

## **Social Capitalist Awards / January 8, 2008/ Andrea Black Remarks**

I am here tonight to celebrate how each of these incredible organizations changes the lives of real people, like me.

“Change” is fast becoming a political buzzword these days. Great social entrepreneurs, like those honored here tonight, are known for their passion to create lasting change in the face of tough challenges. I’m here to remind you that the innovations you create change lives. I’m honored to have this chance to tell you about how one Social Capitalist organization—actually two organizations—made a big difference in my life.

My momma always told me I would go to college but I would have to keep being smart so that people would pay for me to go because she couldn’t. I knew she couldn’t, we barely had enough food each month, I knew from six years old, that she couldn’t.

I had been enrolled in gifted classes since I was in first grade, but in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade—like so many students who stumble when they enter high school--why did my report card read CCDD?... Could it have been that those years my stomach was growling louder than my teacher’s banter about doing homework? Could it have been that my mother’s painful sobs rang in my ears throughout the day so I talk to everyone in the back of the classroom to drown them out? Maybe.

My storm lasted about a year and a half. When it was over I was ready to take on the world and make my momma proud. But that storm left damage... By the end of my junior year I had a cumulative 2.7 grade point average. When a lot of people looked at that number, they said, “Andrea was not college material.”

Fortunately, my high school participated in College Summit, a non-profit organization that helps high schools raise their college-going rates and build college culture so that students stay on track academically.

My high school counselor believed I was better than my numbers and that I was an influencer. She selected me to serve as a College Summit Peer Leader. So I grabbed my bags and hopped a bus, a train, and another bus to the University of Chicago College Summit workshop in 2000. Throughout the four day workshop I learned, I grew, I wrote, I cried, then I wrote some more. I saw obstacles that I had never realized were hindering my growth and I derived motivation from the encouragement showered on me by family. These College Summit volunteers helped me break down emotional barriers, step out of my comfort zone and open myself to all possibilities.

College Summit also equipped me to know the steps in the college application process.

Because no one in my family had ever applied to attend a formal university, it was important that I was able to apply for admission and financial aid without the assistance of a parent. With College Summit, I even had the knowledge to share with my peers.

Back in my high school, I led discussions during our homeroom period regarding the application process.

My school and the people at College Summit were right. I was better than my numbers, and I am an influencer. I was accepted to Fisk University, where I graduated Magna Cum Laude and President of the student government. I contributed enough to Fisk that I was asked to serve on the University's Board of Trustees.

Sometimes when you've lost your way, you have to slow down, think, retrace your steps, and put yourself in motion in order to find something you lost. I had almost lost sight of my power and potential but College Summit encouraged me to retrace my steps and use my past as fuel for my future.

When I graduated, I used that fuel to give back to my community, through another great organization, Teach for America. I spent two years teaching 1st grade in a low-income school in Atlanta. And since then I have stayed on in my school because I deeply believe in our students.

My students often tell me...Ms. Black one day I want to be as smart as you. I always tell them sweetie...one day you will be smarter than me if you believe that you can and try really hard. All a child needs to excel is the possibility. College Summit opened my mind to the possibility...and for that I am eternally grateful. Teach for America gave me a wonderful opportunity to have an impact in the lives of young people with my skills.

As I now introduce Danielle Sacks, a Fast Company staff writer, who will welcome tonight's keynote speaker, I would ask you to think of the hundreds of thousands of young people who have changed their lives working with all of the organizations honored here. Thank you.