Pictured here, Lang Opportunity Scholars (back row, from left to right) Chenge Mahomva ’11, Lois Park ’10, Anson Stewart ’10, Elizabeth Crow ’09, Diego Garcia-Montufar ’09, Sneha Shrestha ’11 (front row, from left to right), Salem Shuchman ’84 and Mr. Eugene M. Lang ’38 and Smitha Arekapudi ’99.

The Dogfish Story

As a freshman (age 15) at Swarthmore, Eugene M. Lang ’38 volunteered to be a club leader at the Friends Neighborhood Guild, a settlement house in the slums of Philadelphia. "I would come in on Monday evenings," he says, "to meet with a group of 13 or 14 kids, almost my age, all African American. For each meeting, I had to think of an agenda that could keep them interested. For my finest hour – inspired by the lab experience of my then current freshman bio course – I decided to engage my kids at the Guild with a cooperative but guided dissection of a dogfish – an agenda, enthusiastically shared and destined to have a far greater impact than I ever could have imagined.” After the meeting, each kid went home with an identifiable souvenir piece of dogfish. About five years later, Lang, who by then had graduated with an Economics degree, received a letter via Swarthmore from one of his Guild kids expressing how the dogfish experience, refreshed by periodic references to his souvenir, made him re-evaluate his life, and go back to school with the goal of becoming a doctor. “Most significantly, he wrote the letter to me when notified of his admission as a pre-med scholarship student to a prominent university. I can never forget that," says Lang with a brief pause. "It was a defining experience in my life".

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Chinatown Youth Radio Project: A Venue for Unheard Voices

She paused before she spoke, her weathered fingers wrapped around the microphone. The city councilman, frustrated by the rowdy room, had interrupted her, but her gravelly voice remained steady. “My name is Gong So Kei,” she announced. “I will say a few simple words today.” Up until that point, the community meeting had been conducted exclusively in English. Her Cantonese startled the city officials, who sat behind a long table at the other end of the room. A translator was requested before she continued: “if this casino opens in Chinatown, the consequences will be unimaginable. Number one, it will impact the next generation. Number two, it will increase the crime rate. Number three, it will impact families. If both parents go gambling, the children will have nothing to eat, and it will be horrible. Number four, it will impact the businesses. If employees go gambling, come back the next day and don’t want to work, businesses will suffer. Let’s stand united and oppose the casino in Chinatown!”

Standing a few feet from her, I felt tremors through my body as I listened to Gong So Kei’s speech. My body pulsed similarly when I heard her speak again in Cantonese outside of Philadelphia’s City Hall a few weeks later at a rally against the casino proposal. Tears welled in my eyes because her words hit a core within me, the American-born son of Chinese immigrants. English is not my parents’ first language, and they have always had difficulty speaking up using a foreign tongue. As a child, I never understood exactly why my father would suddenly switch from speaking Chinese to English whenever a stranger would pass us by in a store. Eventually, I came to associate being able to speak Chinese with a flaw in my “American-ness,” something to hide for fear of revealing foreign identity. But my long-standing anxiety from speaking Chinese outside of home in hushed tones was overcome by the conviction of an elderly woman concerned about the future of her community. At the Philadelphia Chinatown meeting, community organizers distributed hearing devices to Chinese speakers, who listened to a live translation of the discussion. With their fingers pressed to the earpieces, many of the Chinese speakers listened intently, quietly, while English speakers, one by one, lined up to take their turns in front of the microphone. Then, Gong So Kei stood up, and with no prior warning or apologies, she addressed her fellow Chinatown residents and the city officials in Cantonese.

The often-unheard voices of Gong So Kei and the Chinatown community inspire my efforts to sustain Chinatown Youth Radio Philadelphia (ChYRP), a program I created as my Lang Opportunity Scholarship project to train high school students in producing radio stories about Philadelphia Chinatown. At its core, ChYRP aims to create spaces for local communities to tell their own stories. As I continue to work together with community partners to develop future summer sessions of ChYRP, I hope that the radio stories produced by our teen reporters can help to deepen the shallow image of Chinatown as a tourist stop of restaurants and novelty stores. Outsiders often forget that Chinatown is a community, whose borders have long been besieged with city development projects like the recent casino proposal. As I embark on new beginnings as a freshly minted LOS (and Swarthmore) alumnus, I will take with me the few simple words of Gong So Kei from Chinatown. They have given me the courage and strength to continue finding my own voice by helping others find theirs.

—Hansi Wang ’09

Early Childhood Development Center: Inspiring Youth In Zimbabwe

Chengetai (Chenge) Mahomva ’11 describes her Lang Opportunity Project, “The establishment of a comprehensive Early Childhood Development (ECD) center in Epworth, Zimbabwe will have communal effects. Epworth, the community that our project plans to serve, has been historically neglected. The majority of the township has no running water, sewage is often exposed and most households grow their own food and are child-headed or run by grandparents. On a practical level having children attend the ECD will educate them and relieve their caregivers during the day so that they may fend for their families.

Photograph courtesy of Susy James

On a more holistic level, I think that having a fellow female Zimbabwean as the initiator of a project of this nature would gently challenge our patriarchal tendencies and the ‘helpless’ mentality I fear will set in. More importantly I hope my actions will inspire the youth in the surrounding community.”

—Chenge Mahomva ’11
San Francisco Saludable: Waste Management in Peru

“In the 7 months that I worked with the San Francisco Saludable Project [my Lang Opportunity Project], we succeeded in developing and implementing a simple yet effective waste collection and treatment service in the community of San Francisco. Our production of compost provides a valuable resource for local agriculture in a region with poor soils that have been mismanaged. The sale of recyclable materials provides a small portion of the income for the workers, and the sanitary disposal of waste materials reduces contamination and the risk of diseases for the population.

Today, approximately 95% of the households participate in our waste collection system. Through our resource recovery efforts we have gathered over 40 tons of organic garbage, which has produced approximately 10 metric tons of compost. Furthermore, we have recovered over 2 tons of recyclable materials (which would have otherwise been burnt or thrown out) and reduced the amount of landfill waste by approximately 87%.

In terms of community involvement, 95% of community households have been trained in respect to integrated refuse management. Approximately 500 children have attended environmental education workshops and film screenings, and 1,000 community members (adults and children) have participated in community-wide clean-ups. We have organized a total of 8 community clean ups (one every month) and one community-wide cleaning competition in which the 6 community streets participated.

In terms of employment, we have created 2 permanent jobs (for the operation technicians) and offered temporary employment to another 6 community members. We have also created a volunteer program that receives volunteers both from inside and outside the community. We have received a total of 4 non-local volunteers (3 Canadians and 1 Peruvian from Lima).

Our local volunteer program has provided mentoring and support to 6 young boys and adolescents from the community who help us in our composting activities and reforestation efforts.

Finally, we have been able to reforest half a hectare of land with two local tree species, bolaina (Guzuma crinita) and capirona (Calycophyllum spruceanum). Reforestation is part of our long-term sustainability efforts to develop agricultural development solutions with the compost we produce...

I have been working on the San Francisco Saludable project since 2005, when I first arrived in the community as a volunteer with ANIA, a Peruvian NGO. Since then, I have been working to bring this project to fruition, and I now feel extremely grateful to have been able to work and implement what looks like what will be a truly sustainable initiative.

I am greatly thankful to the Lang Opportunity Scholarship and to the Lang Center staff for all the help and guidance they provided during the process...This year, I have been dedicated to grant writing with hopes of seeing our project grow into a formal organization dedicated to issues of rural development. I will continue looking for grants and, if the opportunity arises, would definitely go back to the Amazon to oversee the development of San Francisco Saludable into a regional or national organization.

– Diego Garcia Montufar ‘09

Pikin Wellbodi: Children’s Wellness in Sierra Leone

“Social and economic status should not entitle one person to life and to another to death... This project addresses something more essential than good health; this project hopes to give children a chance at life.” In summer 2008, Lois served as an intern with the National Organization for Wellbody (NOW). Lois helped to implement the Child Survival Intervention Project in the Port Loko District of Sierre Leone, where she went into the villages to survey and refer children that are severely malnourished to a therapeutic feeding center (TFC) to be admitted and treated in an inpatient program.

In summer 2009, Lois returned to Sierra Leone and initiated a community-based treatment program for acutely malnourished children called “Pikin Wellbodi” (children’s wellness) program as her Lang Opportunity Project. Over 800 children under five years of age were screened in a house-to-house screening initiative and 90 were enrolled into the treatment program using Plumpy’nut.

– Lois Park ‘10
LOS Class Notes

Class of 2009
Shadi Rohanna writes, “My experience with La Escuelita, a school for children of Latin American migrant laborers in the south of Tel Aviv, was both eye-opening and life-changing for me. I discovered that amongst us, Palestinians and Israelis in conflict, there exists a foreign community that insists on maintaining its native language and culture, constantly challenging our perception of our environment, our conflict and ourselves...My Lang Opportunity Scholarship allowed me to be engaged in a process of not only deconstructing the myths of our current reality, but also of constructing substantial possibilities for the near future.”

Class of 2008
Katie Camilus ’08 writes, “After graduating, I spent a year in India managing an economic development research project. Now I’m working in International Projects and Research at the Cooperative for Education in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is a non-profit organization working to improve education in rural Guatemala.” For her Lang Project, Katie started a women’s microfinance program in Kampala, Uganda.

Class of 2007
Dan Hammer ’07 worked as a project coordinator for RescueCorps, a nonprofit devoted to providing emergency response services to local partners in Bolivia and Thailand. His Lang Project was an extension of his work in Bolivia, where he used the funds to support the training and operations of firefighters in Santa Cruz. Dan is currently enrolled in the spatial analytics graduate program at the University of Maryland.

Class of 1997
Jeremy Weinstein ’97 served as Associate Professor of Political Science at Stanford, before going on public service leave for two years as Director for Democracy at the National Security Council at the White House. For his Lang Project, Jeremy piloted a democracy education curriculum and service program for 80 high school students in South America.

Class of 1996
Emily Bobrow ’96 is currently working in DC as a Senior Research Officer at the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation (EGPAP). After Swarthmore, she completed a MPH in International Health and Nutrition from Emory University and a PhD in Maternal and Child Health with a minor in Demography at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has worked as a technical advisor to various organizations on the global, national and domestic levels on issues of Maternal and Child Health, specifically on issues related to international HIV and nutrition. For her Lang Project, Emily worked with an organization called REMEDY (Recovered Medical Equipment for the Developing World) based at Yale University. She helped expand the REMEDY model for systematically recycling medical supplies to other US hospitals. She also traveled to Riga, Latvia and to Asmara, Eritrea to conduct needs assessments and to establish connections from each country to a REMEDY medical supply system. For her Lang Project, Emily worked with three St. Louis hospitals to expand REMEDY, a medical-equipment recycling program.

Class of 1985
Lang Scholar alumna, Lourdes Rosado ’85 was named Citizen of the Year by the Philadelphia Inquirer for her juvenile justice legal work. The Inquirer’s Citizen of the Year award honors “people whose work has upheld the ideals of citizenship - promoting justice, strengthening democracy, or fostering community.” As a Lang Scholar, Lourdes’ journalistic interests led her to Lima, Peru where she recorded the daily struggle of community organizers in a poor outlying district that was fighting to get water and sewer lines installed. “I learned a lot about community organizing,” she says. Rosado majored in political science and minored in economics at Swarthmore, earned her law degree at New York University and joined the Juvenile Law Center in 1998. Today, Rosado is an attorney at the Philadelphia-based Juvenile Law Center. She and her colleague, Marsha Levick (her co-award recipient), led the effort to have the convictions of approximately 6,500 juveniles vacated after it was alleged that two Luzerne County, Pa. judges had received over $1.3 million each in kickbacks from a privately run juvenile detention center.
The Eugene M. Lang Opportunity Scholarship Program each year selects up to six (6) members of Swarthmore College’s sophomore class as Lang Scholars. Selection criteria include distinguished academic and extracurricular achievement, leadership qualities and demonstrated commitment to civic and social responsibility.

As its central feature, the Program offers each Scholar the opportunity and related funding to conceive, design and carry out an Opportunity Project that creates a needed social resource and/or effects a significant social change or improved condition of a community in the United States or abroad. In addition, it offers each Scholar a diverse succession of undergraduate and graduate financial and other benefits. The Program was conceived and endowed by Eugene M. Lang ’38.

This year the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility has hired an independent consultant to conduct a study of past Lang Opportunity Scholar’s projects and prepare a research report – LOS Retrospective – on the nature, experience, impact on Scholars and the communities they worked with, and status of projects developed and completed by Scholars during the previous 10 years, including the prospects of their ongoing viability and continuing benefits.

Andrea Taylor, Ph.D., the independent researcher who will be conducting the LOS Retrospective, will be creating a brief on-line survey for completion by Lang Scholars and may be contacting you for a more in-depth conversation. We fully support her efforts and hope that you will feel comfortable participating in the research project and conveying your full range of experiences and ideas. We are excited to be doing this and are anticipating the outcomes will impact the future direction of the LOS program.

In Gratitude

Heartfelt thanks to Eugene M. Lang ’38 for his continued support and generosity to the Lang Opportunity Scholarship Program and Swarthmore College.

Many thanks to the Lang Scholars who contributed to this newsletter! If you would like to share your “dogfish” story, pictures or a class note, please email Jennifer Magee, jmagee1@swarthmore.edu.

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