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KALIMAN ZABARSKY

Obama's Call Is a BU Tradition

A sorority supports needy children in China and cures for breast cancer

AS A PRESIDENTIAL candidate, Barack Obama called for expansion of the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, and other national service programs. "It is time to recapture that sense of a common purpose," he said in a 2007 speech in Iowa. "I am my brother's keeper, I am my sister's keeper."

Since then, Americans have responded to the call. By November 2008, Teach for America had received more than 14,000 applications, a 48 percent increase from 2007. The Peace Corps saw applications increase 16 percent from fiscal year 2007 to 2008, with a large spike in applications around the time of Obama's inauguration, on January 20.

At BU, students have long been involved in philanthropic efforts. The sorority sisters of Alpha Kappa Delta Phi (AKDPhi), the first and only Asian-interest sorority on campus, for example, have volunteered at the Boston Marathon and hosted the annual Hope Show, raising money for underprivileged children in China.

But the primary philanthropic interest of AKDPhi, says Jenny Giang (CAS'09), cochair of BU's Multicultural Greek Council and an AKDPhi sister, is the fight against breast cancer. Over the past year, the sorority has raised more than \$4,000 for breast cancer research.

"I think it's important to volunteer, because it shows others that there's support," Giang says. "You're not alone. You may feel that others aren't out there, but the world really does care." **AL**

Elizabeth Alexander (GRS'87) was the fourth poet in history, after Robert Frost, Miller Williams, and Maya Angelou, to read at a presidential inauguration.



Poetry to the People

Elizabeth Alexander sees hope in a president who reads poetry

WHEN ELIZABETH ALEXANDER stepped up to the podium at the U.S. Capitol on January 20 and read "Praise Song for the Day," the poem she composed for Barack Obama's inauguration, she became only the fourth poet to read at a presidential swearing-in ceremony.

The experience, says Alexander (GRS'87), a Yale University professor of African-American studies and a prizewinning poet, was joyous. "It was a privilege," she says.

Alexander, who earned a master's in creative writing BU, has published several books of poetry, including *American Sublime*, a 2006 Pulitzer Prize finalist. She has won the 2007 Jackson Prize for Poetry and two Pushcart Prizes.

She learned of her latest honor on December 17, when she received a phone call from the

WEB EXTRA
Listen to Elizabeth Alexander read "Praise Song for the Day" at www.bu.edu/bostonia.

Presidential Inaugural Committee. She began working on her inaugural poem immediately. "I carefully studied the previous inaugural poems," she says. "I read many poets — W. H. Auden, Gwendolyn Brooks, Robert Hayden, and Walt Whitman — who I felt had addressed historical moments with a kind of gravitas and with powerful language that resonated beyond the moment."

Alexander says she begins writing a poem not with an idea, but with language "arranged in fresh and surprising and powerful ways. When you come across those fragments, around you and in

your subconscious, that's what makes me want to make a poem."

She is delighted that our new president has an interest in poetry. "Three days after the election, he was photographed carrying the collected poems of my beloved teacher and one of the great poets of the world," she says, referring to Derek Walcott, a Nobel Prize-winning poet and playwright and a retired College of Arts & Sciences professor of creative writing. "I mean, it doesn't get much better than that." **CKB**