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BRIEF



“Cherry Blossoms at the Tidal Basin,”  
by Mount Pleasant-based artist Jennifer Golden.

BY SARAH AMANDOLARE

### Chantal Ellen on “The Rise”



When apartment dwellers collide, things get interesting. First-time novelist Chantal Ellen depicts high-rise life for a group of young, African-American professionals in “The Rise: Where Neighbors are Sometimes More.” The 257-page novel was published by Ellen’s own Lions Den Publishing and officially released on April 1.

A Queens, NY, native, Ellen discovered solace and inspiration in her neighbors as a 20-something Howard University Law School graduate living in Silver Spring. Though she has since moved into a house in Northeast, Washington, Ellen said she remains in contact with some of her old friends.

“At the time, it was good for me to connect with my neighbors. It gave me a sense of family. There were a handful of us in the building who really knew each other and talked to each other when we were feeling down,” Ellen said.

Her connection to the metropolitan area gives “The Rise” a distinctly DC air, something Ellen emphasized when discussing her novel.

“The Rise really showcases DC. The city is an integral part of the story,” she said.

Several of the book’s chapters are named after area locales, including Union Station, Wolf Trap, Friendship Heights and the Silver Spring night club, Crossroads. Washington First Fridays - a monthly arts event, and Black Family Reunion - an annual festival on the National Mall, are also featured. In addition, a few of the characters are Howard Law students.

“DC is a lawyer’s town, and a lot of black lawyers who are based in the city come out of Howard,” Ellen said of her decision to highlight the university.

Other than writing a few short stories and poems in college, Ellen was a relative-

novice when she started working on “The Rise” about seven years ago.

“When I started this book, I really didn’t know if I could finish it,” she said.

Ellen finished, but struggled when she shopped the book around to publishers in 2001. At the time, “The Rise” was approximately 100 pages long, and Ellen was agent-less. She decided to shelve the project for a while and had all but forgotten about it until 2005 when a literary agent, who was an old law school friend, contacted her with good news. A publisher had expressed interest in the novel.

“I didn’t end up going with them. I wasn’t confident with the image they went for – it was very street lit, black erotica. It wasn’t the image I was going for,” Ellen explained.

She decided to take matters into her own hands, establishing DC-based Lions Den Publishing in 2006. “The Rise” was then accepted by Independent Publishers Group for national distribution. The worldwide company selected Ellen’s novel, along with about 20 others, from a group of nearly 160 entries. Distribution in Europe, Africa, Asia and South America is possible eventually, according to Ellen. For now, 10,000 copies have been printed and distributed to various booksellers, including Barnes and Noble, BooksAMillion, Amazon and the Howard University Bookstore.

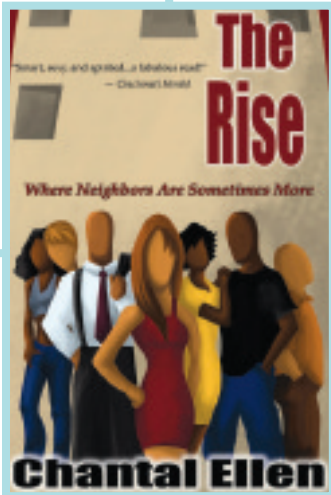
Ellen feels that her novel has the potential to appeal to different demographics. Though her target audience is young, African-American women, she has received praise from older women, as well.

“I’ve talked to people who’ve read the book, and they’ve all been able to identify with a character, or know someone who is just like one of the characters. The stories and characters are all fictional, but I let my real life experiences influence the story, and also drew from experiences that people I know have had,” Ellen said.

The result is a novel strung together by universal themes and intriguing personalities. Relationships, self-esteem issues, emotional abuse and forgiveness are all addressed by various characters. Remi, a young attorney, and Henry, a chauvinist bachelor, are joined by stay-at-home mom and widow Chassia. An older man who guards the building provides first-person narration.

“The Rise” has already received praise from the Cincinnati Herald, but Ellen is not content. She is at work on a second novel, and is anxiously awaiting a positive response from Washington readers.

“I’m really counting on DC. I’m excited, but nervous to see



Above: Northeast Washington novelist  
Chantal Ellen, author of “The Rise.”

how this really goes. It's a dream I've had in the making for a few years," said Ellen.

For more information, visit [www.lionsdenbooks.com](http://www.lionsdenbooks.com). Lions Den Publishing, LLC, PO Box 91702, Washington, DC 20090

"The Rise: Where Neighbors Are Sometimes More", By Chantal Ellen. NAL Trade Paperback Original, Lions Den Publishing, \$14.95 USD.

## Jennifer Golden teams up with Bread for the City

Mount Pleasant-based artist Jennifer Golden joins forces with nonprofit organization Bread for the City this month.

Art With A Heart, the organization's annual fundraising gala event, includes live and silent auctions and a seated dinner at the Renaissance Washington DC Hotel, at 9th St., NW, on April 12.

Golden's painting of "Cherry Blossoms at the Tidal Basin" will be included in the auction. Proceeds benefit Bread for the City in its continuing efforts to provide food, clothing, medical care, legal and social services to vulnerable Washington, DC, residents.

A proponent of grassroots artist groups, Golden was eager to lend a hand to another positive organization.

"I like that Bread for the City is local and benefits locals. I think that it is all-encompassing - they are capable of addressing just about any issue a person may have," she said.

Deciding what to paint for the auction was simple, according to Golden. She hopes to capture the pleasantries of April.

"Cherry Blossoms are synonymous with spring, a joyful time of year. What better color and subject matter than pink cherry blossoms against a heavenly blue canvas?" she said.

Photographs she took at last year's Cherry Blossom Festival have been helpful reference material, according to Golden, who prides herself on innovation and experimentation in her work.

"I enjoyed creating this painting, and as an experiment, I've started painting the same composition with different approaches and colors," she said.

Golden said she tends to paint without drawing her subject matter first, because it makes for a more honest, less rigid composition. Using thick dabs of paint, she intends to create motion and richness in her pieces. She is also bringing back an old technique in some of her paintings.

"I've been dabbling around with pigment to make my own paints. I intend to progress and attempt to make egg-based paint, which was the practice ages ago," she explained.

For more information, visit: [www.jennifergolden.com](http://www.jennifergolden.com); [www.breadforthecity.org](http://www.breadforthecity.org).

To purchase tickets, contact Adrienne Ammerman at (202) 386-7609 or [Aammerman@BreadfortheCity.org](mailto:Aammerman@BreadfortheCity.org).

## ECAC in the Community

The Emergence Community Arts Collective (ECAC) will stop at nothing to restore basic community and family values to the Pleasant Plains neighborhood of Washington, DC. "It is important to me that relationships are built among our classmates who can support each other in other areas of life," said Sylvia Robinson, treasurer and general manager of ECAC.

Located at 733 Euclid St., NW, across from Banneker High School and Howard University, ECAC provides unique programs, from Capoeira Angola, (an African-Brazilian martial art form), to Youth Open Mic, to grief workshops and various dance classes.

"We look for programs that will nurture the mind, body and spirit, whether it's allowing a safe space to discuss problems, or to develop a creative talent, to release stress or negative energy, or to exercise," Robinson said.

Through April 19, instructor Tiffany Davis leads the Foundations of Writing Class on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. The classes are new to ECAC, and began in March, but welcome new participants.

"The students, all adults, are very fired up about the assignments and safe-writing space. I hope that they'll gain a firmer foundation for writing and have their sparks for writing lit and fanned," Robinson said.

The collective is dedicated to providing programs to the entire community, rather than a select few, and does not discriminate based on an inability to pay. Although Washington, DC, offers a great variety of arts programs, acknowledged Robinson, many are not affordable.

"ECAC provides artistic space for those who may otherwise not be able to express themselves creatively, due to financial or even time constraints," Robinson explained.

The collective's success is largely due to its dedicated volunteer staff. Robinson has witnessed hardworking volunteers helping to paint, clean and perform office tasks.

"They are excellent ambassadors for ECAC in the community," she said.

For more information, or to volunteer, contact Sylvia Robinson by e-mail, phone or mail: [sylvia@ecacollective.org](mailto:sylvia@ecacollective.org). 202-462-2285. 733 Euclid St., NW Washington, DC 20001. ■

The Emergence Community Arts Collective offers classes from Capoeira Angola to Youth Open Mic.



Artist: Barry Bishop

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