



A Storyteller with Purpose

TRYMAINE LEE
Pulitzer Prize-winning Journalist,
MHS Class of 1996

Trymaine Lee, '96, was a young staff writer on the city desk at the *Times-Picayune* when Hurricane Katrina's fury bore down on New Orleans. Stranded and cut off from communications along with the thousands of other victims, Trymaine was determined to stay and report on the story as it unfolded. Setting aside his own safety, Trymaine worked tirelessly to record the personal stories of struggle and survival.

"As I interviewed the victims, I quickly understood the profound importance to them of my getting their stories out to the rest of the country. Their needs were more important than mine. Much like Milton Hershey's world view, it became instinctual to make sure I didn't put myself first," said Trymaine.

Trymaine realized he had a gift for writing in the sixth grade when he won his first writing award, but saw little hope of having that talent nurtured consistently in the over-burdened school district in which he lived. While he enjoyed a stable and loving home, his mother wanted to give him more opportunity and so enrolled him in MHS in the seventh grade. He eagerly took advantage of everything that MHS had to offer and was active in basketball, football, track, intramural baseball and Boy Scouts.

Milton Hershey School's focus on building character and providing children with the skills necessary to be successful in all aspects of life gave Trymaine many opportunities to foster his love of writing and develop his skills. The classes he took at MHS and the teachers he worked with nurtured his commitment to writing and bolstered his confidence.

Trymaine's love for writing continued through college. Through an internship and jobs at Philadelphia-area newspapers he discovered journalism and importantly, a gift for getting people to open up to him.

"I try to approach people in a genuine way so I can tell their story. These people could be my mother or my brother, and I want to tell their story," he said.

Trymaine pursued his passion for writing stories while becoming the best person he could be. What he could not have foreseen as a seventh grader was that his commitment to seeing the humanity in people would one day lead to winning the Pulitzer Prize, not once, but twice.

The Hurricane Katrina story, "Nightmare in the 9th Ward All Too Real for One Woman," was one of a series of articles that won the 2006 Pulitzer Prize for Breaking News Reporting and Public Service. That same year, he was co-winner of the Emerging Journalist of the Year Award given by the National Association of Black Journalists. In 2009, working for *The New York Times*, Trymaine was part of a Pulitzer Prize winning team for Breaking News Reporting.

"I am grateful for the opportunities that MHS gave me. I have these opportunities because of the generosity of others, and I want to return the favor by helping other young journalists develop their craft." To that end, he encourages and coaches young writers through the National Association of Black Journalists and the New York Times Student Journalism Institute, and hopes to give them the same opportunities he was given early in his life when his mother enrolled him in the MHS.

"I think the true appreciation for MHS may not come until later in life. As an adult, I look back and realize that the school played such a major role in shaping who I am."