

# 'I Have a Dream' program to send kids to college is expanded

**Editor's note:** It's been more than five years since businessman Eugene Lang promised a class of sixth-graders in Harlem that if they studied hard and stayed in school, he would pay their way through college. Of the original 81 students, it looks like 52 will make it, and Lang's "I Have a Dream" program is expanding to other cities.

By NANCY SHULINS  
AP Newsfeatures Writer

**NEW YORK** -- Because a 14-year-old dishwasher was asked to step out of a restaurant kitchen and fill in for a sick waiter half a century ago, an impoverished city kid fulfilled his dream of getting an education.

The dishwasher ended up serving dinner to Swarthmore College trustee George Jackson, whose curiosity was aroused by the youthfulness of his waiter. Shouldn't he be in high school? Nope, already graduated. What about college, then? College costs money.

Because of Jackson's interest, the dishwasher did go to college. Not to City College of New York, as he'd planned, but to Swarthmore College, on a full scholarship.

The one-time dishwasher, Eugene Lang, went on to become chairman of the board at Swarthmore, as well as the school's biggest benefactor, donating \$18 million. "Sort of a romance novel," Lang says. Still, he wanted to do more.

"Giving should mean more than just writing checks," explains the 67-year-old industrialist.

And so, more than five years ago, when Lang found himself in a position to help other Harlem kids, he didn't bother to reach for his calculator. Instead, in an unrehearsed commencement speech at his first alma mater, P.S. 121, Lang told an entire sixth-grade class that if they studied hard and stayed in school, he would send every one of them to college.

As students went on to junior high school and high school, Lang saw he had to do more still to keep the dream alive.

"A promise can be diluted with time. Even if they stayed in school, the chances were that their educations wouldn't be adequate to get them into college," he says. "I realized that I would have to provide a program of support to encourage them to stay in school, to help them learn and qualify."

And so, Lang began giving his time as well as his money. He organized study groups and seminars, field trips and meetings. He brought in guest speakers and scrounged after-school jobs.

He listened to the kids' problems and tried hard to solve them. He became, in effect, a one-man PTA, holding together a group of minority kids who'd been scattered among 19 high schools.

Next September, the now-famous dream will come true -- for Lang and for the "dream kids" who accepted the challenge and want to go on to college or vocational school.

Of the original 61 students, 52 are still attending New York public schools. Lang says the majority plan to become doctors and lawyers, teachers and scientists, mechanics and computer programmers.

In all, Lang estimates that more than 90 percent will graduate from high school, "tremendous," he says, when measured against the average dropout rate of 75 percent for inner-city minority kids.

The dream will also come true for poor kids in nine other sixth grades in New York. For up to a thousand more youngsters in Dallas. For an as-yet-

undetermined number in Cleveland and Los Angeles, to be followed by others in Baltimore, Chicago, Boston, Jersey City, Washington, Detroit and 12 other cities throughout the country.

This fall, the U.S. Department of Education donated \$80,000 to help Lang develop a national network of "I Have a Dream" chapters in nine cities. The money will provide students a place to go for tutoring and social activities.

A headquarters to nurture all these new hopes is being set up in Manhattan. The "I Have a Dream Foundation" will provide information, search for new sponsors and oversee additional projects.

In the year since his efforts were made public, Lang has told

get a fair shake." Lang insists that each class have a single benefactor, without visible corporate involvement.

"There must not be even the slightest suggestion of corporate or public relations interests being served," he says. "Youngsters are very aware when they're being used."

"The students have a perfect right to be suspicious as to why someone is doing this for them. The sponsor must understand and be taught how to respond to the kids. My dream kids taught me how dangerous it is to have preconceived notions about the way people react and respond."

They also taught him how far he had traveled from his Harlem roots.

Growing up in his 98th Street tenement, "we had very little. We

didn't even have a bathroom; there was a toilet in the hall," Lang recalls. "But I had a full family -- and I was white. My father didn't graduate from grammar school, but my parents placed an extreme value on education."

"My experience was different from the conditions under which these kids have grown up, with a father who's walked out, a mother who has a live-in boyfriend, a brother who's a junkie and a sister who has a baby. The kid sleeps on a corner of a mattress on the floor. He has no money, no place to study. That's an accurate composite of what these kids face."

After graduating from Swarthmore, Lang went on to earn a master's degree in business and industrial engineering at Columbia University's School of Engineering. He founded a business, Refac Technology Development Corp., that is devoted to creating new ventures.

Over the years, he and his wife raised three children. Meanwhile, through Refac, Lang set up hundreds of manufacturing operations in 40 countries.

"I do have a good eye for making money," he says. "But life goes by -- I never wanted to get bogged down on the profit-making aspect of business. I believe the primary justification and dignity of human life is to fulfill a creative function so that the world and society has a little more than it would have had if you hadn't existed."

And so, when he found himself addressing 61 restless sixth-graders, all of them black or Hispanic, Lang saw that his opportunity had finally arrived.

The dream was born in a moment of inspiration.

Lang was all set to tell the graduates that if they worked hard and stayed in school, then went on to college, they could one day become successful, too.

"I had spoken at commencements before. But this group was different. I didn't know how to get to them. I felt completely like someone from outer space. It was as if I weren't there."

"It insulted my own self-esteem, but more to the point, I also felt a deep sense of caring. There had to be something wrong with me if I did not let this chance encounter count for something."

Suddenly, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's famous speech popped into his head. Everyone must have a dream, he thought. A dream of what to be, what kind of life to build. What more appropriate time for a dream to be born than at one's first graduation?

And so, he began: "Dreams don't come overnight," he told them.

"You have to believe in them, to keep faith and work hard to make them happen. Study hard and get an education -- that's the building block of dreams. You must go on to junior high school, high school and college."

It was the word "college" that tripped him up. "I realized I was being rather glib," he recalls. "It became immediately apparent to me that few had any reason to expect to go on."

"The sequitur hit me; I didn't stop to do any arithmetic. I just said, 'You can go. I promise that each one of you can go to college.'"

**DID YOU KNOW ...** that if you do not fall asleep right away when you go to bed, or if you wake up several times during the night, there may be a problem? You simply may not need as much sleep as you think you do. The American Medical

Association has published a guide on how to get better sleep. It is available from Random House, 201 E. 50th St., New York, N.Y. 10022. It's titled "The AMA Guide to Better Sleep" and costs \$8.95.

— ROBERT N. TAYLOR

## Third World

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ty communities. "If what happens in the Third World causes global economic problems, it's going to affect us first," he said. "If it causes war, it will affect us first because there is an inordinate number of minority servicemen. It would seem to behoove us to become interested in the world. Just because we've had to struggle so hard should not give us license to ignore the struggles of others."

Andrews is a special consultant to the Global Missions Committee of the Synod of the Piedmont and university pastor of the University of Delaware.

Andrews also is recognized as a noted authority on Third World affairs.

"We'd better start thinking about foreign policy and not leave it to the white majority," said Andrews, who is white, encouraging the audience to become more interested in the struggles of the Third World. "Fifty percent of U.S. forces in Honduras and Nicaragua are minorities. Those dying will be minorities."

Andrews added that he is disturbed that only a few people realize that the head of the Presbyterians' World Council of Churches is a black man.

"The leader of our world church is a person of color," he said. "Our leader, (South African) Allan Boesak, is not a white man, and we haven't made enough of it. Catholics regularly pray for their bishops and the pope. We (Presbyterians) don't even remember our world leader in our prayers often enough."

The Rev. Carlton A.G. Eversley, pastor of Dellabrook Presbyterian Church, served as a stand-in speaker for Dr. Kay-Robert Volkwiin, who originally was scheduled to speak about the crisis in South Africa.

Eversley, a vocal critic of apartheid, pointed to connections between the conflict in South Africa and the United States.

"The struggle in South Africa is old," Eversley told an audience gathered in the church's fellowship hall. "The same institutions in Winston-Salem that don't lend you money for

downtown development are doing beaucoup business with South Africa."

Sofia M. Clark, first secretary of the political section of the Embassy of Nicaragua in Washington, represented Nicaragua in the panel discussion. She substituted for Francisco Cambell, the minister counselor of the Embassy of Nicaragua to the United States, who was forced to cancel at the last moment. Cambell had just received word that he was appointed the new ambassador to Zimbabwe and had been called away for briefings, Lassiter said.

Ms. Clark outlined the history of the struggle of her country and its efforts to establish better diplomatic relations with the neighboring United States and other world powers.

She said that in recent months Nicaragua, which is about the size of Wisconsin, has "become fashionable" as a discussion topic and that, while Americans are not especially familiar with the country, most of its citizens have historically been aware of the United States.

"Many Americans are either uninterested in or know little about Nicaragua," she said, "but you have been an omnipotent factor in the minds of Nicaraguans."

With approximately 4 million residents, Nicaragua is an underpopulated country, Ms. Clark said. Most of the homes there, she said, have no refrigerators, families have no cars, and many communities rely on communal water supplies.

The Pacific coast of the country consists primarily of Creoles, Indians and blacks brought in during the Dutch slave trade, she said. Its Atlantic coast, she said, was largely influenced by the Moravians, the Spanish and the Germans.

Throughout its history, Ms. Clark said, Nicaragua has been the target of interference from other countries. Today, she said, with the United States supplying arms to the Contras, history is repeating itself, but her country won't lie down and play dead.

"We became the guinea pigs on how to intervene in other countries," she said. "Right now in Nicaragua there is a feeling that even against incredible odds Nicaragua will succeed. I don't know if it's realistic, but you're not going to take it away from us."

However, the price of victory is becoming expensive. Ms. Clark reported that her country has lost 18,500 lives in combat.

She also said that Nicaragua is not asking for anything out of the ordinary, only its basic rights as a separate country.

"We're not asking for special rights, and we're not asking for special treatment," she said. "What we're asking for is that our rights as a sovereign nation not be abridged by any other power."

American grassroots and church efforts, she feels, will be essential in helping Nicaragua obtain its full rights as a country.

"It's time to reassess your relationship with Nicaragua," she said. "Changes in the administration's policies toward Nicaragua will come from grassroots and religious groups' efforts in the United States."

She also said that the situation in Nicaragua, a predominantly Roman Catholic country, is causing its citizens to call for a position statement from the Catholic hierarchy.

"The assessment throughout Latin America is that the conditions were not God-given but were man-made," she said. "People felt they had the right to respond to conditions, and if the church did not respond, they were going to lose members. We've had people raised in Catholic schools who were taught all the values and virtues who went out and saw the living conditions and felt compelled to do something about it. The biggest question today is, What is the church's role? Does the church represent the interest of the poor or the interest of maintaining the status quo?"

Ramzi Saffouri, a Palestinian Christian who is a graduate student at the University of

Delaware and a member of the panel, said that many misconceptions about the Third World arise because people want to attach labels to other people.

"In the United States there is no such thing as a Palestinian; there are Palestinian terrorists, Palestinian killers and Palestinian murderers," he said. "The whole point of attaching labels is that it becomes easier, then, to kill someone if you label him a terrorist or whatever. People say, 'If he's a terrorist, he deserves to be killed. He was a terrorist, so it was all right for you to kill him.'"

Saffouri also contended that an undeniable thread connects situations in South Africa, Israel and Nicaragua.

Andrews agreed with Saffouri's assessment and said that the current conflicts in the Third World may spark the next major war.

"South Africa and Israel," he said, "may well touch off the final nuclear conflict between the two superpowers."

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### Y-HAPPENINGS

#### Y-ACTIVITIES

#### 1986 ANNUAL MEETING


Don't forget our 1986 Annual Meeting on Thursday, December 18, 1986, with the prestigious U.S. Representative William (Bill) Gray, (Democrat/Pennsylvania) as the Keynote Speaker. Representative Gray is known to many for his articulate and capable manner as Chairman of the House Committee on the Budget, 99th Congress. He also serves as the Senior Pastor at Bright Hope Baptist Church in New Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He speaks eloquently and the meeting promises to be one you'll remember for years to come. Why not join friends at this affair? Tickets are available at the Community Shoe Store, Contract Office Furnishings, Gilmore's Funeral Home & the Winston Lake Family YMCA.

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#### MEMBER OF THE WEEK

#### MEET IRIS W. OFFICER!!!

Iris Officer's name has been associated with good things in Winston-Salem for many years. She is known for championing the causes of the community, and the YMCA is grateful for her support. For the past four years, Mrs. Officer has served as a member of the Board of Management of the Winston Lake Family YMCA, on the Special Projects Committee. She attends St. Benedict Catholic Church and recently retired as a career counselor with the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools!



**IRIS W. OFFICER**

### DID YOU KNOW???

HAVE YOU HEARD?? ... that the Retired Men's Club meets at the Y on the 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at noon??? Call for information. ... that the Winston Lake Family YMCA will be closed on Thursday & Friday, December 25th & 26th, and on Thursday, January 1st??? ... that the Youth Basketball League has begun practices for their league, with games starting in January, 1987??? Call and register your 1st-12th graders, girls & boys!!! ... that the Y's tutoring program is badly in need of tutors??? Why not call and volunteer your services on Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday afternoons from 4-6 P.M.??? ... that the Afterschool Fun Club includes arts & crafts, creative gym activities, storytimes, movies, homework supervision and more??? Upcoming events include visits from area agencies to discuss hints for children at home alone!!! ... that a great gift for your child would be a youth membership at the Winston Lake Family YMCA! Call for details. You'd be surprised at the reasonable cost, for such healthy benefits!!!

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### Y-TIP

"PROMISE YOURSELF ... To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future."  
— Christine Lawson

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