

## TODAY'S SUNBEAM

### Author of Obama book was president's classmate

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SALEM - From the hard wooden chairs of the Salem Middle School auditorium, children shouted gleefully "I am Barack Obama!" here Tuesday, prompted by the renowned author who penned a book of the same name.

Charisse Carney-Nunes, a former classmate of the president's at Harvard Law School, spent her birthday reading some of her collection to the third-grade class, the colorful pages emblazoned on a big-screen projector above her.

Her stories are of a hope that often finds confinement within the poverty-stricken city.

"The most important thing I think, and the reason the book is called I Am Barack Obama, is because I like when children say I am Barack Obama," Carney-Nunes said. "They understand that there is a little bit of Barack Obama in all of us."

Her latest endeavor captures the journey of Obama from childhood to the White House steps, offering that the power to change the world lies with all of us.

For Carney-Nunes, 42, who is an attorney for the National Science Foundation, the story has been a catapult to a writing career that began with her daughter's hair.

She said her first book, "Nappy," was a poem she wrote as her then-3-year-old daughter was hiding from getting her hair combed several years ago. It illustrated that some of the country's most influential black women had tufts just as tough, though it was nothing they couldn't handle.

Her work went on to win Independent Publishing's Most Outstanding Book of the Year award as the most inspirational book for youth in 2006.

As an outspoken voice of the black community, the Washington, D.C.-based mother adds her written work to a long list of civic involvement, including the Jamestown Project and Sistermoms, Inc.

Middle school Principal Syeda Woods was able to snag Carney-Nunes through the help of a sorority sister who knew her, Woods explained. The author had spent Monday in Burlington City.

"I was so excited when I heard she was able to come," Woods said. "I think the book has a powerful message."

Woods said her third-graders had shown a keen interest in the presidential election and first heard of the book on the president during the Read Across America event earlier this month.

In the back of the book is a series of children's essays about what Obama's presidency means to them. The book will soon take digital form, encouraging youth from across the country to write their own essays and submit them online.

It was the endless series of questions about Obama that Carney-Nunes received during school book tours last year that led to her latest venture, she pointed out.

"They just wanted to talk about Barack Obama," she said. "I decided you know what, it would be easiest if I just wrote a book."

At the end of the program, each child received a copy of Carney-Nunes publication. At least one was signed with a message to keep looking for that inner-Obama.