

# FELISHA RAMQUAR



**JA NEW YORK 2011 STUDENT HONOREE**

**12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE**

**ACADEMY OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM,  
BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**

Good Evening, my name is Felisha Ramquar and I am a senior at The Academy of Hospitality and Tourism in Brooklyn. [PAUSE] I would like to thank Junior Achievement of New York for selecting me as a 2011 student honoree. I feel very privileged and humbled by this recognition. I began my education in Trinidad where academic standards are high, but opportunities are limited for personal and professional exploration. Back then, I never knew that Junior Achievement existed and cannot believe that I am standing before you as an ambassador for this prestigious organization. I am thankful for this opportunity and would like to share with you how JA has helped to support my growth and my dreams for the future.

Tonight you will hear a lot about the power of role models in the lives of young people. Role models come in many forms. For me, the late Benazir Bhutto, the first female prime minister of Pakistan is a symbolic role model. Bhutto's journey has inspired me to be disciplined and focused in pursuit of my dreams. Her life taught me that even the toughest setbacks can be overcome with dedication. Because of her, after I lost the student government election in my sophomore year, I did not give up. I ran again. Unfortunately, I didn't win the second time either, but am happy that I gave it my all.

Another mentor for me is my teacher Karen Francis, who has dedicated her life to developing others. Ms. Francis has given me many opportunities to explore my interests and helped me to develop my goals. She introduced me to JA, where I've have been fortunate to participate in various programs that have enriched my life. I can't begin to thank Ms. Francis enough for the guidance she has given me over the last several years. JA opened up my world by providing me with job shadow

experiences at companies like Deloitte and AT&T. Meeting successful professionals at various levels of their career development, listening to their advice and being exposed to different opportunities, has given me hope that with a good education and the right skills, there are countless opportunities out there for young people like me. [PAUSE] JA has also taught me the value of learning through giving back. Thanks to the High School Heroes program, I've been able to volunteer in Brooklyn classrooms to teach money management skills to elementary school students. [PAUSE] Through JA, I also attended the NY Women in Communications Conference and participated on a youth panel at The United Nations. JA has helped me to identify how to succeed in the future, and encouraged me to develop the confidence to follow through even when it is difficult to do so.

Then there are the role models that live in your heart, memory and soul. My older sister Shereen has been a strong foundation in my life. She has had to sacrifice a lot to take care of me. She is financially smart, independent, and works hard for our family. Shereen has always provided me with a supportive and nurturing environment. My sister is also very

passionate about many subjects. Her avid knowledge and constant study encourages me to explore my interests. When I became fascinated with photography, Shereen had every issue of National Geographic on hand. I hope to be like her in so many ways. [PAUSE] I look up to you Shereen, my second mother, for so many reasons and I thank you for your love and support.

My mother, Shaffira, who passed away after battling with illness in 2005 is and forever will be a constant source of inspiration to me. Her achievements, actions, and character drive me to succeed everyday of my life. My mother made difficult decisions like leaving her family in Trinidad to move to New York so she could make a better life. Her risk taking has taught me to never be afraid to go out there and follow my dreams. My mother worked tirelessly to help my father start his dental business and provided support to her family in Trinidad. Her spirit and enthusiasm will always inspire me. I am proud to be receiving this award tonight on my mother's birthday and know that she is proud of me.

Because I have experienced loss at a young age, I fear losing my loved ones and worry for my family. This is why it is important for me to live up to my family's expectations and accomplish my goals. Many in my family did not have the resources to advance into higher education though they desired to do so. However, they have always taught me to take advantage of every opportunity. Therefore finishing my education and developing my talents are paramount to me.

There are many young people like me in New York City and Long Island. Many have lives that are full of challenge, loss and disappointment and because of this; it's hard for them to imagine a future of hope. All kids want to learn, but sometimes the difficulties in life get in the way. Many young people are not as fortunate as Melissa and me to have multiple sources of inspiration and support. This is why JA is important. By bringing role models into the classroom, by providing students with important knowledge; and by taking kids out of their environment, JA shows students pathways that are reachable to them. I hope you will continue to provide your support to reach more young people with your

message of hope and inspiration. Thank you for your time and for this honor.