



Lifeline

Winter 2005 – 2006

A Reflection from Point Scholar Tanene Allison

A girl from a small, conservative and homophobic desert town would be hard pressed to imagine a future that would span from life on the streets of San Francisco to life as a Harvard student, doing summer work in South Africa and debating human rights with a Nobel Peace Prize winning former president.

But, if the path of my life has been in any way extraordinary, it has also been incredibly simple and traditional. It is a flesh and blood embodiment of the American Dream come true.

As a young queer American, I have often reflected on where my unwavering belief in the potential of America and the American dream comes from. I keep coming back to a poem from our prolific gay brother, Langston Hughes; as he put it:

***O, let America be America again —
The land that never has been yet —
And yet must be —
the land where every man is free.***

In times of hardship and calamity, there is hope in stories like mine. Hope in the fact that some kids find ways to survive, even thrive, in the face of hateful towns, families that reject them, and a

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Tanene recently attended a Point Foundation mentoring luncheon hosted by Edgar Bronfman, Sr.

Meet Point Scholar Travis Wright

Travis is from a rural community in Tennessee with only one blinking traffic light. He grew up with four generations of his family living on one dead-end road in a mobile home that his mother worked two shifts to pay for after the bank foreclosed on their house.

Abandoned by his father, he was encouraged academically by his mother, grandmother, and aunt. He was the first person in his family to attend college. He is currently finishing a degree at Harvard University. After five years in Cambridge, he still speaks with a strong but charming southern accent.

When I was little, my family raised tobacco and other things that we needed right on the land. The men worked as delivery men for the local Coca-Cola plant and my mom worked in a grocery store. There was always enough, but there was almost never any extra after my parents divorced. I think it was really the strength of the community, and the very strong women in my family, that got us through. We really supported each other. My grandmother used to say, "If you pass a fencepost and see a turtle sitting on top, you know he probably didn't get there alone." I've always quoted that saying when talking about the people who helped me get where I am.



**Travis Wright
Harvard University**

I think I always felt different growing up. I was always very precocious and loved reading. I was sort of dramatic and asked everybody tons of grandiose questions. I was also interested in pleasing people. I got very involved in church

because that was, like, my refuge from the chaos in my home and my first step into the world at large. I think I was depressed as a child, probably because everyone around me was just so sad. I didn't see a way out, though I knew I didn't fit in. When I think about my childhood now, I just sort of watch it. I see it sort of just happening.

I used to imagine that I was going to be president of the United States someday, and I would stand up and give speeches to anybody who would listen — to the dogs, to the chickens, to people at church. It really didn't seem that hard to be whatever I wanted to

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Point Scholar Travis Wright

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 be. I had also achieved some success through 4H Club, and was even president of our chapter when I was in fourth grade. I think I fell in love for the first time with a friend from 4H. I met him at 4H camp when I was in eighth grade. I think he was the first person I felt was anything like me.

When I graduated high school, 282 people got diplomas and only six people went to college. I remember applying to Duke, and I hand-wrote my application and asked for a fee waiver as I didn't even have the money to pay the application fee. I just prayed that they would read the application anyway. And I got accepted, even though I applied late and had no money. The vice principal at my high school pulled me aside and said, "I think it would be a horrible mistake for you to go to Duke." She said, "People like you will feel very uncomfortable there. It's no fun being the poorest kid on campus." I don't mean to demonize her, because I think she was trying to protect me. But what's been really striking to me in my life is realizing that the people who never had anything always encouraged

me, and those who were where I wanted to be found a way for me not to be there.

So I decided that I was going to be a perfect kid, and I hid, and I became the best straight guy that I could. I managed to get a full scholarship to the University of Tennessee and I immediately joined a fraternity. I wanted to be governor of Tennessee. I wanted to help poor families. That was my whole mission in life. But I also knew that I couldn't be gay and be governor.

Instead of a traditional senior thesis, my professor asked me to write my "story." As I did this, I realized that I was editing so much of it out, and that the holes were all part of my being gay. So for like 36 hours, I just wrote and I wrote, and I cried because it all came tumbling out. When I presented my thesis, I invited my three best friends from college, and I came out. I said, "This is the person you don't know. But you're my best friends, and you

are who I need to take on my journey with me." They were totally supportive.

From the forthcoming book *Outspoken: Stories of Queer Resilience and Reconciliation* (PoliPoint Press, February, 2006)



**"We are far more alike than we are different."
 — Maya Angelou**

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By supporting diversity in the academic environment, TPF hopes to create a greater level of acceptance, respect and tolerance within future generations for all persons regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. You can help us make the world a better place through your generous support.

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Providing for The Point Foundation after your lifetime not only secures future revenue for TPF but also offers a number of financial benefits for you and your family. Donations can take the form of bequests, trusts and beneficiary designations on life insurance policies and retirement plan accounts. For more information on how you can make a difference in the lives of deserving students, contact The Point Foundation, either through the Website www.thepointfoundation.org, or by calling 1-866-33-POINT (337-6468).

We gratefully acknowledge the following members of The Point Legacy Society for their generous commitments:

Kathleen Adamick **Thomas Andrew Sachs**
David P. Lewis **Sean Walker**
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Visit www.thepointfoundation.org

Point Scholar Tanene Allison

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 national debate on sexual identity that scorns and demeans them.

My story, my hope and my belief in the American Dream come from the country I have known. A country of hate crimes and Defense of Marriage Acts, yes — but also a country where, step-by-step — from my homeless shelter in San Francisco to my apartment in Cambridge — strangers have realized our connectedness, and have reached out to make my dreams realities. Folks, who — just because they believe in a better world — helped feed me, house me and keep me in school. More important, perhaps, is that these individuals also have loved me and, in unequivocal terms, reassured me that I too had a rightful place on the stage of this country and world.

**O, yes
 I say it plain,
 America never was America to me,
 And yet I swear this oath —
 America will be!**

I cried the first time I came across the Point Foundation's webpage. Its simple yet radical mission — to claim and support some of America's most rejected youth — seemed like a miracle. I knew that being a Point Foundation Scholar would allow me to continue in my studies at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. I yearned to be a part of this strong collection of dedicated individuals, bonded together to make a better world possible. Lives are changed by the strategic compassion of the Point Foundation, as is this story of America we are all writing.

How better to make the dream of America possible than by supporting an organization dedicated to uplifting society's most promising, and yet too often forgotten, young. The Point Foundation fills a crucial gap of need in our society, and happens to be creating history while doing it. Scholars like me, however, cannot be nurtured and prepared to lead our world to better places without the support of others who believe in our vision. I ask you today to join us in this radical reclaiming of our country. Through your support, the Point Foundation can continue rewriting America.

As Langston put it:

**O, let my land be a land where Liberty
 Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,
 But opportunity is real, and life is free,
 Equality is in the air we breathe.**

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Passionate about The Point

"Providing support for the education of lesbian and gay youth where none might otherwise exist is the surest way of both advancing the social and emotional needs of individual young people and ensuring the future leadership of an effective and relevant LGBT movement. The Point Foundation is unique in its range of support for its scholars, and its work could hardly be more important, both right now, and for the future."



**Michael J. Sullivan, President,
 Devries Public Relations**

HURRICANE KATRINA

POINT SCHOLAR UPDATE

Katrina's devastation was felt by millions including Point Scholars Lindsay Higgins and Matthew Cardinale, both residents of New Orleans.

Just before the hurricane hit, Lindsay, a first-year Medical Student at Tulane University, was safely evacuated to Alabama with her girlfriend, Lucy and kitty, Cleo. The medical school has temporarily relocated to Houston, and Lindsay has resumed her studies in facilities provided by Baylor University.

As the storm raged, Matt stayed behind in the uptown two-story home of friends until neighborhood fires forced him to leave. He endured a harrowing journey, wading through polluted water to be picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard and then dropped

off in the dark in a crime-ridden neighborhood. He waited hours for a bus that never came. "I've become a tough cookie over the years through a lot of crisis situations, but this was really out of my league," he says. He finally made it to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., where he's staying with a friend who helped him

achieve independence as a teen. But Matt won't turn his back on New Orleans. He'll return, ready to help homeless youths and publish his newspaper.

**Matthew Cardinale
 University of
 New Orleans**

"The second they allow people to go back into the city, I'm going to be there," he says. "I want to go back home."



DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Esther Lastique

When Esther Lastique and her partner Joni Frater first began contributing to The Point Foundation this past summer, she included this moving statement with her gift:

“I am so excited that the Point Foundations exists — I was one of the lucky ones, with wonderful parents who still paid for college. Yet I know how many of us were spurned and cut-off by our families and had their dreams of college dashed by intolerance and hatred. I was an advocate/activist for women and the LGBT community on campus, but there were woefully few role models that I could look to for guidance and



Esther Lastique (right) and her partner Joni Frater.

encouragement. Thankfully, things have improved for today's LGBT youth, but we still have much work to accomplish. We consider it an honor to be providing for Point Scholars — for our next generation of leaders.”

Owner of Passions Gallery, a mainstay of the Provincetown, MA economy, Esther also has started contributing 10 percent of the gallery's net proceeds to The Point Foundation.

“We are doing this, not only as an act of service, but also as an act of reverence for the way money works, and for the incredible benefit that The Point Foundation is having on our community — today and tomorrow. It is my core belief that this is the way the universe works: much like an education — what you put into the universe at large, so you receive in turn. We have chosen to “enlighten” our company and share our wealth with others — especially the next generations of gay and lesbian leaders. We are now their role models: the more we do for them, the more they will, in turn, do for those who follow. Taking care of one's own has been an ethnic and cultural tradition the world over, and it is time for our community to adopt the same commitment to our youth. May our efforts, and that of all of the Point Foundation's supporters transform the world — one scholar at a time.

The Point Foundation is proud to salute the commitment and generosity of our donors like Esther — hell-raisers and torch-bearers for the generations to come.

“The Point Foundation is one of the few national groups conceived explicitly to help gay kids, and it is a leading example of how the gay movement is responding to the emergence this decade of hundreds of thousands of openly gay youths.”

—TIME Magazine



The Point Foundation is featured in TIME magazine cover story.

View the article at www.thepointfoundation.org

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December Lincoln Center Benefit to feature *Confessions of a Mormon Boy*

We're happy to report the tremendous enthusiasm and interest being generated by this December 5th event. This autobiographical, one-man play tells the story of a failed attempt to overcome “same-sex attraction” through “reparative therapy” which resulted in the author's divorce and excommunication from the Mormon church. People already are calling and emailing to purchase tickets, including several Host Committee members who are buying entire blocks of tickets!

For more information please contact ginger@thepointfoundation.org