances, but we had a strong showing in the singles and doubles tournament, with our #1 doubles team making it to the semi-finals.

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**Come and Cheer the Blues at the Girls Varsity Basketball Tournament**

Dec. 14-15-16, 2006  
Kezar Pavilion  
Admission is \$5 adults/\$3 students

Urban's first game will be against St. Vincent on Thursday, December 14, at 8 p.m. Game times for Friday and Saturday are TBD, based on whether we win or lose. The championship game will be played Saturday, December 16, at 3:30 p.m.

This is a very competitive tournament with the top Division V Girls programs from Northern California participating. Teams that are playing include: Urban, Convent, East Side Prep, St. Vicent, Cloverdale, Capital Christian, Castilleja and South Fork.

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**B:** After you graduated from Urban, tell us about your life path – college, work, etc.

**A:** After graduation I immediately went off to Stanford, which I attended from 1995-1999, and received a B.A. in Psychology. I quickly settled into working with youth and education – while in college, I tutored and ran an after-school program for kids in East Palo Alto, and realized then that I wanted to commit myself to the field.

During my senior year at Stanford, I had an opportunity to pursue my honors thesis, and the research really interested me when I saw I could combine my interests in psychology and education.

After graduating, I spent a year working at the East Palo Alto Tennis and Tutoring (EPATT) program as their Tutorial Coordinator for first through sixth graders, supervising them, working with their parents, organizing field trips, etc. I also hired and trained 12 Tutor Coordinators (Stanford students) who oversaw 140 other tutors working with kindergarten, elementary school, junior high and high school students.

As I worked at EPATT I thought more about my interest in research and youth and decided to apply to Stanford's PhD program in Educational Psychology, with an emphasis in Child and Adolescent Development. So from 2000-2006, I was back in school full-time. As a doctoral candidate, I taught Stanford students for two years, and completed my 165-page dissertation "Contending with Legacy: Stereotype Threat, School Culture and Racial Identity."

Teaching college students for two years made me realize that I wanted to get back to working with youth, and that my long-term goal is to open a school especially for low-income youth. I decided the best way to prepare myself to pursue this goal and become a successful principal/school founder was to become an elementary school teacher, so I am working at KIPP Bayview Academy as a fifth grade science and social studies teacher for about 70 kids (I have three classes of about 22-24 kids each).

Teaching is definitely rewarding, but it is honestly more challenging than anything I have ever done – even getting a PhD! Mental focus is a huge task when you are managing a classroom of 20+ kids, and physically it can be challenging – I work about 70 hours a week, and when I'm not in the classroom I'm thinking about, "Did the kids learn? What do I need to prepare for and accomplish in my next lesson?"

I have a newfound respect for teachers and challenge anyone to show me a harder job!

**B:** Now, as a teacher, how do you apply your Urban education to the classroom?

**A:** Of course it's different teaching fifth graders than high school students (10-year olds can be pretty silly), but certainly the educational rigor is a common denominator. I challenge my students in ways they haven't been asked before, and I expect them to meet high standards. I got that from Urban – serious content, serious expectations and demanding students apply themselves to master each concept.

**B:** You joined Urban's Board of Trustees this year – what do you hope to bring as an alum to the organization?

**A:** My perspective will always be that of the student, even though I have grown up and we have two current students as Trustee representatives. But I believe that my historical perspective during my years at Urban will be helpful. I also hope to continue Urban's legacy and ensure that it's strong and thrives for years to come. Urban offers an amazing education program and I want to make sure that others can benefit from it now and in the future. And finally, my perspective as an educational researcher will add value as we focus on current concerns with diversity and inclusion, both of which are essential to Urban's future.

**B:** Is there anything you'd like to share with our readers? Anything you'd like to say to current Urban students?

**A:** To alums I would like to say that we need to find ways to invest back in the Urban community, from which we all gained so much. To students, I would like to encourage them to love and enjoy the experience and all that Urban has to offer them. It's a great time in life and an amazing school.

You can reach Aisha at [a.lowe@stanfordalumni.org](mailto:a.lowe@stanfordalumni.org).

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The pressures of college [admissions] is so much more daunting today. Students constantly live with this fear of not getting in. But I remember kids being anxious years ago, too! Kids need to remember there are hundreds of really great colleges.

**K:** Share one of your fondest memories from your early teaching career.

**L:** We used to have something called Project Month. I took a group of eight students to the East Coast for a three-week American Revolution and Civil War trip. We first flew into Newark [NJ] where we connected with some students from a partner school. We rented a van and I drove to Washington, DC, where we spent exactly one day before going to Gettysburg, PA, Sharpsburg, MD (home of the Antietam National Battlefield), and Harpers Ferry, WV. Then we headed south to Williamsburg, VA. After that, we headed back north to New York, then to Newport, RI, and then to Lexington to spend Patriots Day. Our goal was to get there to see the re-enactment of the Battle of Lexington and Concord – and we made it! Then we spent some time in Boston doing the Freedom Trail, and then drove back to Newark to celebrate at a school festival with our partner school and then came back home. I arrived home with eight kids, and I hoped they were the same ones I left with! It's hard to believe these folks are now in their late 30s!

**K:** You've taught history to so many. What has history taught you?

**L:** That there is a reason for things and why they happen, and that those reasons are usually a good bit more complicated than we sometimes think. And I don't believe in conspiracy theories!

I think when you study history, you have an opportunity to see the world's complexities. You learn empathy for those who have to make the hard decisions. But you also see the sloppy thinking that goes on when people make decisions – the recklessness, the stupidity and the inability to understand consequences.

We try to enable students to be historians by anchoring them in primary source material which allows them to look at life like a historian does. Being historians gives us a chance to eavesdrop, and in the process, we learn to understand people on their terms.

I've learned to be a lot less self-righteous when I come to an understanding of how others see the world. For better or worse, most people come to their opinions earnestly.

In terms of my history at Urban, I deeply believe that Urban has been the most important thing – after my marriage! – that has ever happened to me. I have the opportunity to learn something new every day, from my time in the classroom and from my colleagues and my students. It's an amazing experience!

**Editor's note:** LeRoy has provided the following American History book list and suggests that you all take some time to read one or more during the holidays!

Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*

Doris Kearns, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*

Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery; American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*

Laura Ullrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*

Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (a Pulitzer Prize finalist)

Ronald C. White Jr, *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln Through His Words*

Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Epic Story of the Underground Railroad, America's First Civil Rights Movement*

David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*

You can reach LeRoy at [lvotto@urbanschool.org](mailto:lvotto@urbanschool.org). He'd love to hear from you!