

Former Briar Vista students reunite after 40 years

By Melissa Davis

DeKalb Neighbor Staff Writer

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Although she graduated from Briar Vista Elementary School more than 40 years ago, Susan Kaplan can still remember the names of almost every classmate in her third-grade class.

The class photo shows small children with big bows, thick glasses and awkward smiles posing politely from their wooden desks.

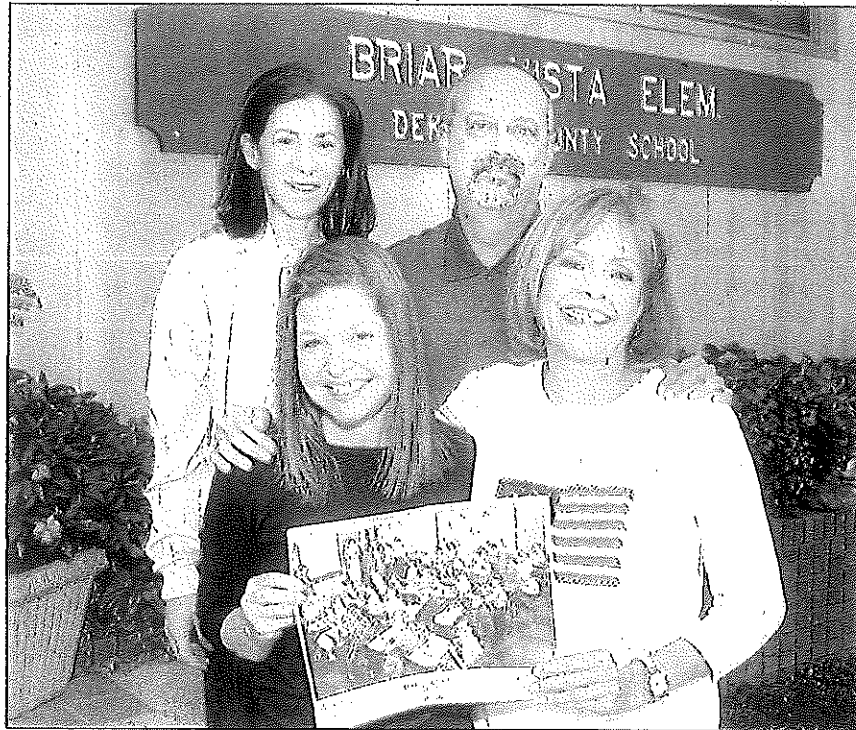
Today, those children are in their 50s and have dispersed across the nation and beyond. They work as lawyers, volunteers and even missionaries in Africa.

"About 20 years ago, I started thinking about all the fun we had in elementary school," Ms. Kaplan said. "We were such a close group."

She decided to organize a reunion for the Briar Vista Class of 1960. The class started at the school in 1955 when Briar Vista, located off of Briarcliff Road in Druid Hills, was brand new.

"I really had to work like a detective to track people down," Ms. Kaplan said. "It was easier to find the boys, but many of the women have changed names, and sometimes, changed them again throughout the years."

After hours of hard investigative work, she held the



Former Briar Vista Elementary School students will hold their 40th reunion on Nov. 15. Holding a photograph of their class in 1955 are, from left, Rina Levin Wolfe, Susan Candell Kaplan, Harry Kuniansky and Claire Perry Woosley.

Russell
Holloway/Staff

first reunion at the Sandpiper in Atlanta in 1980. The party attracted about 40 former students, who brought old photos and shared memories of the past.

Twenty years later, another reunion is in the works. The group plans to meet one more time on Nov. 15 at Everybody's Pizza on North Decatur Road to make up for lost time. The reunion will begin at 6:30 p.m.

On Oct. 29, Susan and three of her former classmates, Claire Woosley, Harry

Kuniansky and Rina Wolfe, met at Briar Vista Elementary to take a look at their old school.

Although they had not seen each other in years, the excitement was obvious as they passed around pictures from the last reunion and of their childhood.

"This area has changed so much since we were small," Ms. Kaplan said. "There used to be a pony farm across the street, and we would all run over and ride after class. Now, it's just condominiums."

She expects nearly 70 people, including spouses, to attend the 40th reunion. As far as she knows, only one classmate has died, but all of the teachers are now deceased.

"Everyone is excited about this because it a chance to get reacquainted and remember when we were young," Kuniansky said.

"Plus, since it's an elementary school reunion, you don't have to face anyone you made out with," he added with a laugh.

'Charlotte's Web' inspires winning essay

By David Poteet

Neighbor Staff Writer

A pig and spider from the children's book "Charlotte's Web" gave Briar Vista Elementary School student Allison Buchholz an idea about what a friend is and led to an award-winning essay for her.

Now the lesson learned could help ease the sadness of leaving friends she has known all her life.

Allison, who will be moving to Ponte Verda, Fla. with her family later this summer, wrote the essay last winter as a fourth-grader for the Mott's Apple Awards.

In the contest, children grades second through sixth were asked to write about their favorite book and how it makes them feel. She came away one of 20 winners out of 45,000 entries from around the U.S.

"The book taught me you have to be true and loyal to your friends and not lie to them," said Allison, whose prizes in the contest include a \$1,000 savings bond for herself and a \$500 grant for reading materials for her school. "I didn't know what true friendship was until I read 'Charlotte's Web.'"

Allison wrote, "At first Wilbur thought Charlotte was brutal and bloodthirsty because she killed insects for food. Boy, was he wrong! Charlotte turned out to be kind-hearted, loyal, thoughtful and true till the end. She stuck up for Wilbur when everyone said he stank, and she cleverly saved Wilbur from becoming bacon."

Although Allison's mother, Ann Buchholz, helped her with spelling, the content and organization came from the 9-year-old author.

"We received forms for the contest last fall, but Allison didn't



Staff photo by Donna Williams

ESSAY WINNER: Nine-year-old Allison Buchholz, one of 20 national winners of the Mott's Apple Award for reading, reads her favorite book, 'Charlotte's Web,' to her younger sister Laura.

write the essay until it snowed last winter and she was out of school for the day," said Mrs. Buchholz, whose husband, Bill, works for Trust Company Bank and younger daughter, 7-year-old Laura, also attends Briar Vista.

"She just went downstairs to my computer, wrote the paper and sent it in. We forgot about it until the spring when Allison got a letter telling us she was one of the

winners. We were real surprised because we had kind of forgotten she wrote it."

Allison is considering entering another writing contest, this one a "When I Feel Better" contest for ages 7-14 sponsored by Tylenol.

However, for now she is using some of the philosophy she learned from "Charlotte's Web" and another book, "Bridge to Terabithia," to ease the pain that

may arise when moving away from friends.

"In 'Bridge to Terabithia,' a boy meets a girl, and they become friends," Allison said. "But, the girl dies. When Charlotte died in her story, I cried because I realized that friendship doesn't last forever."

"But now I know my friends will always be in my heart wherever I go, just like in the books I read."