

A Ray of Hope

(This speech was delivered by Chronicle Executive Editor Richard L. Williams Friday night at the opening ceremony of the Winston Lake Family YMCA Youth Basketball Association program.)

It is always a humbling experience to be recognized by your peers. It is even more so to stand before your peers and deliver an address. That is my charge here this evening.

I would like to welcome everyone here. I hope that you are taken in, as much as I am, by this Olympic-like, almost theatrical, atmosphere presented by our own Winston Lake Family YMCA. But as you sit there, keep this question in the back of your mind: What good is having such a fine facility as the Winston Lake Y if we don't support it?

As you ponder that question, I would like to take a moment to ask everyone to just look around, scan the room, look at the faces. Isn't Black beautiful, though? And regardless of what fatal statistics think-tank organizations might come up with, looking at you all packed in here tonight, I'm convinced that the African-American family is alive, well and kicking.

And while the African-American family is alive and well, it's important to recognize that we cannot rest on our laurels.

We cannot afford to relax. Because everyday we battle opposing forces. Opposing forces that wish the African American were an extinct group. But as much as they would want to, they have a while yet before they can write us off. That's why I'm so happy to see so many parents, adults and children here. You all are here because you support the Winston Lake Y. You are here because you recognize the plight of this country as it relates to young people in general and young African-American males, in particular. You are here because you recognize the important role a parent should play in a child's life. You recognize that most wayward children are that way not because life has dealt them an unkind or an unfair hand, but because they have had very little parental guidance and very little parental involvement.

You recognize that you — not Charles Barkley, not Michael Jordan, not Michael Jackson and definitely not Snoop Doggy Dog or Dr. Dre — but you, are their No. 1 role model.

It's up to us as adults and parents to get involved in our families' lives and in our communities. We can do that either by volunteering or by contributing financially.

We have got to reclaim some of our lost African-American young men from these deadly paths that they're treading. We should not expect President Clinton to do it for us. We have got to do it. We should not expect the social worker to do it for us. We have got to do it. Nor should we expect our local church pastor to do it. We have got to do it. Like it or not, it is our responsibility. And it's an awesome one. But for the betterment of our children, it is vital that we live up to it.

Some of the children here tonight probably think I'm out of my mind. Parents as role models? Yeah, right. Next he'll be telling us that vegetables are healthier than a Big Mac. But it's not very often that children will understand what I'm saying until later in their lives. Believe me, your own dear, loving children who are sitting with you tonight will not think that you, their parents are "cool," or "dope," or "hype," or "phat" or "got it goin' on," or whatever the latest sayings are these days. Most of the children here probably think that their parents were born back in the days of Jurassic Park.

For example, the way parents dress. Fathers, remember that polyester, bell-bottom suit in the back of your closet that you should have donated to Goodwill 12 years ago? You want to wear it, but you know your son refuses to be seen with you in it. And what about haircuts? Your kids want you to get a fade, but you hang on to that Afro. They don't know that when you get a certain age, your fade comes naturally. And it doesn't start on the sides.

But parents be patient; they'll come around. It reminds me of something Mark Twain said years ago when describing the relationship he had with his parents.

"When I was 14," he said, "I had the dumbest parents. But when I turned 21, I was amazed at how much they had learned in seven years." He didn't realize it was he who had done the growing. He didn't realize that it was he who had matured and had been nurtured over the years. One day, with proper nurturing, every boy in this room will grow into a man.

What good is having a flower bed if you don't water it? What good is having a fine automobile if you don't provide it with proper maintenance. Children are no different. They need nurturing, too. They, too, need caring after. And what better avenue to help nurture our youth than a wonderful program like the Youth Basketball Association. Winston-Salem is unique in a sense. Not every city can boast that it has such a fine facility like the Winston Lake Y in the heart of the black community. But again I ask: What good is it if we don't support it?

Programs like the YBA will help change the fact that every 46 seconds of the school day an African-American child drops out. Programs like the YBA will help change the fact that there are more African-American males in jails than in colleges. Programs like the YBA will help stem the tide of African-American boys bringing babies into the world. Programs like the YBA will help our African-American boys grow up to be responsible fathers instead of

deadbeat dads. Programs like the YBA help turn our shy black boys into proud black men. And we need more proud black men to help run this country. Because as you can see, with Caucasian men running things, we're quickly going to hell in a hen basket.

You know, there's a saying that goes: When America catches cold, the black community catches pneumonia. Well ladies and gentlemen, our role as African-American parents and adults takes on an added significance when you look at the uphill battles our youth are faced with. It's vital that our youth understand what it means to be black in America. It's important that it is fully understood, as unfair as it is, that there is a double standard in this country. Always has been, probably always will be.

Many of you remember the words of a song by Godfather of Soul James Brown that went like this: "I don't want nobody to give me nothing; open up the door, I'll get it myself." Those lyrics still ring true today as many doors of opportunity remain closed to African Americans.

But after talking with many young African-American males, many of them seem to already have their futures planned. Graduate from high school, squeeze by in college, then mail your game clips to the National Basketball Association. Well, folks, I have news for you. There aren't a lot of job openings in the NBA. The fact of the matter is, you stand a far greater chance of becoming a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer than you do of playing basketball in the NBA. So while we're driving our children to basketball practice, we should also drive them to the library from time to time. Our youth need to know that their possibilities are endless if they prepare themselves. And young men you have to understand that not everyone will believe in you when you say you want to become a doctor, or a lawyer, or an astronaut, or an engineer, or a general in the armed services.

But you can succeed in spite of those doubts. You can succeed in spite of some teachers telling you that you'd be better off not going to college, because you're wasting your time trying to become a doctor. These same folks doubted Dr. Charles Drew, an African-American who developed blood plasma. These same folks doubted Thurgood Marshall, an African-American who became the first Black supreme court justice. These same folks told Ronald McNair he was foolish to dream of going to the moon. Well Ron McNair made it to the moon. And he was educated 30 miles away at little North Carolina A&T.

Let no one discourage you from trying to fulfill your dream. Let no one tell you what you are or are not capable of accomplishing. That's for you to decide. You may not make it. But you owe it to yourself to give it your best shot. And you have to understand that you are not going to be given a handout or anything else. You will have to scrap and scrape for every little scrap you can scrape. You will have to dot every "I" and cross every "T" and yet still be looked upon as inferior.

Some of you parents know what I'm talking about. Some others, well, you may feel that this is just rhetoric. You may think that what I'm saying doesn't affect you because of your elite status; or because you have fancy titles or degrees and are able to send your children to the finest schools. You may think that you've assimilated and is now isolated from the racist attitudes that are fostered in these great United States of America. But as sure as I'm standing here and as sure as you're sitting there, you'll be in for a rude awakening.

And finally to the parents, listen to your children. Don't just hear them, but listen to them. Believe me, if you don't listen to them, they will find someone who will. They will find a receptive audience somewhere. And that someone will not have their best interest at heart. And when you listen to them try to understand where they're coming from. I've always found it good practice to: "Seek first to understand before you seek to be understood."

Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C., said in a speech two weeks ago in Albany, N.Y., that America is failing our Black youth.

She pointed out that violence, drugs, poverty and abandonment by their families have combined to create the worst crisis since slavery for young blacks in America. Did you here what I said? Violence, drugs, poverty and family abandonment have combined to create the worst crisis since slavery for young blacks in America.

But, ladies and gentlemen, there's a ray of hope that shines in little old Winston-Salem. There's a ray of hope because you here tonight refuse to turn your children over to the deadly streets corners. There's a ray of hope because of the opportunities provided by Marcellette Orange at the Winston Lake Family YMCA. There's a ray of hope because of the hard work day-in and day-out, night-in and night-out of James Segers, who operates the YBA program. There's a ray of hope because of African Americans like Forsyth County Court Judge Lorena Biggs, who told me recently that she moving back to East Winston from Kernersville because she realizes the hope that can be inspired in little black girls and little black boys when they can see her get in her car each day headed for her judge's chambers and say to her: "Good morning, Judge Biggs."

Yes, there's hope in this little old tobacco town. There's hope in East Winston, too. And that hope, ladies and gentlemen, begins and ends with you. Thank you.



Richard L. Williams

LIVING WITH AIDS

Researchers Study Aids/Depression Link

CHICAGO (AP) — Researchers trying to determine whether depression hastens the advance of AIDS symptoms reached opposite conclusions in two new studies. The study that found no such effect is considered more reliable.

Researchers have focused on the question because depression is a treatable disorder common among people with HIV; scientists in both groups agreed that depression should be treated in those infected with the virus.

A study led by Dr. Constantine G. Lyketsos of Johns Hopkins University found no significant difference in the decline of white blood cells known as CD4 lymphocytes between those who were depressed and those who weren't.

Researchers believe HIV attacks and kills CD4 cells, so that the lower the count, the more vul-

nerable the patient. The Johns Hopkins study looked at eight years' worth of data beginning in 1984 on 1,809 HIV-positive men who hadn't progressed to full-blown AIDS.

In the second study, a team from the University of California, San Francisco, found the CD4 counts of subjects who were depressed fell 38 percent faster than those of subjects who weren't depressed.

However, they found no relationship between depression and the time elapsed from HIV diagnosis to full-blown AIDS or death. That study, led by Dr. Jeffrey H. Burack, analyzed 66 months' worth of data collected from 277 men who by January 1985 were HIV positive but did not have AIDS.

Both studies were published in a recent Journal of the American Medical Association.

The San Francisco findings

are "intriguing" but less reliable than the Johns Hopkins findings, which support previous research, Drs. Samuel Perry and Baruch Fishman of Cornell University said in their editorial. They noted that the Johns Hopkins researchers studied more subjects over a longer period of time. When the data from both studies was combined, they said, the effect reported by the San Francisco team disappeared.

All the researchers agreed depression should be treated.

"Clinicians should not assume depression is a natural reaction to the disease," said psychologist Thomas J. Coates, a member of the San Francisco team.

The depression rate among HIV-infected men is 25 to 40 percent higher than among men in the general population, Coates said.

AIDS Often Carry Even More of a Stigma in Rural Communities

ORANGEBURG, S.C. (AP) — The only people Jan trusts with her secret in this town are a small group of nurses, doctors, social workers and fellow patients at the county health department.

Jan, who doesn't want her name used, has AIDS. In a rural area, the disease can carry a stigma that's hard to escape.

"You tell one person, and the whole town knows," Jan said. "You know how people act because they don't know about this disease. They get distant."

Many South Carolina AIDS patients face similar situations. From January 1981 through September, South Carolina had a total of 3,458 AIDS cases. More than half now are in rural areas, the Department of Health and Environmental Control says.

Jan, 40, is like a growing number of people in the region who test positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. She is poor, black, female and a former drug-user.

She moved back to Orangeburg from New York City in 1990 to be near her family. She still used drugs, had sex without condoms, and drank heavily.

Then Jan contracted tuberculosis and pneumonia in 1991. She weighed 80 pounds, couldn't get out of bed and was near death. She got to know the people at the Tri-County AIDS Interagency Coalition because they made house calls.

Their cramped offices are in the basement of the Orangeburg County Health Department, but much of their work is along the county's dirt roads, at ramshackled houses with patients too sick to get out of bed or too poor to afford transportation.

"In a lot of ways we're sort of like an extended family. They can talk to us without having to worry," nurse and clinic director Bonnie Fogle said.

The clinic administers HIV tests, monitors the health of people who test positive for the virus, and provides care for people without insurance or a regular doctor.

Clinics around the country do the same things everyday, but the staff here is known for going the extra step to make life easier for

people who are HIV-positive or have AIDS.

"This clinic is really helping people. They stay from early in the morning until late at night helping people," Jan said.

One night a week, volunteer doctors treat patients. Sometimes Mrs. Fogle shows movies or brings a guitar player in to entertain people while they wait.

It was during one of those visits that Jan met Jack, who suffers from meningitis as a result of AIDS.

"Before I started coming here, I didn't know anybody with HIV," said Jack, 23, who also didn't want his real name used. Like Jan, he moved back to his hometown after he found out he was HIV positive.

Jack said he prefers the intimate atmosphere of the clinic to the local hospital, where he has stayed twice this year during bouts with meningitis.

"It's easier to get to know people at the clinic," he said. "Everybody calls me by name every time I come in here. They act like they really care about you."

Fogle and her staff win praise from colleagues nationwide for keeping patients' secrets and for their tenacity in getting treatment to poor patients who desperately need it.

Though state law requires people asking for HIV tests to give their names, the clinic's commitment to protecting their identities keeps patients coming back for treatment and is the key to its success, said David Berry, a University of Nevada-Las Vegas public health professor who studied the clinic this past summer while researching a report on AIDS in rural areas.

"In contrast to many other areas, patients seem very pleased with the service they're receiving. Confidentiality is respected more," Berry said.

The clinic serves three of the state's poorest counties: Orangeburg, Bamberg and Calhoun. Orangeburg, with its population of 84,803 people, ranks fifth among South Carolina's 46 counties in the prevalence of AIDS or HIV infections for its size.

Bamberg, with 16,902 people, is third highest for HIV and eighth highest for AIDS. Calhoun, with 12,753 people, is 33rd-highest for AIDS and 37th for HIV.

Poverty and widespread drug abuse most often get the blame. Poverty and ignorance compound the obstacles the clinic's staff faces.

More than four out of five clinic patients have not sought or do not have Medicaid, the health care program for the poor, Fogle said. Clinic workers often help them apply.

Along with patients without insurance or transportation, the three nurses and three social workers also wrestle with chronic money shortages and an increasing caseload.

When the state health department initiated full-time AIDS programs around the state in 1989 and Fogle became clinic director, one or two people a week came in to be tested.

Now, eight to 10 come in weekly, Fogle said.

More staff were hired as the community's need grew, but the need still outstrips the yearly \$80,000 budget.

Fogle spends much of her time on the phone, persuading people in a gentle, firm tone that's hard to refuse. When she calls, doctors donate time; patients agree to come for treatment; pharmacists provide expensive medicines.

"When people are talking about missions, I think, 'This is my mission. I don't have to go out and look for one,'" Fogle said.

The clinic's budget can't support a full-time doctor, so it relies on volunteers like Dr. Michael Watson. If a patient needs a doctor for an emergency, Fogle helps find one.

"Bulldogs," Watson calls the staff. "You show them a problem and they'll wrestle with it until they get it solved."

Watson, 67, has treated people referred by the clinic since the late 1980s. He is attracted by the challenge of tackling diseases he's never seen and of staying up to date.

"You read and read and you listen to tapes," he said. "Intellectually, it's stimulating."

Victim Says

AIDS, or Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, attacks the immune system killing off blood cells. The disease was discovered in the early 1980s. Since then, 209 AIDS cases have been reported in Forsyth County, the fifth highest in the state, according to the Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources.

Marilyn Stafford, a case manager with the AIDS Taskforce in Winston-Salem, said the virus is prevalent in the black community and commonly occurs through unprotected sex and the sharing of needles.

"It is very widespread in our community, especially in East Winston," Stafford said. "You cannot

look at a person and tell if they have the virus. A lot of them look perfectly healthy."

Stafford counsels clients and refers them to other social service agencies. Over the last year, she has counseled 80 clients — nine of which have died.

"Too many clients don't have someone who cares," she said. "They don't get a hug often and many find themselves modern-day lepers."

The most difficult part of her job, she said, is seeing someone deteriorate over time and the sudden death of a client.

Davis said he doesn't constantly think about dying, but the thought of

from page A1

his own death crosses his mind every other day.

"Yes, I think about (death) sometimes," he said. "Especially when somebody I know has been sick and dies."

Davis regrets having unprotected sex, but now wants to help educate others to the dangers of AIDS.

"Before, I was involved in the community a lot," he said. "Now I try to spread the word, especially to the African-American community because we are real ignorant when it comes to health issues. People will shut the door in your face. But this thing is real."