

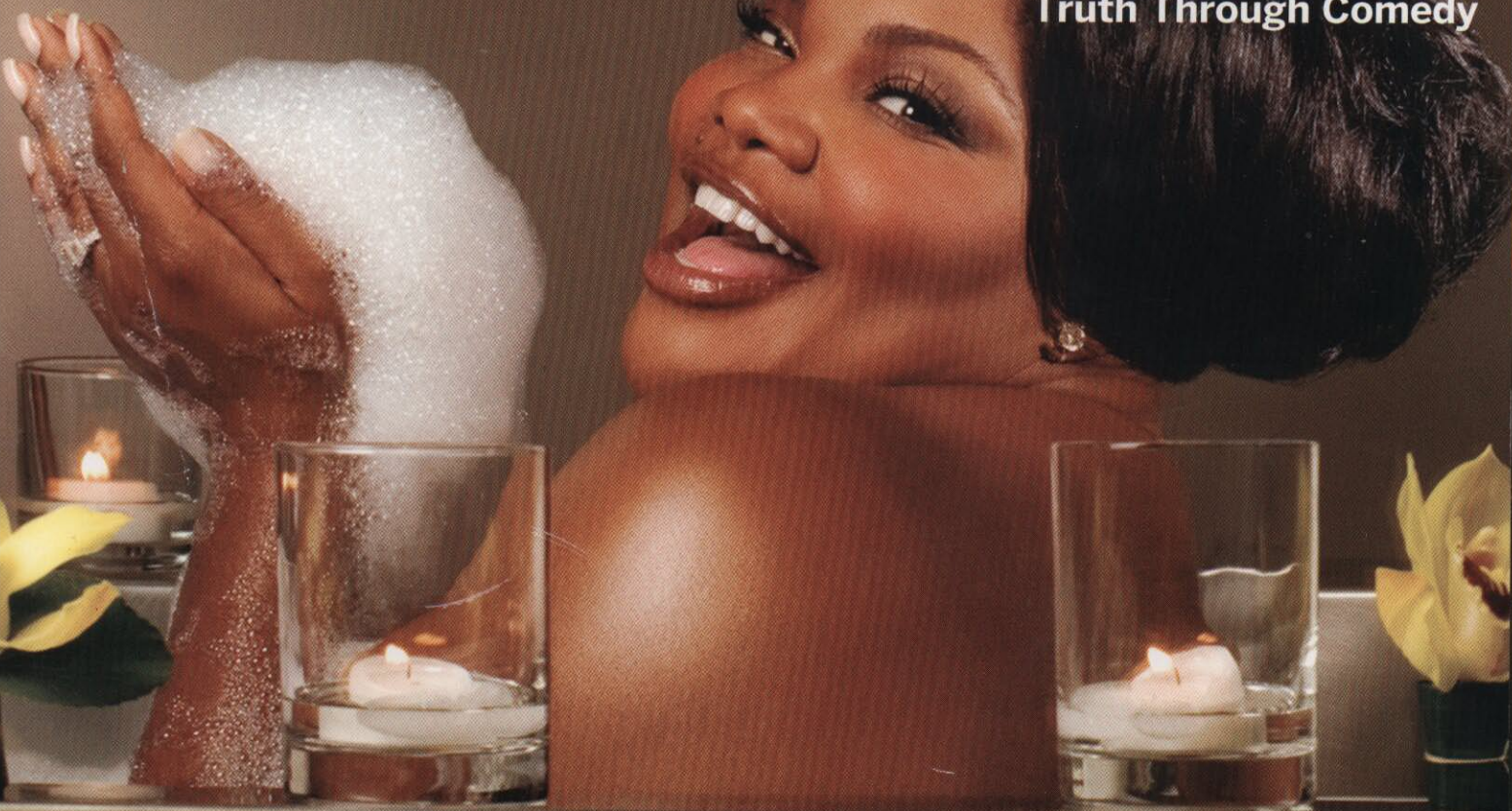
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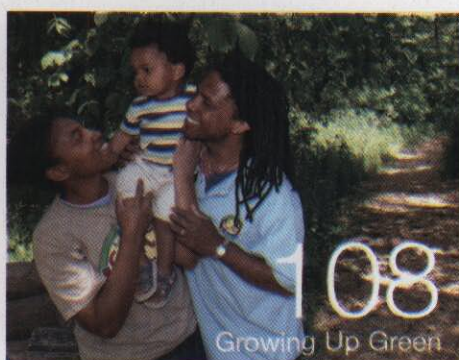


contents


VOL. LXII, NO. 10 AUGUST 2007

departments

- 14 President's Message
- 16 Speaking Of People
- 21 Contributors
- 24 EBONY On The Scene
- 30 Letters To The Editor
- 32 Center Stage
- 34 EBONY Bookshelf
- 38 5 Questions For...
- 40 Sisterspeak
- 42 EBONY Travel Guide
- 44 Sounding Off
- 48 Money Talks
- 50 For Brothers Only
- 52 House Call
- 55 EBONY Advisor
- 56 EBONY Essentials
- 76 Two Sides:
Do We Need An Apology
for Slavery?
- 98 Strictly For Laughs
- 100 BodyTalk:
Belly Dance Your Way To Fitness
- 108 Parenting:
Growing Up Green
- 134 Date With A Dish:
The Art of Wine
- 142 Ebony Fashion Fair:
Boldly Femme
- 160 Beauty Profile:
Legends Of The Fall
- 166 Beauty & Style
- 172 Artist Profile:
Adia Millett
- 178 Memorable Photo



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Growing Up green

parents take the lead in teaching children how to be environmentally conscious

BY SHIRLEY HENDERSON

In Illinois, Kevin Gordon (c.), owner/director of Camp White Eagle, leads a group of girls on a nature hike during Camp Kupugani, a multicultural program designed to boost young girls' self-esteem and to teach them to be respectful of their environment.

Welcome to Camp White Eagle, an eco-friendly oasis of sprawling trees, wildflowers, nature trails and a serene lake for swimming and canoeing. Owner/camp director Kevin Gordon, who runs the 120-acre retreat with wife Natasha, pauses from the day's activities to question a group of thirsty campers.

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"Where does [the camp's] water come from?" asks Kevin, 39, who wears cut-off khakis, a blue polo shirt and shoulder-length dreadlocks. He explains that the water is drawn from a well and has no chemicals. Like much of Camp White Eagle, which is devoid of pesticides, styrofoam and cell phones, the goal is to stay in balance with nature. "We practice what we call 'leave no trace,'" says Kevin, a Harvard graduate. "Basically your impact as a human should be as minimal as possible."

As the Green Movement continues to take root, it has fostered a wave of environmentally aware parents who, like the Gordons, are teaching children to be respectful of the earth's natural resources.

Under the guidance of the Gordons, recycling cans and plastic is mandatory at Camp White Eagle, which is a two-hour drive west of Chicago. So is monitoring food scraps and other waste. Already their 17-month-old toddler Mico is fascinated with the camp, watching visitors and listening to the sounds of birds. In fact, a menagerie of wildlife exists on the grounds, including deer, rabbits, snakes, turtles, toads and skunks—all amid a backdrop of expansive greenery.

"The point is for them to disconnect from the outside world," says Natasha Gordon, who oversees the camp's kitchen. She and her husband communicate by walkie-talkies and don't allow iPods, televisions or other electronic devices inside the camp. "We want the children to talk to one another and nature."

There are a number of ways to teach children conservation and environmental awareness as it relates to home and school. Jill Buck, founder and executive director of Go Green Initiative Association, has been "greening up" schools around the country by offering comprehensive environmental improvement plans to lessen the amount of waste that is generated. More than 500 schools are currently practicing the Go Green Initiative, including some in Africa. The program focuses on helping schools conserve and recycle paper, cardboard, aluminum, plastic beverage containers, food waste and even cell phones. Buck, who brings worms into classrooms to demonstrate vermiculture, the composting of organic waste, says that children are usually excited about helping to preserve the environment. "They love the worms," says Buck. "It's the parents who get that 'yuk' factor."

Helping to conserve, or "go green," doesn't have to be difficult, according to Buck, a mother of three who began teaching environmental awareness at her children's school in California.



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VANDELL COBB

Natasha Gordon (top, left) looks on as Chappell Daniels, 10, recycles cans. Tuning in with nature, Kevin Gordon (top, right) and his group study insects. Below, a group at the High School for Environmental Studies in New York tends a rooftop garden.



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