

# Students draw their dreams, connect across continents

By **KATHRYN EASTBURN**

The Daily News

» **GALVESTON**

**S**ara Smart's fourth-grade class had just arrived at the Parker Elementary School of International Studies library when a deafening, pulsing alarm went off.

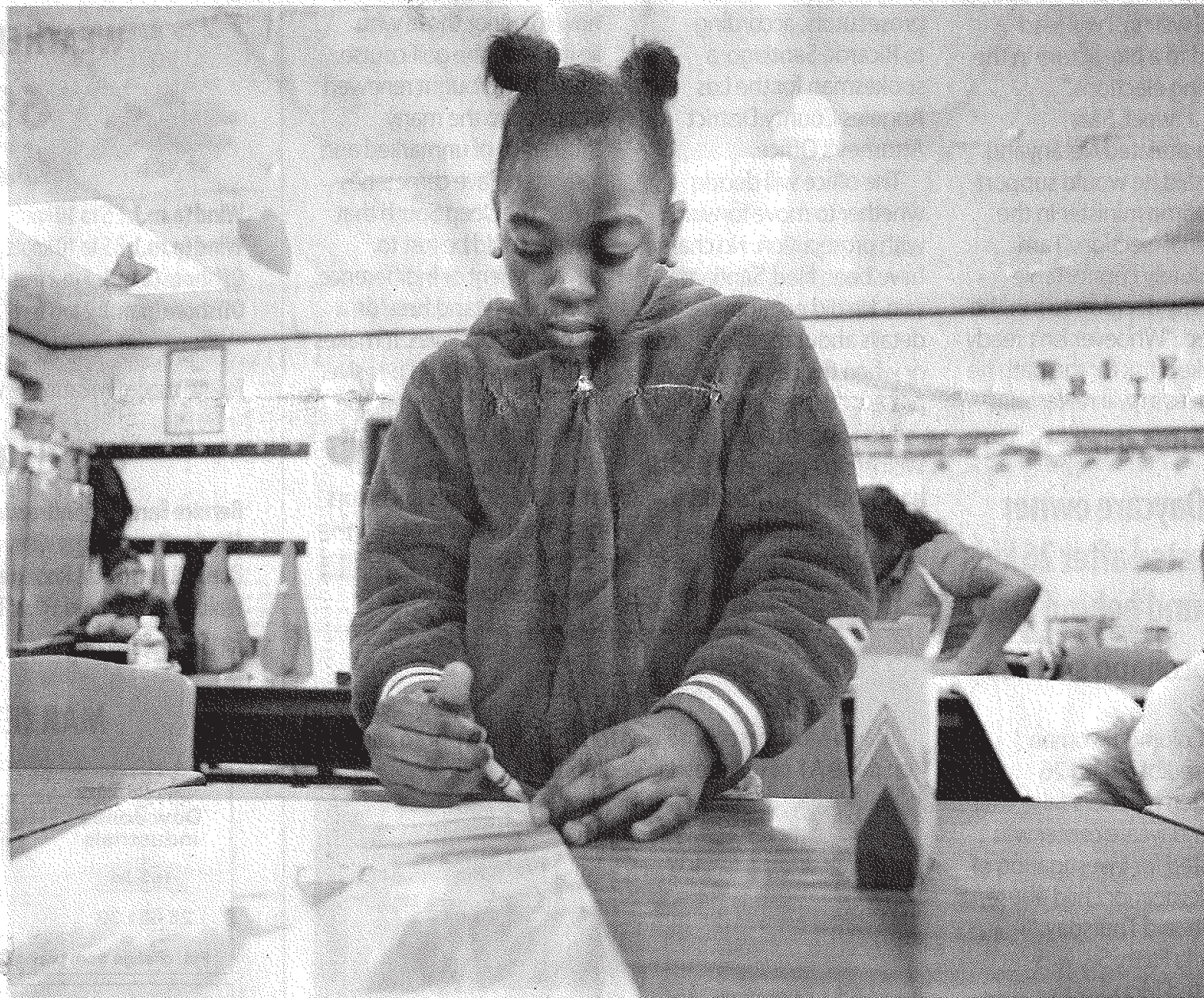
"What an exciting day to come, the day of a fire drill!" said a woman dressed in a leopard-spotted cape, her neck draped with a leopard-print stuffed snake. On her ears she wore fat gold frog earrings. Her sunglasses were in the shape of dramatic cat eyes.

She was Linda Ercole-Musso, at Parker Elementary School that afternoon to lead Smart's students in an exercise called Draw Your Dreams, practiced with thousands of school children on the African continent and in India. Ercole-Musso followed lines of children out to the far edge of the school's back lot, then back into the building.

The students settled into their desks in the small library, each with a drawing pad and a box of crayons.

Ercole-Musso introduced Ed

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A'Mari Henderson works on a drawing in Sara Smart's fourth-grade class at Parker Elementary School of International Studies on Dec. 18. She and her classmates drew their dreams, which ranged from superheroes, teachers and business owners, through an art program with African Children's Haven.

**JENNIFER REYNOLDS**/The Daily News

"I was born in Sudan in Africa. I had no art materials growing up there, but when I was sent to India at age 12, some art teachers recognized I had some skills and supplied materials for me to practice painting and drawing. I became an architect eventually. Simple access to art materials literally changed my life."

**Dinesh Doshi**,  
a Long Island, New York, artist  
and architect



# DRAW

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Sulzberger, her husband and assistant.

The children had been prepared for the day by learning about African children and watching videos of them in their classrooms, drawing their dreams on large pads with crayons.

Most of the African children dream of being teachers, police officers, nurses or doctors, Sulzberger said.

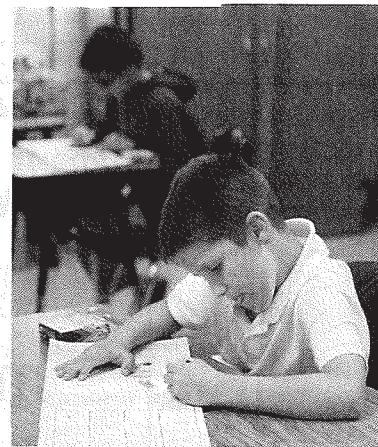
## AFRICA, INDIA AND GALVESTON

Ercole-Musso and Sulzberger founded and operate Galveston-based African Childrens Haven, a charity originally designed to improve living conditions for children in African orphanages.

From 2006 to 2015, Ercole-Musso and Sulzberger, along with Galveston Island business owners and residents, raised \$800,000 and served about 1,000 children in three African nations, providing community schools and teachers in slum neighborhoods, fighting genital mutilation of young girls and providing safe shelter for orphaned children.

Over the past two years, they partnered with Dinesh Doshi, a Long Island, New York, artist and architect, to start Draw Your Dreams.

"I was born in Sudan in Africa," Doshi said. "I had no art materials growing up there, but when I was sent to India at age 12, some art teachers recognized I had some skills and supplied materials for me to practice painting and drawing. I became an architect eventually. Simple access to art materials literally



JENNIFER REYNOLDS/The Daily News

Jimmie Kreger draws himself being a superhero in Sara Smart's fourth-grade class at Parker Elementary School of International Studies in Galveston on Dec. 18.

## If you go

**What:** Draw Your Dreams art exhibit at Galveston's ArtWalk

**When:** 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Jan. 18

**Where:** Galveston Arts Center, 2127 Strand, Galveston

**More:** To learn more, or to make a donation to art programs for children in Kenya, Tanzania, India and Galveston, visit [www.africanchildrenshaven.org](http://www.africanchildrenshaven.org) and click on Draw Your Dreams. To bring Draw Your Dreams to your school, email Ed Sulzberger at [esulzberger@comcast.net](mailto:esulzberger@comcast.net).

changed my life."

Doshi, who wanted to provide art materials to children in poor places, came across African Childrens Haven and asked Sulzberger and Ercole-Musso whether they would be interested in bringing art education into some of their projects. They said yes and



JENNIFER REYNOLDS/The Daily News

Linda Ercole-Musso, with Galveston-based African Childrens Haven, looks at Aaliyah Vasquez' drawing of herself as a teacher during a Draw Your Dreams exercise on Dec. 18.

Draw Your Dreams was born.

Doshi provides money to purchase materials locally wherever the program goes, to avoid shipping costs.

In two years, Draw Your Dreams has reached about 4,000 children in Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa and has expanded to India.

"We were so impressed with the process that Linda said, 'Why don't we do something similar for kids here in Galveston?'" Sulzberger said.

## KIDS LIKE THEMSELVES

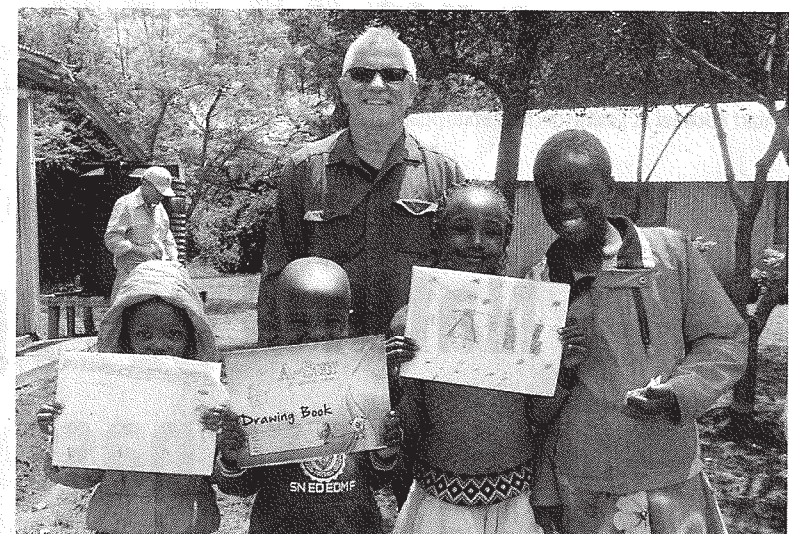
"What are your dreams, you sweethearts?" Ercole-Musso asked.

"I wish I could fly," said one girl in a quiet voice.

"You mean in an airplane or all by yourself?" she asked.

"All by myself," said the quiet girl.

"Great. That's a wonderful dream," Ercole-Musso said. "This



AFRICAN CHILDREN'S HAVEN/Courtesy

John Eanes of Galveston Automotive kicked off the Draw Your Dreams program with students in Africa in 2017. Since then, the program has expanded to thousands of students in Africa, India and Galveston.

is one of many dreams you're going to have throughout your lifetime."

Ercole-Musso asked whether the children had any questions.

"How old are you?" said a boy on the front row.

"Seventy-five," she said.

"Wow!" he said.

The children hunched over their drawings, some puzzling over what their first shapes on the page would be, others filling in details on sketched-out scenes.

The children wanted to know how African kids celebrated Christmas. They wanted to know what African classrooms were like. They were intrigued to hear that many African children cleaned up their school at the end of the day.

Jimmie Kreger, 8, drew his dream of being a superhero, Water Boy, with laser eyes, water shooting out of his hands and fire from his feet.

Aaliyah Vasquez, 8, wanted to be a teacher and drew her adult self, Mrs. Aaliyah, with long, straight hair and a blue dress.

Alex, 9, drew his dream of becoming an animator.

Ercole-Musso sang a song with the children about their teacher falling down a hole. Sulzberger took pictures of each student and drawing.

"We photograph them so we can show others what kids like themselves have done," he said.

The children laughed as they left the classroom. Come January, their work will hang at the Galveston Arts Center, alongside drawings by children in African schools.

Doshi will come from New York to see the exhibit and everyone attending Galveston's January 18 ArtWalk will see it, too.

The Galveston students kept their drawing pads and boxes of crayons and the students in Africa did too — gifts for them from Draw Your Dreams.

"If one of them can make their dreams come true, I'll be happy," Doshi said.

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