



HARLEM CHILDREN SOCIETY

'The purpose of souls is to Assist each other.'

February 3rd 2006
New York Academy of Sciences
New York City

The Archie Lacey Lecture & Award

Thank you, Dr. Cook, for your kind introduction and warm words.

It is indeed an honor for Harlem Children Society and myself to receive the 'Archie Lacey Award and Lecture' by the New York Academy of Sciences. Especially this month - Black History Month!

For those of us who are not aware - Professor Lacey was a science educator and civil rights leader who fought for increased participation of minorities in science.

Professor Lacey rose from a segregated childhood in Alabama to earn a degree in chemistry at Howard University. Teaching became his passion and vocation, and he eventually was awarded a full professorship in science education at Lehman College, becoming chair of the department.

Every February since his death, the New York Academy of Sciences has presented an award in his name to little souls like us, who have contributed to the education and advancement of minority students in science and technology.

It is indeed an honor for 'Harlem Children Society and me to be this year's honoree for our endeavors and commitment to research, learning-and-experimenting, new forms of teaching, and experiments with science and society.

I still remember the day quite a few years ago, when I attended the same very lecture and had the opportunity to meet Professor Lacey's son - Charlie Lacey, who is with us here this evening. My dear sir, your father was indeed an honorable person and you are carrying the same torch ahead. Please stand and be recognized.

Thank you!

Dear friends, Colleagues, and my dear students, we are also fortunate and blessed to have in our midst, Dr. Roberta Rivi and her husband Dr. Sanil Manavalan. Both are amazing physicians and amazing scientists, and have guided and nurtured so many students, including so many from Harlem Children Society.

We are fortunate because, in spite of the fact, that just a few days ago Roberta had major surgery for breast cancer, she is here with us! Roberta I do not have words to express my feelings.

But, I must encourage my students to follow your example, your compassion, caring, nurturing and magnanimity. Dear students, no matter how high you get in life - if there is anything that you get from us, from Dr. Roberta, it is this: Never forget to be human and never compromise on the labor of love.

I would like to dedicate this speech in honor of Dr. Roberta Rivi. Dear friends, please give a hand of applause for one of the greatest people that you will meet.

Roberta, I would be delighted if you could say a few words.

(ROBERTA'S REMARKS)

Thank you, Roberta.

The Motto of our society is borrowed from an ancient Jain text, which is -
"The purpose of Souls is to Assist Each Other"

And we intend to continue our work continuously, steadfast and fearlessly with the right knowledge and therefore creating an awareness towards a goal of universal-hood! This reminds me of a quote from Dante Alighieri in the 'Inferno' -

**"Considerate la vostra semenza:
Fatti non foste a viver come brute
Ma per seguir virtute e conoscenza."**

It translates into:

"Consider the stock from which you came. You were not created to live the lives of animals, but to strive for virtue and the attainment of knowledge."

It has been a little over five years since I founded the Harlem Children Society. We aim to develop a society for a better humanity by creating awareness in scientific literacy and social issues.

We help provide an opportunity for an extremely high level of scientific research at leading scientific, medical, engineering and other institutions for selected high school students from low-income areas in New York City, the Tristate area and nationally.

Students are paired with mentors, who are top professionals in their field. They train and work on specific projects.

The Harlem Children Society remains dedicated to its founding mission and is potentially, one of the most important learning opportunities to bridge the achievement gap.

The program identifies under-resourced and under-served communities, targets at-risk children and youth in those communities and provides them an opportunity to explore the world and their future through science - helping to revitalize the community as a whole.

As the organization has grown, so have I - in every sense of the word! It has indeed been a tremendous opportunity to leverage our future potential and resources to best serve our communities and societies.

Kierkegaard said, *"Life can only be understood backwards, but unfortunately has to be lived forwards."*

And this future can be molded by all of us if we work jointly and single-mindedly toward our common goal of universal hood. These five years have been some of the best, as I participated with so many of my colleagues and acquaintances in helping our youth who themselves in return have become so inspirational to me.

I have personally selected all the students and having put them through some of the most intensive programs anywhere, I must say that these young minds and hearts have surpassed even my dreams!

We have all participated in this wonderful venture called 'change'. As Mahatma Gandhi once said, *"If you want to change the world, be that change."*

Our mission is to provide such motivated kids with an introduction to advanced scientific research, increase and foster their growth, in addition to fostering an awareness of the sciences in our communities.

We see our involvement with the communities as an enterprise and an experiment to increase the entrepreneurship of the communities.

- An Enterprise for generating Hope
- An Enterprise for creating a culture, and
- An Enterprise for arming a community with Knowledge that would propel itself to the future.

Our Ultimate Goal is to create a society for better humanity by creating awareness in scientific literacy and social issues, a society of understanding and tolerance to the different value systems and ideas, so that we can live in a certain peace and harmony.

Our Target is the youth living in under-resourced and under-served communities and School districts. We refer to these communities and societies as "Harlem."

Harlem in my mind is more than just a geographical location. It is a symbol of the drive to succeed and to achieve your dreams.

Harlem Children Society is keeping that dream alive and well, with its dedication to promoting an innovative science education program.

It seeks to empower the youth of tomorrow with the skills to pursue higher education and career achievement and to give back to their communities by becoming innovative entrepreneurs and productive world citizens.

To achieve our goals, we have evolved a unique partnership with several National and International organizations to foster our dream.

Harlem Children Society students - all of whom meet stringent family income limits - are selected through an extensive interview process.

They are directed to perform hands-on research at leading Research and Educational Institutions such as Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Columbia University, Hunter College, New York University, Beth Israel Medical Center, Fordham University, American Museum of Natural History, Stevens Institute of Technology, The Gaia Institute, and others.

About 98% of the students in 2005 were from minority backgrounds.

- 43% are African American
- 27% Hispanic
- 15% Asian
- 5% Native American, and
- 4% Caucasian.

About 60% of the students are female.

During the intensive interview process, our interns impressed us with their enthusiasm for science and their desire to succeed academically and professionally.

Over three-fourths of the students who participated in our program this year are new to the Harlem Children Society.

A rigorous training in lab safety, the scientific method, and research and presentation skills is combined with individually designed research projects to give each student an understanding of how meaningful work in the sciences is conducted.

Guidance and background is given to enable them to build self-confidence and presentation skills. This is combined with twice-a-week, Harlem Children Society conferences held at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer.

At these sessions, leading experts give talks to the students. The students also learn how to present their research and are given financial guidance by leading institutions like Chase and Citibank, including guidance on the various scholarships and preparative courses.

Many have won innumerable Regional and National Awards including the 'New York Times Scholarship'.

Students are paired with mentors, who are top professionals in their field. They train and work on specific research projects, including HIV/ AIDS, Asthma, Immunology, Cancer, Cardio-vascular, nutritional, environmental, neuroscience, genetic, engineering, robotics, and others.

The students also learn the admission requirements and scholarships available for the various universities in the country. Experts also tutor them on honing their writing and presentation skills. By the end of the summer, interns are ready to summarize their research and present it at regional and national conferences and competitions.

Therefore, we believe that we have evolved a comprehensive system of education for the all-round development of our participants.

Over the past 5 years, the Harlem Children Society has grown exponentially - increasing enrollment from 3 students from 2 high schools guided by one mentor in 2000, to last year *where our program involved 103 students from 36 schools who work with over 125 mentors in 45 leading institutions in the country.*

In 2004, forty-seven students from 16 schools performed research with 57 mentors in 17 leading institutions all over the Tri-State Area in an Intensive summer and After-school research program.

With the generous support of the American Chemical Society, New York Community Trust, the Butler Foundation, the Pinkerton Foundation, Boehringer Ingelheim Inc.,

Citigroup Foundation, among others, we are able to provide the interns with a handsome stipend for their research this summer and a continuing all year-round after-school program.

The Harlem Children Society's rate of success is exemplified in the numbers of former students who have gone on to top colleges and institutions of higher learning like Rutgers, Dartmouth, Penn State, UMDNJ, Swarthmore, St. John's, Cornell University, Rennessalaer, and many others. They are pursuing their careers in various fields including MD and MD/PhD, Engineering and Veterinary programs.

In addition, Harlem Children Society has been honored for its level of accomplishment with so many students receiving many awards, including, a \$30,000 New York Times Scholarship and two Posse scholarships of over \$100,000.

They have also received Four Year American Chemical Society Scholarships, Jersey Journal Betty Foley Memorial Award, Hudson Regional Health Commission Award, The United States Army, Navy & Air Force Certificate of Achievement Award and 1st place in New Jersey Biomedical Cancer Research Symposium at Rider University.

So therefore, let me now introduce my Harlem Stars: Please stand up for all of us to see who you are...

- 1) Paulo Lizano - Presently in the MD/PhD Program at Rutgers Univ.
- 2) Louis Shackelford - Presently in the Engineering Program at Steven's Inst.
- 3) Swapan Bhuiyan - Presently at St. John's University
- 4) Pankaj Saha - Presently at St. John's University

And from the class of 2004:

- 5) Rami Abdelghafar - Heading to Brandeis University
- 6) Nertila Ujkaj
- 7) Alberto Del Rosario
- 8) Eunice Asare
- 9) Ka Lai Poon
- 10) Erika Hernandez

And from the class of 2005:

- 11) Shouqian Shi

- 12) Oscar Tabora
- 13) Oscar Camilo
- 14) Alejandro Nieves
- 15) Kujtime Muzhaku
- 16) Princess Kara Parker-Smith
- 17) Saphir Niakadie
- 18) Littin Kandoth
- 19) Odell A. LaCroix
- 20) Anatasia Gangadin
- 21) Tyreen Sims
- 22) Derek Kenyenso
- 23) Michaelle Exhume
- 24) Charles Lamar
- 25) Greysi Tavarez

Let's give a round of applause for our young stars.

I am very proud of all of you.

I know all of you and every one in the program will excel and bring fame and fortune not only for yourselves, and your family and friends, but also to your mentors, teachers, Harlem Children Society, and myself. So when you become famous and are very wealthy, please do not forget us.

I am nothing but a vessel and a conduit through which things flow. It is you, who are going to carry the dream - the 'Harlem Dream' further.

You have a great responsibility to work towards this goal and be role models for your friends, family, community and your younger brothers and sisters.

This dream will only remain a dream unless you make it come true, for yourself and all of your teachers and mentors, who have invested so much in your growth and potential.

Dear Students, your careers are just beginning. Your life will be in the arena of human endeavor. You will be faced by challenges and perhaps humiliations. Face these humiliations with humility and restraint.

Never tolerate intolerance, but be patient with it. Create that change that leads to its abolition!

The way you handle yourself under these circumstances will determine your own personal quest of achievement, not only in the careers of your choice, but also your growth as responsible citizens, not only of this country, but also of a global humanity.

This will be reflected in your families, communities, teachers and mentors, who have guided and nurtured you. It is that sense of pride and achievement that you have to be conscious of. Be responsible citizens not just of your own community, but also of a universal neighborhood. Be a part of the global citizenry!

Thank you. Please be seated.

I would now like to introduce you, to our stars in our short film.

FILM

Please allow me to introduce and salute some of the best people, present here with us today without whom this work would be impossible:

Our mentors and guides:

Dr. Roberta Rivi, Prof. Yuying Gosser, Dr. Cathy Drew, Dr. Mark Klang, Dr. Sanil Manavalan, David Cook, Dr. Tony DePass, Prof. Susan Fahrenholtz, Prof. Eileen Johnson, Dr. Donna Jones, Dr. Yak Santuren, and Dr. Katia Manova

Please join me in giving them all a hand of applause.

Our amazing and committed teachers without whom, students would indeed falter:

Ms. Nadia Makar, Mrs. Nina Lavlinskaya,

Please join me in giving them all a hand of applause.

And our amazing supporters of our programs without whom we simply would not be able to support what we do:

Dr. Julia Rankin, Ms. Frances Freedman, Mr. Jeffrey Bonville, Dr. Azad Hussein, Ms. Jeanne Ross, Mr. Sunny Holland, Mr. Christopher Bell, and Mr. Roderick Jenkins, and Rosa Mayhue - my right hand - who within a short time has become so close to the students and a great help. And Jeanne and Susan Woodard, coming all the way from Kansas to be with us and share our moments. I met Jeanne and Susan in Greece about 4 years ago when I went there for a conference to present our research work. I feel that it is

this wonderful family that we have - that we can celebrate and be thankful.

Thank you. Please join me in giving them all a hand of applause.

I would like to thank all of you who have come today to support our cause

You are all part of our 'Harlem Dream' - and thank you for it.

We believe that the education of the students does not end within the confines of the four walls of the classroom and their regular school hours.

We believe the real education happens when the students leave and are involved in their immediate homes and neighborhoods. Therefore, their education has to be integrated with the prevailing Socio-economic culture of the neighborhoods - giving them a sense of pride to improve their own lot and look after their own rights and privileges.

We aim to quell as much misinformation as possible, encourage a healthy debate and provide a helping hand for the benefit of our society at large.

These goals are met by the gradual implementation of the following steps:

1. The students have a chance to know of the different fields of sciences and receive the advantage of the creation of various internships not only during summer break, but also throughout the year.
2. The program helps the students to have a greater sense of belonging and develop a sense of responsibility early in their careers.

The students are then encouraged to participate in Summer Science Street Fairs to showcase their achievements to their own neighbors and family members.

Such programs help these communities to ultimately better their Socio-economic status. This is an experiment - an experiment to implement social change with science and education.

We believe we have developed and demonstrated a sound and successful model for engaging high school students

from underserved communities in scientific research-and-study that increases their interest in science, improves study skills and self-confidence and prepares them for entry into competitive institutions of higher education.

We feel we are ready to expand our program in New York City and to other cities across the country so that many more young people can take advantage of this opportunity. We intend to continue to support our programs in New York City, and let it serve as a paradigm for other cities and communities.

We can proudly say that this program has evolved, in a short period of time, into one of the biggest and one of the best programs of its kind in the country. We intend to expand on our experiences and develop this into the best anywhere.

We take great pride in our involvements, starting with the selection of students and mentors, running of the intensive research program, seeing to its completion, showcasing our work and interacting with the general public with our science street fairs, and ultimately, following our students into adulthood as successful scientists, engineers and doctors.

The other main objective is our experiment with science and society - where we celebrate our participation in a 'real' city neighborhood. Our main showcase, our "Science Street Fair and Festivals" is our vehicle, which enables us to communicate and interact with our society.

This way, we can participate in creating awareness and establishing a dialogue with our communities - not only concerning issues important in a particular neighborhood, but also transcending eventually into a unique weave of socio-cultural and scientific amalgamation.

This has been a marvelous opportunity for our students to interact and convey their ideas and serve as role models for others in their own communities. Public discussion of the students' inquiries is a keystone of the program.

We are making an effort to bring scientific awareness in our communities more directly to people in the neighborhoods of New York City and therefore having a direct impact on students, their friends, and families.

To do this, we have as the aim of the 'Harlem Science Street Fair and Festival' to bring the sciences directly to the people in our neighborhoods, especially the under-resourced and under-represented communities, and promote proper dissemination of scientific knowledge.

This unique venture is also aimed at encouraging, fostering and furthering a dialogue about different health, environmental and other pertinent issues concerning the masses.

Participating students reach out to share their knowledge, passion for learning, and recent discoveries with their families and communities during this annual showcase. An enterprise for generating hope and for arming communities with scientific knowledge, the Science Street Fair and Festival represents our interns' growing ability to connect their work in science - Medicine, Engineering and Mathematics - with the interests and problems of their communities.

This involvement - through both the Internship Program and the Street Fair - represents an experiment aimed at stimulating the development of the human capital and social entrepreneurship.

Last year we organized our street festival in collaboration with the Salem United Methodist Church right in the heart of Harlem - at 129th St. and 7th Avenue. The fair honored various outreach programs that aid youth in under-served and under-represented communities and school districts in New York City and New Jersey, and in our national venture.

The event took place in association with Rockefeller University Chapter of Sigma Xi Scientific Research Society, Salem United Methodist Church, American Chemical Society and New York Academy of Sciences.

Live entertainment was featured with an all-star international line-up, including King Clave, Cuban and Latin jazz ensembles, The Main Squeeze Orchestra, an all female German accordion orchestra, Kibar, Turkish ensemble and Cheikh M'Baye & Sing Sing Rhythms, Senegalese drum and dance troupe and was organized by Ms. Jeanne Ross.

There was also a science poster competition by over 145 students. Over 2000 people attended the fair from the

community. From the 'American Chemical Society' wonderful folks like Dr. Eileen Johnson helped organize chemistry on the streets. We can proudly say that the Science Fair was an immense success.

The New York City Board of Education honored our science street fair as one of the major science events in New York in bringing Science Education to the masses. Our event was part of the 'Weekend of Science' sponsored by the city. We are extremely proud that we can participate in our ventures to expand our horizons of science and society.

We strongly feel that it is our duty to help create a dream in the hearts and minds of these young enthusiasts - the Harlem Dream - the Global Village! Remember that "It takes a village to raise a child" -- so let's keep the village of Harlem and the global village alive in the hearts and minds of our youth and our communities!

Now after five years, so many of our students who have gone through our program, are at leading universities across the country - mostly pursuing science, engineering, math and medicine. What is very close to my heart and one of my original aims - is that a few students have approached me with ideas and suggestions on how they can help their communities even further.

This has even further solidified my initial contention that at least some of the hearts and minds that have trained with us go back and help their own communities. **My dream is indeed fulfilled!**

But, I must hasten to add that in so many ways it is just beginning!

Many of our students feel that our program is not just an educational experience. They feel that the Harlem Children Society experience has been a socio-cultural learning experience they will cherish for the rest of their lives.

Many of the students have never interacted with so many people from different backgrounds - spanning across a plethora of high schools, and cultural backgrounds.

This is even more important: As students from different backgrounds learn to observe, respect and develop an understanding toward each other at such an early stage of their development and formative years - it becomes a fertile ground for understanding, peace and harmony.

Every year is a steppingstone to another. As our horizons increase, we define new areas and explore the realm of making some of those a reality!

We fine-tune some of our past experiences and apply those to larger settings and increase our resolve to serve our community.

Failure for us is not a deterrent, but is the first step towards success. We start with celebrating our failures, so as to reap our successes!

At every step I pray not to deter from our resolve but to keep our focus on our objectives. We are never afraid to try new and novel ideas and to put them in practice.

It becomes a learning venture for us all - as we all are students of life in the universe of eternal learning! I am thankful for my situations and the wonderful people who I constantly come across and interact with.

These include folks who have served as mentors, advisors, volunteers and all the generous supporters of our programs - without whom our dreams would only remain just a dream! For that I feel very privileged and honored.

We have time and again inculcated in our students that science and studies in various related fields have given us a fascinating insight into our world. They have shown us technologies that can and may change who we are. But these changes may come about because of the desires of human beings. "Science is a perpetual creative process."

A new era in the sciences - medicine, engineering and other technologies - is emerging. A new horizon looms that will lead to a better understanding of ourselves and help us lead better lives. **Ignorance is the parent of fear.** We have to train ourselves to tread on these paths single-mindedly, and fearlessly, and with utmost resolve to be sensitive of our environs and all beings concerned.

We are the Creation and Destruction - *both* in the eyes of God. Of the Future, we never know - of the Past, we know who we are. Let us not forget, when looking into the

Future, we are the eyes of the future. Let us develop that clarity of vision and develop the ability to look. Let there be Light! And there is no higher light than true knowledge, awareness and devotion!

Consider the words of the oldest ancient Indian text, the Rg. Veda:

"May I reach the light, on reaching which, One attains freedom from fear."

Finally. Thank you again for this tremendous honor. Thank you on behalf of the strong and smart students in the Harlem Children Society. Thank you all for listening to our thoughts.

Dear friends, I hope you will allow me to close with something very personal. I have written this poem, which I would like to share with you.

It is called, "I Am Black."

I am Black

I am Black

Black,

because I have a future and work hard at it

Black,

because I am a Christian,

a Jew

a Muslim

because I am a Hindu too

Black

because I am pink,

I am purple

I am blue

And white too

Black

because I am the Gandhi, King and the Teresa

because I am the Krishna, Jesus, Mohammed, and
Buddha too

Black,

because I am that Ode to the Spring Song

Black,

because I am that full moon that lit your winter
sky

Black,

because I am that bloom that set the sweet valleys
in flowery blaze

I am Black.

I am Black,

because I am of all Colors, Class and Creed
and ne'er I live in any encysted embrace

because

I am the all encompassing *Shunya*

because,

I am that path that keeps every step alive

Black

because,

I have my dreams

Dreams for myself

Dreams for my brothers and sisters

Dreams not just for my own community

but beyond . . .

I am Black

I am Black

because

I died

I died in the holocausts

in the Katrinas

in the Darfours

as a Shudra

as a Slave - traded

on the free market

and on the highways of humanity

too

I am Black

Because

I will live

Live as long as there are the Katrinas
the holocausts
the Darfours
and the Shudras

.... I will live

I will live, because I am the future

I am Black

I am Black

because I am that heart that never skips a beat
because I am that mind that never stops dreaming
because I am that will that never falters.

I am Black,

because I have a dream
because I will live
and will continue doing so
because I have a future
and will continue living for it
because I am that compassion
that holds love in embrace

I am Black

I am Black

And proud of it

