



**Remarks for Eileen Lawal
Recipient of the Girls Inc. – Strong, Smart, and Bold Award
Weds, May 7, 2008**

Good afternoon and thank you for honoring me with the **Strong, Smart, and Bold** award from Girls Incorporated of Greater Houston. Thank you to Chree Boydston, a good friend and Girls Inc. Board member, for the wonderful introduction and the presentation of the award.

Let me also extend a very special thanks to Girls Inc. Executive Director Sally Fitzgerald for your leadership and for providing a vital voice for the needs of today's young girls and women.

I also appreciate the efforts of the Girls inc. Board members. Your consistent and dedicated work helps to improve the lives of hundreds of young women for a future of healthy self-esteem, personal ownership, and pride. We are all grateful for your commitment.

I also want to thank Steve and Leticia Trauber for co-chairing this wonderful event today. They've done this wonderful dance of identifying funding for this worthwhile organization and will no doubt do it again.

I would like to recognize my husband, Kase Lawal, who's in the audience today, as well as many of my family and friends who are in attendance this afternoon.

Most especially, let me thank the parents in the audience today for being here for this very significant event in the life of your daughter and by encouraging her curiosity for education through Girls Inc.

I know you have made many sacrifices in order for your daughters to participate in the programs. The past few years I have attended Girls Inc. Luncheons I have always been very impressed and touched by the spirit of the family and friends that attend this annual event.

So how does a young girl grow up to be **Strong, Smart and Bold** woman especially in a society that does not usually associate these adjectives with women?

I am the youngest of 10 siblings. I grew up in a no-nonsense household where my parents instilled in all of us one constant theme that they (my parents) were equal opportunity employers and we were equal opportunity employees. There was always something for us to do - cooking or mowing the yard, changing spark plugs, sewing a button on a shirt, doing laundry or washing dishes. And it didn't matter if you were male or female - all genders were required to participate.

When I was younger I had various jobs. I babysat, raked leaves, mowed lawns, worked at a school concession stand, waited tables at a restaurant, and helped customers at a department store. This was part of the "wash on, wash off" **strength** training similar to Mr. Miyagi in *the karate kid* that my parents used to develop the mental focus that we children needed on the path to success.

Ironically, as an adult with my own children I found myself once again working in the concession stand. The menu has not changed very much. There are still hotdogs, hamburgers, sodas, candy, popcorn, pretzels and ice cream.

I share this experience with you because even though I completed those jobs years ago and probably thought that I would never do those things again as an adult, I revisited

the concession stand job. The lesson here is that skills you learned yesterday are all a part of your life's foundation to help you recognize that there are always lessons to learn.

There was never a question about whether I would complete high school, go to college and graduate from college – never. Completing my education was always the expectation in my family. My parents always told me and my brothers and sisters that we could do anything no matter what “that” was or how high the goal.

You can do that – be an astronaut and walk on the moon, be a surgeon and perform heart transplants, be the guardian of the community as Plato described for politics, or channel the creative spirit for success in the performing and visual arts. They wanted us to dream big and with an open and limitless imagination.

And that was just the formal education portion of the training. They also wanted us to be good human beings. This is the type of person that William Menninger's describes as someone who exhibits sincerity, personal integrity, humility, courtesy, wisdom, and charity during the most important times in a person's life - not when everyone is looking, but when no one is.

My parents encouraged us to discover and to embrace our passion for life whatever it was. They knew that we would discover what we loved to do and by being paid to do what we loved to do it would represent the attainment of our personal and financial satisfaction. A **smart** person understands that life is about options and that when you have options you have a life.

They also provided the life exposure we needed, which piqued our curiosity about the world. As an adult I recognize the value in this training. Because of them I consider community service just as important as working on a job from day to day. I also understand the value of being a team player. Through my various life competitions I learned how to win graciously and how to lose graciously.

John Wesley once said:

Do all the good you can,
by all the means you can,
in all the ways you can,
in all the places you can,
at all the times you can,
to all the people you can,
as long as ever you can

My parents condensed this very famous quote into this sentence: “do all you can, can all you can, while you can, as long as you can.” I heard this version over and over again among my parents and their friends.

This was their charge to us and also the way they greeted us upon arrival and departure. I learned much later in life that John Wesley was the original author of this quote. Of course, he said it much differently, but my parents and their friends said it much the same spirit.

I am so inspired by all of your **bold** stories and I know how determined you were to complete this first phase of your life. Girls’ Inc. has given you a strong foundation upon which to begin an even brighter future. Remember these lessons. Now all that’s left for you to do is to go out there and do it.

Thank you and god bless you!