

“Gullah Branches, West African Roots is an unabashed celebration of a vibrant culture. . . . Ron has thoughtfully and thoroughly documented the journey of the Gullah culture and instilled pride in all those of Gullah/Geechee heritage. His anecdotes are compelling and artfully weaved, much like the sweetgrass baskets that have come to symbolize the Gullah culture.”

—from the Foreword by Congressman James Clyburn

ISBN 978-0-87844-182-2

Trade Paperback • 200 pages
More than 100 photographs

\$24.95

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“. . . a meditation on and celebration of the author’s Gullah heritage and an account of his two pilgrimages to West Africa. . . . held together by Ron Daise’s engaging authorial personality and infectious enthusiasm for his material. (He seems, as is not always the case with those I review, someone I’d actually like to meet—and I’d really like to hear him perform some of his songs.)”

— Seabrook Wilkinson, *Charleston Mercury*

“It’s interesting how things turn out. Daise is now 51, and he’s spent his entire adult life discovering the unique culture he was once ashamed of, then documenting it and sharing its beauty with the world. . . . Daise and his wife, Natalie, certainly have done their part to take Gullah mainstream. . . . long before the National Trust for Historic Preservation put the Gullah-Geechee Coast on its ‘11 Most Endangered Places’ list, Ron and Natalie were partners on stage—singing, dancing, and reading to audiences about the culture that 50 years ago ruled Hilton Head Island. . . . Today, as vice president for creative education at Brookgreen Gardens in Murrells Inlet, Daise looks across his desk to see the flowing green sea of old rice fields.”

— David Lauderdale, *The Island Packet*



Photo by Lenny Spears.

Ronald Daise



The Daises

Natalie, Simeon, Sara, and Ron

—celebrating Sara's recent high school graduation—

RONALD DAISE grew up on St. Helena Island, South Carolina. His parents Kathleen and Henry both attended Penn Normal Industrial and Agricultural School, one of the country's first schools for freed blacks. Today, The Penn Center, whose mission is to promote and preserve the history of the sea islands, stands on the site of the school.

In 2004, Ron, a former teacher and journalist, traveled to Ghana as a Fulbright Hayes Scholarship fellow, where he and his colleagues taught in village schools. The teachers developed a curriculum about Ghanaian culture and history, which is posted on Charleston Southern University's web site. In 2005, at the invitation of historian Joseph Opala, Ron visited Sierra Leone with the family of Thomalind Martin Polite as part of "Priscilla's Homecoming." Priscilla, who was ten years old in 1756 when she was sold into slavery and brought to Charleston, was traced back to her village in Sierra Leone. Thomalind Martin Polite is her descendant.

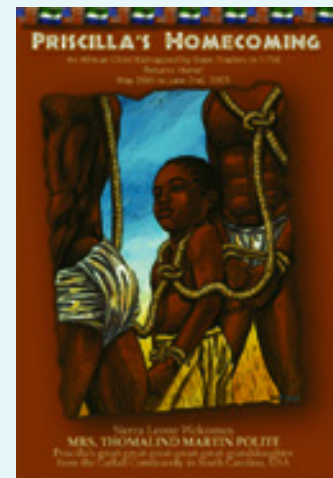
Ron has researched his own family history and discovered his personal connection to West Africa, tracing his mother's family to the Temne people of Sierra Leone and his father's to the Ewe and Akan peoples of Ghana. *Gullah Branches, West African Roots* is a celebration of his African homecomings, a reminiscence of his childhood on St. Helena Island, and a tribute to the fascinating and colorful Gullah culture. His other books include *Reminiscences of Sea Island Heritage: Legacy of Freedmen on St. Helena Island* and a children's storybook, *Little Muddy Waters*.

Ron's schedule remains busy with public appearances and performances. He loves telling others about Gullah culture and sharing his songs and poetry. His face and voice are probably best known from *Gullah Gullah Island*, Nick Jr.'s 1990s award-winning television show, in which he starred with his wife Natalie and children Sara and Simeon. The Daises live in Beaufort, South Carolina. Ron serves as Vice President for Creative Education at Brookgreen Gardens in Murrells Inlet.

For more information on Ron Daise and his life and work, visit www.gullahgullah.com or email ron@gullahgullah.com.

Priscilla's Homecoming poster

Courtesy, Toni Carrier, Joyce Reese McCollum, and African Heritage Project. Art by Dana Coleman. Poster design by Ideas 4 and USF African Heritage Project.



Dats Right, I Am a Gullah

© 2005 by Ronald Daise

sung to the tune of "Children, Go Where I Send Thee," a coded message song used by Harriet Tubman, celebrated conductor of The Underground Railroad



Dats right, I am a Gullah
A saltwata Geechee-Gullah
This is Reason Number One—
I was born on an island,
a Carolina/Georgia Sea Island
and my ancestas came from West Africa



Dats right, I am a Gullah
A saltwata Geechee-Gullah
This is Reason Number Two—
I eat hoppin john and other rice dishes, too
One is I was born on an island
a Carolina/Georgia Sea Island
and my ancestas came from West Africa



Dats right, I am a Gullah
A saltwata Geechee-Gullah
This is Reason Number Three—
Beliefs and oral history
Two is hoppin john and other rice dishes, too
One is I was born on an island,
a Carolina/Georgia Sea Island
and my ancestas came from West Africa



Dats right, I am a Gullah
A saltwata Geechee-Gullah
This is Reason Number Four—
Rice and cotton and indigo
Three is beliefs and oral history
Two is hoppin john and other rice dishes, too
One is I was born on an island,
a Carolina/Georgia Sea Island
and my ancestas came from West Africa

Dats right, I am a Gullah
A saltwata Geechee-Gullah
This is Reason Number Ten—
I look back an rememba my ancestas' strength
Nine is respect for eldas
Eight is de Gullah language
Seven is our spiritual songs about heaven
Six is sweetgrass baskets
Five is benne wafers
Four is cotton, rice and indigo
Three is beliefs and oral history
Two is hoppin john and other rice dishes, too
One is I was born on an island,
a Carolina/Georgia Sea Island
and my ancestas came from West Africa

Photos courtesy, Don Clerico, Charleston Southern University.

What Reviewers Have Said

“Growing up on St. Helena Island, Ronald Daise was corrected by his mother if he spoke Gullah. . . . Today, the 51-year-old is making his livelihood by using his speaking, singing and writing talents educating others about the Gullah culture and language. His third book, *Gullah Branches, West African Roots*, is **filled with Gullah language and culture**. It is a compilation of stories, poems and songs about the Gullah connection to Ghana, West Africa and Sierra Leone, as well as his own.” – Cathy Carter Harley, *The Beaufort Gazette*

“Daise’s new book *Gullah Branches, West African Roots*, explores heritage. . . . Daise learned that his visits to Ghana and Sierra Leone had been more of a personal family reunion than he realized. He shares maternal genetic ancestry with the Temne people living in Sierra Leone, and paternal genetic ancestry with the Ewe and Akan peoples in Ghana. In the preface to the book, Daise writes



about how perception of Gullah has changed. . . . ‘I’ve learned that **being Gullah has become highly esteemed**. Such was the opinion of the nearly 2,500 persons gathered for the day-long celebration of the release of *De Nyew Testament*, or Gullah Bible, by the American Bible Society. . . . Many have shed shame and embarrassment about Gullah culture and are happy to identify themselves as ‘Gullah down!’—that is, being **truly, authentically, and proudly Gullah**.’” – *Beaufort Scene*

“. . . **a meditation on and celebration** of the author’s Gullah heritage and an account of his two pilgrimages to West Africa. . . . **Most satisfying for this Sea Islander are the numerous adaptations of Gullah spirituals**. . . . His African homecoming was also an exercise in time-travel, for it reminded him of the lost world of his idyllic island childhood: ‘Before my eyes, Present became Past, Past became Present.’ . . . He taught some classes at Tuwohoho-Holly International School in Akotokyr Village in Cape Coast, Ghana. . . . ‘The discipline and productivity I witnessed among West African children, despite their lack of material abundance, was a by-product of an age-old value handed down to Gullah descendants: de ol sheep done know de road, an de young lam mus fin de way.’ . . . This is an **attractively produced** book, **skillfully edited** and with **numerous black and white photographs**, primarily of the author’s African travels. *Gullah Branches, West African Roots* should be **an inspiration** to Lowcountry Gullahs to seek out and celebrate their origins. . . . **Ronald Daise reminds us forcefully, yet with unfailing cheerfulness, that one of the most precious and potentially life-enhancing gifts we possess is the sense of belonging.**” – Seabrook Wilkinson, *Charleston Mercury*