



IN MEMORY OF
IGNATIUS ADANGA
CHARLES LESPERANCE
SEE WONG SHUM

September 11th Memorial Program for Regional Transportation Planning:

Biographies



Participants in the Academic Initiative, September 11th Memorial Program

September, 2011

Biographies

Ignatius Udo Adanga



Ignatius Udo Adanga was born 62 years ago in Nigeria. As a young man, he left home for Lagos, the capital. He moved on to Liberia and then Germany before migrating to New York some two decades ago.

Mr. Adanga's quest for a better life led him through a series of city and state jobs in housing, probation, children's services and, finally, the planning department of the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, at the World Trade Center.

For all that, Mr. Adanga struck those who knew him as energetic rather than restless. He always seemed to have spare time to help family members – his wife

Affiong, and three daughters – friends and co-workers.

“Your country or your nativity was immaterial,” said McLord Obiora, a friend, at a memorial service in November. Judith Wilson, a co-worker, said Mr. Adanga not only took the time to help her settle in but also became a mentor for her son Kareem, when he learned she was a single parent. “I was always going to him for advice,” she said.

Copyright © 2004 The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission

Affiong Adanga,

Wife of Ignatius, reflects on the September 11th Memorial Program

Thanks for inviting me to share my thoughts on the September 11th Memorial program.

On that fateful day, I spoke to my husband, Ignatius three times after the plane hit the north tower before it actually collapsed.

It was a traumatic experience to watch a building collapse with your loved one buried in it. I was thrown into this world of depression, pain and loneliness. Then it dawned on me, what about the colleagues and co-workers that experienced this trauma first hand. How are they feeling?

Then the September 11th Memorial Program was started. Defining the mission and scope, establishing the criteria and the selection process. The depth of the commitment of NYMTC to keep the memories of Ignatius

Adanga, Charles Lesperance and See Wong Shum alive just blows my mind. My family is humbled and honored by it.

My husband left home as a young man trying to make a life for himself. He was able to educate himself and he loved to learn new things and he impacted young lives when he was alive. I am honored that this Memorial Program has given deserving students an opportunity to thrive in their respective fields. I know Ignatius is smiling down from heaven.

Life is a journey marked by bumps and bruises but one has to stay positive and live life expecting the best. Thanks NYMTC for the September 11th Memorial Program. It is a lasting tribute to Ignatius, Charles and See Wong. God bless you all.

Charles Lesperance



Charles Lesperance loved the good life, and he loved to learn. He was a pro at cooking salmon, had season tickets to the opera, and could take a computer apart and put it back together again. He had an M.B.A. from Columbia and enough credits for a second bachelor's degree. The Saturday after Thanksgiving, Mr. Lesperance, 55, was supposed to marry Renee Alexander, whom his daughter described as "like the love of his life."

"I really tried to go about being as normal as I possibly could," Ms. Alexander said of that day. "I just didn't know what to do. I did not know what to do. I figured it's just a day; it'll come and go. But then his birthday was right after that. Holidays are very difficult.

Mr. Lesperance had spent his early childhood in Haiti, and he and Ms. Alexander enjoyed traveling to the Caribbean, espe-

cially St. Martin, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Martinique and St. Lucia.

"We were always very at peace and comfortable back there," she said. He wanted to go back to the blue water of the Caribbean. He loved it," she said of her fiancé, who had spent his early childhood in Haiti.

Nilaja Shealy, the second of his three daughters, remembers the lesson she learned from her father, who was a systems analyst with the State Department of Transportation. "The biggest thing that my father did, that anyone should try to do in their life, is to always improve, to always continually seek to be better," she said. "I think he did that."*

Copyright © 2004 The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission.

Renee Alexander,

Fiancé of Charles, reflects on the September 11th Memorial Program

Thanks for inviting me to share experiences.

First, let me begin by saying what it was like for me to be involved in the process. I felt genuinely welcomed and included from the very beginning. It was really exciting to meet at the very beginning, create the logo, define the mission and scope, establish the criteria, and begin reaching out to applicants through various channels.

The office was temporarily relocated to Long Island City, and I trekked out there on a number of occasions. I was truly amazed at the level of passion and commitment to this endeavor. It was heartfelt

Everyone really wanted to contribute. It was the first time that I realized how traumatic the 9/11 attacks were to those of you who were in the North Tower that fateful morning.

Up until this point, I was experiencing the tragedy through the lens of my personal loss: seeing Charles leave the house that fateful morning twice – once to vote then

again when he returned to pick up his laptop before heading to work. Working on this project really got me to think about and feel your organization's loss of three colleagues.

It was abundantly evident how much they meant to NYMTC and how grieved you were when they perished. These words cannot describe how impactfully this experience resonated with me.

I was struck by the level of professionalism that went into the planning. Colleagues from regional organizations attended and offered an abundance of suggestions. Good ideas seemed to flow from around the room and the phone. The energy was exuberant and uplifting.

After we structured the program, I received cover letters, resumes, and evaluation forms, and settled into the process of reading, assessing, and ranking our applicants.

It was exhilarating to review the applications of ambitious and well-deserved young adults who were seeking opportunities to

further their education by applying to our program. Todd [Goldman] did an excellent job of coordinating this effort. I attended several sessions where the recipients were awarded their scholarships. And I really appreciated speaking and being asked to participate. It was an honor.

Charles loved knowledge. He loved to learn. He was inquisitive and always wanted to know more about how things worked. The students we selected over the years embodied a quest for knowledge and a discipline for problem-solving; they exemplified all we set out to accomplish better. There is no greater tribute to your three colleagues

They are bright, ambitious minds with a strong work ethic; students committed to making transportation systems work

From my vantage point, I am committed to personal growth and development. In 2006, I returned to Cornell University, my alma mater, to work for the school, completed my doctorate, and have continued to make progress. I was recently appointed Associate Dean of Students at Cornell University, and I am thrilled to be working with students again.

My life was shattered on September 11, 2001; however, I continue to move forward, without ever forgetting the unimaginable events of that awful day. I feel as though I am part of the NYMTC family and I hope you continue to include me in future gatherings and events.



See Wong Shum



Globetrotting was just one of See Wong Shum's interests. Born in Hong Kong, he migrated to the U.S. in the late 80's, leaving behind his years teaching high school biology – his college major – and being a corrections officer. Between earning an MBA at the State University of New York, Albany, in management information systems, and his work in the New York State Department of Health and the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, he traveled to Europe, South America, Mexico, India and other destinations. His wife Rebecca, whom he wed in 1992, remarked that it would have been nice if he'd waited to take her along on some of those trips.

When Shum wasn't on the road, he read voraciously, books of all kinds: finance, science, politics, religion, mysteries. On September 11, 2001, he was busy at yet another passion: his **computer and his information systems job at NYMTC**. Technology bonded him

with Rebecca, herself a programmer.

Shum called Rebecca "the glue that held his family together." Their two children, Leon and Chanel, were the highlights of their lives. "His stories centered on them," a colleague recalled. "He worried about their health when they became ill." And with good reason. Shum was acquainted with tragedy. He'd lost two siblings in accidents and was the only remaining son in his close-knit family.

Since 9/11, Rebecca hasn't had much time to pursue Shum's other interests: movies and working out at health clubs. She's quit her job and devoting her time to raising Leon and Chanel. Family is of utmost importance to her, too, especially now.

© 2008 September 11th Memorial Program. All rights reserved

Rebecca Shum,

Wife of See Wong Shum, reflects on the September 11th Memorial Program

I was touched when I first heard that the September 11th Memorial Program would be established as a living memorial to my husband, See Wong Shum and his two colleagues, Ignatius Adanga and Charles Lesperance. In remembering them in such a noble way, I feel immensely grateful and honored that I could be part of it.

With the support and contribution from everyone, the program is up and running. I was taken aback by how impressive the concept, design, planning, coordination and organizing was that contributed to the success. Being busy with two children, I wish I could have been more involved. I was involved in the first year and again this year. Each time it stirs up a lot of emotions and feelings. It took a lot out of me. I feel drained and exhausted. But yet I gained my strength back afterward and grew even stronger.

I know Shum wants me to do it. As his

first job, Shum was a high school teacher.

He once said the best we could give for our children is education. Their biggest asset is their knowledge, not the inheritance. It is not easy to assess and rank the applicants since their work and credentials are so outstanding and extraordinary. The scholarship recipients throughout the years are truly the rising stars of the transportation sector. They will continue to walk their path and make their mark along the way both for themselves, and also for Shum, Ignatius and Charles.

A big piece of us was gone along with all the victims on September 11, 2001. But this doesn't stop my children, Leon and Chanel, from turning into young and beautiful teenagers. They will definitely continue their journey of life and live their life fully with the biggest inheritance that their Dad had left for them