

# COLLEGE BOARD FORUM 2006:

## Inspiration Awards Luncheon

### with Sarah Jones

#### Inspiration Awards Winners

SARAH JONES: Thank you so much. I want to congratulate each of the wonderful young people who will be joining me on stage. They are the winners of the Inspiration Awards for 2006. Please, let's give them the hand they so richly deserve.

I would now like to welcome Tammy Lopez and Tate Tinley from Hobbs High School in Hobbs, New Mexico.



Inspiration Award winners talking with Sarah Jones

#### Hobbs High School

TAMMY LOPEZ: Hi. My name is Tammy Lopez.

TATE TINLEY: And I'm Tate Tinley. And we're from Hobbs, New Mexico, from Hobbs High School.

TAMMY LOPEZ: We're very proud to represent Hobbs High School at this Inspiration Award Luncheon.

TATE TINLEY: We'd like to share a little bit about ourselves and our experiences at Hobbs High School.

TAMMY LOPEZ: First of all, I would like to thank God for being here. I'm a senior at Hobbs High School. I represent the girls at my school. I also represent the face of Varsity Tennis, Honor Society, and the ever growing number of students from Hispanic backgrounds.

Yes, we do have our problems, but I think our school is amazing because of its unique demographics and achievements. More than half of our student population qualifies for free and reduced lunch. Our county has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the State of New Mexico. Some of our teen moms on campus are on their second and third child. In our district, many struggling single parents are not available to support our students. Because of our open door AP policy, many of these students have been able to overcome these challenges, graduate, and even go to college. Not only do the teachers care about their students' education and security, but they care about our lives and ambitions.

I knew since kindergarten I wanted to be a teacher. I love teaching, and I love children. I want to work as a speech pathologist in public schools. The education I received at Hobbs High School has inspired me and prepared me to fulfill this goal. My dream for the future is to inspire others. We're so blessed to live in this great nation, so let's just go out there and really make a difference in the world. Tate?

TATE TINLEY: Hi. I am Christopher Tate Tinley, an A student who plays varsity golf, the son of two parents who have truly achieved the American dream. I live in a family of four, the national average. My parents are hard working, decent, and loving people. They're photographers, who have a family business. They have both been the single most influential people in my life. They have always made sure that I never went without but have also taught me how to work hard and be responsible. I know it sounds perfect, but in school I'm not the smartest guy, although I'd like to think I am.

TAMMY LOPEZ: Trust me. He's not.

TATE TINLEY: Thank you. Well, English is my toughest subject. I am more of a math guy. Since I have attended Hobbs High School, my interest in learning has increased immensely. Our advanced program that welcomes any student who is willing to put forth the effort to compete in more rigorous classes has inspired the average student, just like me, to take more demanding classes. All of us, not just the elite, have greatly benefited from this opportunity. We want everyone to have the same opportunity. It's the American dream, isn't it?

Now, could you please welcome Andrew Johnson and Cagney Sanders from John Tyler High School in Tyler, Texas.

### **John Tyler High School**

CAGNEY SANDERS: Good afternoon to everyone in attendance today. What comes to mind when you think about your high school? Was it a place to remember because of all of its wonderful characteristics, or was it just a place that you attended school? Often students don't take the time to look beyond that nagging teacher in biology or the principal that has about as much energy as all the students on campus. These are all the things I have learned to appreciate during my four years at John Tyler.

Now that I'm a senior, the actuality of me leaving saddens me. My journey through the busy hallways at John Tyler started before I took my first breath. My mother attended John Tyler, and my grandmother dedicated 32 years of teaching there. As I reflect back to my childhood days, I cannot ever remember a time when John Tyler was not a part of my life. I knew that one day I would be able to say that I would be a part of the Lion pride.

I stepped on the campus as a freshman, full of anticipation of what my future would hold. My sophomore year rounded and my world was turned upside down when two days before school started, I was hospitalized with Epstein-Barr disease, doubling the size of my spleen and tripling my liver enzymes. I had a full load of AP classes and a new principal that I was eager to meet, but because of my special circumstances, could not. I was convinced that

no matter how hard I worked or tried, my end result would be failure. The teachers at John Tyler came together and figured out a plan to get me through that year successfully.

I am one of many students that the teachers and administrators have stepped out on a limb to help. We are taught that we do deserve to be somebody in the world, despite what others say. There are many more great qualities that John Tyler possesses, but there is not enough time in the day to tell you everything.

ANDREW JOHNSON: Good afternoon. I am Andrew Johnson, Student Body President, John Tyler High School. I am honored to stand here before you today and represent John Tyler. Over the past three and a half years it has become more and more evident that education is the one great equalizer for us all. It allows each and every one of us access to the pursuit of success, measured by only how much we are willing to sacrifice.

Sacrifice is a word that is often used for dramatic statements, but I want to share with you why it is that I feel I possess a better than average appreciation for the words "sacrifice" and "integrity." Oftentimes we allow current trends in society to shape our belief system. I can honestly say that my parents have instilled in me a 'can do' and 'never quit' mentality that has given me the stamina and courage to overcome any obstacle, challenge, or stereotype.

It is from their teenage pregnancy in 1989 that my existence came to be. From the viewpoint of society and the American belief system, the product of a teenage, unwed pregnancy is often labeled with a lethal or nonexistent chance for any success in the future. My parents, in spite of their unfortunate circumstances, chose to overcome the stereotype and are now college graduates and contribute much to society and have imparted the belief in me and my two younger siblings that you can achieve. Not only will challenges give you the strength and willpower, but they can be instrumental in personal growth. My very existence is because my parents made a choice to face adversity with a positive attitude and determination. They chose to sacrifice and strive for a life without social stigma and negativity. They chose to go to college and work during that time, and never relied on government assistance. And because of their efforts, we now have a better quality of life.

My father, who is a parole supervisor for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and my mother, who is a registered nurse and currently the nurse at my high school, taught

me to believe in myself and to remember that life is what you make of it. My fellow students and I realize that education is truly the great common denominator that allows us access to the promise of success, no matter your race, creed, color, or religion. It is the window to opportunity and the door to achievement.

I enjoy learning and have decided that I will be able to give back to my community some day and intend to do so by becoming a surgeon. There are many great educators who have given their time and wisdom to enable me to be a great young man, and I will strive with every fiber of my being to return that gift to the generations to come.

In closing, if you remember nothing else that I say today, please remember that this excited, determined, and proud young man from the proud state of Texas has left you with the good news that no matter your socioeconomic status, your background, or any other factor can determine your level of success. The brightness of your future depends on how hard you decide to shine. Thank you.

Now, please welcome Janee Hawkins and Maria Wilson from Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia.

## **Wakefield High School**

MARIA WILSON: Good afternoon, distinguished guests of the College Board.

JANEE HAWKINS: Better yet, great afternoon, as we are so pleased to be here to celebrate Wakefield as one of the three most inspirational high schools in the United States.

MARIA WILSON: The beauty of inspiration is that it comes in many different forms and touches a variety of people in many different ways.

JANEE HAWKINS: My name is Janee Hawkins.

MARIA WILSON: My name is Maria Wilson and we are here today to talk a little bit about what has inspired us during our time at Wakefield.

JANEE HAWKINS: I'm a native Virginian, born and raised. I live in a household where there is no father figure, and where my mother's responsible for taking care of three children. One of these children, my younger sister, Brandy, was born with muscular dystrophy. Taking

care of Brandy in addition to providing for my younger brother and me has forced my mother to work two jobs, day and night, just to make ends meet. The fact that she has never stopped to complain is remarkable to me, especially when I think about the ups and downs in her life and the obstacles she has had to overcome.

After graduating from college, my mother's plans to attend law school quickly became a dream deferred when she discovered she was pregnant with me. The loss of her dream and the pressure of being a young single parent got the best of my mom early on, and she fell into drug addiction, an affliction that plagued her and our family for the next five years.

Fortunately for us, my mother is now in her twelfth year of recovery, and she has turned her life around. She is a motivated hard worker, as well as a successful single parent. She certainly has a story to tell, but she has never stopped to reflect on the journey she has traveled. She simply believes that she is taking care of her children and her responsibilities. Needless to say, I have been inspired by my mother in all that she has overcome and done for our family.

MARIA WILSON: Like many students at Wakefield, I'm the product of a mixed racial heritage. My mom is white and my father is African-American. Oh, and my mom's Hispanic, too. My parents' different cultural backgrounds have provided me with a variety of experiences to draw upon in my life, but the one constant in our family is the importance of education.

My mother grew up in Honduras and left her family and friends to move to the United States by herself to attend an American college. My father, on the other hand, grew up stateside in rural North Carolina. As a young man, he was forced to deal with racial tension, especially when it came to school integration. In pursuit of better educational opportunities, he left his home for a secondary boarding school and was one of a handful of black students in a nearly all white student body.

Regardless of the bigotry my father frequently confronted, he persevered, graduated, and went to college, where he earned his degree. Both of my parents grew up in a time when both educational and social diversity were not always valued. They even had to

elope, because their parents frowned upon their interracial marriage. Even though my parents are no longer together, they have inspired me with their independence, courage, and sacrifice. My mother, especially, has instilled in me the belief that even as a woman and a minority, I can achieve anything that I desire. I am both honored and grateful to be a representation of their diversity.

JANEE HAWKINS: Our stories may be different, but our inspiration has been the same. Our families, like many of yours, have taught us the importance of --

MARIA WILSON: Sacrifice.

JANEE HAWKINS: Hard work.

MARIA WILSON: Perseverance.

JANEE HAWKINS: Ambition.

MARIA WILSON: Goal setting.

JANEE HAWKINS: Faith.

MARIA WILSON: Honesty and integrity.

JANEE HAWKINS: And last, but certainly not least, our families instilled in us that learning is a continual process that occurs both inside and outside of the classroom.

MARIA WILSON: Fortunately, we have been able to put these values and lessons to work at Wakefield. Where else can you find --

JANEE HAWKINS: Counselors whose doors are always open.

MARIA WILSON: Teachers who will come early, stay late, and give up their lunches.

JANEE HAWKINS: Administrators like our principal, Miss Jackson, who know more about you than just your first name.

MARIA WILSON: A building where the air conditioning may be on in December and the heat pumping in June, but also where our students feel safe and at home.

JANEE HAWKINS: Athletic teams that may not win every game, but welcome every student.

MARIA WILSON: Fine Arts programs that teach students from the ground up, but they also fill our trophy cases by out-performing ensembles from other schools.

JANEE HAWKINS: ESL programs that enable students to transition into advanced classes.

MARIA WILSON: Intensified and AP classes that actually look like our overall student population.

JANEE HAWKINS: A senior class that earns millions of dollars in scholarships each year.

MARIA WILSON: And lastly, a student body that comes from over 40 different countries and speaks over 40 different languages.

JANEE HAWKINS: But whose spirit and energy is the inspiration for what we know as Wakefield pride. I am Janee Hawkins.

MARIA WILSON: I am Maria Wilson.

TOGETHER: And we are Wakefield. Thank you.

## Q & A

SARAH JONES: Well, I don't really know if anything more ever needs to be said...ever...anywhere! But I believe I'm going to have the privilege of taking questions, one question from each of the schools represented here.

**TAMMY LOPEZ: What philosophy in life do you have to help students overcome the challenges of today?**

SARAH JONES: What philosophy in life? See, this is a technique you all should learn. Repeat the question while you think about the answer. What philosophy in life do I have? No, I -- in all honesty, I'm not a teacher. You have a layperson up here. But I guess I should speak as a student, because that's the only thing I've ever been. And I think that the one thing you can do is value each and every person's experience. And I think unfortunately -- it's not through any of our faults, you know, coming up in our wonderful country that's so filled with diversity and, you know, so many opportunities for all of us -- there are many people who don't have access to those opportunities or whose experiences marginalize them so severely

that they can feel like there's no way to win. And I think if they continually hear the message that they're just not trying hard enough it can make it hard for them to see the institutional barriers that are real in their lives.

So I think it's giving people credit for how hard they try, even if they're stuck in difficult circumstances, and encouraging them to work to break down those barriers, so that we do have both, equality theoretically and at an institutional level around our country. That's my philosophy.

**ANDREW JOHNSON: What did it feel like for you to win a Tony Award?**

SARAH JONES: What did it feel like to win a Tony Award? It was such an overwhelming thrill...and I remember being surrounded by celebrities and the excitement of it all. But when the time came for my acceptance speech, I remember thinking, "before I thank my agents or lawyers or even Meryl Streep for all they've done for me, I should thank my third grade teacher Mrs. Jenkins from Brightwood Elementary School. I should thank her and all the great teachers I've ever had". But they like you to keep your speech pretty short, so I barely got to thank anybody before I ran off!

**MARIA WILSON: I want to be an actress and seeing another female and minority do it is -- well, we're on the topic of inspiration -- it's really inspirational for us. And we wanted to know did you face any obstacles being a female and a minority in the theater, acting business?**

SARAH JONES: Just like all of you, I had obstacles throughout my upbringing, and there are some I still face today. While I think it's important to keep emphasizing how great our country is, I also know we have a long way to go toward making good on the promise of real equality, access to opportunities and the American Dream for everyone of any race, gender, economic background, etcetera. As an African- American person, I can remember my parents looking for homes when I was a kid in the '80s in Washington, D.C. Even though both of them were doctors, because of the difference between my father's black skin and my mother's white skin, she would be shown better homes in neighborhoods where he wasn't welcome. And as a woman in the entertainment industry today, I'm aware of double standards, such as the pressure for women to look a certain way, when men can look any old way they please--no

offense, guys. But I realize that all I can do is create the best art I can and hope that it resonates with everybody. And that's my job.

Well, I just want to thank you all for those insightful questions and also for sharing your stories. You are truly -- I know it's called the Inspiration Awards, and I hate to be redundant, but y'all are inspirational.

And now, I would also like to welcome another person who is an inspiration, I'm sure, to everybody in this room, and that is Mr. Gaston Caperton, who of course you all know is the Board president. And I am so honored to be able to be here with him, knowing the influence he has on so many kids' lives, and I want to welcome him and shake his hand. Thank you so much for having me here.