Amidst all the recent bad news about layoffs, foreclosures, and other economic problems, the story of a first-year University of Hartford student stood out and sparked generosity from people around the country.

In February, CNN aired a piece about Nicole Suissa ’12 and her struggle to pay for college. She had scholarships, loans, and wages from a part-time job, but she still owed nearly $5,000 by the time the second semester began.

Suissa and her mother have had a difficult time financially since her father abandoned them when she was 11. But Suissa is determined to become a lawyer. She has maintained an A average at the University and did not want to transfer.

“None of the kids who can afford it have to [transfer],” Suissa said on CNN. “And their grades aren’t as good.” Those words touched viewers.

J. Edward Bell, an attorney from South Carolina, was inspired to establish the Bell Scholarship at the University, and Suissa is the first recipient. He traveled to West Hartford in April to meet with Suissa and University President Walter Harrison.

“Nicole has this positive attitude about life that is refreshing,” says Bell. “I think she has a great future ahead of her.”

The Bell Scholarship will give Suissa the opportunity to meet her expenses in the coming school year. Bell also gave Suissa an internship at the Bell Legal Group in Georgetown, S.C., this summer.

“Mr. Bell deserves a public thank–you for all he’s done for me,” Suissa says. “I’m indebted to him for helping me achieve my dreams.”

Suissa has also received financial offers from a soldier in Iraq; a Las Vegas man who lost his job; a bone-marrow-transplant survivor; and the mother of another University student, who helped Suissa clear up her debt instead of buying a car for her own child.

“I am truly amazed there are so many people who are willing to help me in this time of economic struggle,” Suissa says.

President Harrison, who calls Suissa the type of student he wants to attract to the University, echoes her gratitude.

“What I find really heartwarming,” says Harrison, “is that somebody’s generosity is going to help a deserving student stay here.”

Rebekah McMahon ’11 holds Sharon, who was around 16 months old when the photograph was taken in 2008 at the Awinjo orphanage in Uganda. McMahon is working on a book about her experiences, tentatively titled Awinjo.

**English Majors, Take Note**

**STUDENT WRITING BOOK ON EXPERIENCES IN UGANDA**

“I love to tell stories. I hope to have as many to tell about myself as possible,” says Rebekah McMahon ’11, an English major and the second student to receive the Galluccio Scholarship. The two-year scholarship is awarded to second-year students in the humanities and the politics and government programs and provides $10,000 per year for their third and fourth years of study.

McMahon is well on her way to achieving her goal. “Rebekah started at the University three semesters ago and has established herself as an outstanding writer,” says Joseph Voelker, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Raised by devout Jehovah’s Witnesses in Winsted, Conn., McMahon explains that she and her mother “did not see eye to eye” on religion, which led to her moving out when she was 16. McMahon worked as a line chef and a seamstress during high school to support herself.

After she graduated, she became a massage therapist to earn money for college. McMahon, who suffers from juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, found that massage helped her manage the pain of her disease. “I was so impressed with my success that I wanted to share this process with others,” she says.

McMahon is no stranger to helping people. After hearing about an orphanage in Uganda from her father-in-law, she sold her car to finance a trip to work there in the summer of 2008. She also volunteered for Smile Africa, a program that helps street orphans.

“Uganda changed my life,” she says. “My heart remains in Africa. I hope someday to return and stay for as long as life will allow me to.”

In the meantime, McMahon is working on a book about her experience. She and her husband of two years, Brian McMahon, would also like eventually to adopt a child from Uganda.

McMahon says the future is wide open, once she and her husband finish college. She hopes to “live well and be as happy as possible. Perhaps join the Peace Corps. Anything that is rewarding and will enrich my life.”

The Galluccio Scholarship was endowed by a $250,000 gift in 2005 from Nicholas Galluccio, a University regent who received a bachelor’s in English from the University of Hartford in 1972.