

RHODES GRADUATION ADDRESS – 9TH APRIL 2010

Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Distinguished Office bearers in the University, Deans of the Faculties, Proud Parents and Partners, Manene namanenekazi, Graduands.

Congratulations

1. This is a wonderful occasion for all of us here tonight.
2. We celebrate and applaud the hard work, sacrifice, discipline and achievement on the part of so many people: parents and partners, teachers and administration and especially, the graduands.
3. For everyone here this is an occasion where we give concrete expression to the local saying “umntu ngumntu ngabantu” – a person is a person by the people or each one of us achieves our potential as a human being, our ubuntu, because of other human beings.
4. Congratulations to all graduands. The journey to your degree or diploma cannot always have been as smooth as you would like - early morning lectures, overdue assignments, too many pages and not enough time, a life to explore rather than be spent at a desk. Yet you've done it.
5. As our vice-chancellor, Dr Badat, said at last years graduation– you have participated in a “ partnership, a relationship of mutual commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, to the development of expertise and skills and to the embrace of appropriate values and attitudes”.

6. Congratulations to all parents and partners. Umbulelo nohalaliselo lonke kunibazali nabalingane. Sibulela ukusiza kwenu nokuxhasa kwenu ene nikezele kuyo kwezizingane ngalo lonke ixesha lwayo kuzifundo zabo. Your hard work, support, participation and love over many years have brought these graduands to this day.
7. Congratulations to the academic staff. It is your research, your ideas, your debate, your lectures, your time advising and counseling which have guided your students towards their achievements and this occasion.
8. Congratulations to those who keep the University going – whether administrative officers, gardeners, residence staff, the office of the Vice Chancellor. You make it all possible.

Thank you

9. Chancellor, thank you for the honour of this award tonight.
10. In accepting this honour, I understand that this University is recognizing the collaborative work and shared struggles of many different people. It is a further reason for me to choose my theme – “umntu ngumntu ngabantu” for this talk.

A South African Life Journey – Debts of Honour

11. In reflecting on why I am being honoured by our University and in reflecting on the achievements of all you graduands tonight, I have thought about the way in which our lives have been and continue to be created and nurtured and developed by and because of other people.
12. For myself, I cannot recognize or acknowledge all those to whom I owe debts of honour, but I can mention some of those ways in which my particular South African life journey has brought me here today.
13. I grew up in a family where my parents were loving and caring to their children. Importantly they were actively involved in their wider communities - their churches, party politics, the Black Sash, local

volunteer civic groups. It is because of them that I came to Rhodes having no real idea what my major subjects would be but determined to join NUSAS, which the then Prime Minister had described as a radical communist organization. I phoned home to report that I had been successful and was now a card carrying subversive. I also reported that I had registered to study Latin - my father was rather horrified at my subject choice – the next day I think I enrolled for something equally useful - visual communications. My first special guest here tonight is my mother – Margaret Satchwell – without whom I would not be but also without whom I would never have engaged with South African issues and society during the years of apartheid.

14. While a student at Rhodes I joined the Black Sash – a group of women who came together to defend human rights and protest injustice. For years the Black Sash protested the pass laws, detentions, forced removals and many of the injustices of apartheid. It was one of few organized groupings which spoke out as loudly and publicly as possible. My second special guest here tonight was one of our chairpersons and a stalwart of that organization – Rosemary Smith – who remains a trustee of the Black Sash to this day.
15. A significant contribution by the Black Sash to protest, research, activism and concrete help were the Advice Offices. In Grahamstown we had some rooms near the station where volunteers worked with South Africans who were faced with forced removal from their homes in Fingo Village, denial of pensions and other administrative injustice. Esinye isimenywa esikhethekileyo esikhoyo ngobu busuku ngu Mary Kota ophangele e Grahamstown Advice Office kusukela ekuqaliseni kwayo. My third special guest tonight is Mary Kota who worked in the Grahamstown Advice Office from its beginnings. She taught me never to send people away with the bad news that we could not help without also sitting quietly and holding that persons hand to pass on sympathy and strength.
16. Our recognition and understanding of oppression is often clouded. We may ignore or neglect what is closest to us – usually because we are part of it. My fourth special guest tonight is the sociologist Jacklyn Cock who did the first study in South Africa of domestic exploitation, the relationship between maids and madams in the

- Eastern Cape. She continues to challenge our thinking and our personal responses to issues ranging from environmental pollution to food profiteering.
17. My years as an attorney were a supporting role to the many courageous boys and girls, men and women who were inspired by ideas of freedom and principles of justice and dignity and who paid the price in bannings, detentions, torture, imprisonment. I have no special guest here today who represents those extraordinary people. But I would like to acknowledge two persons. One is Thandi, daughter of the President of Convocation and Mrs Gqubule, who was a Wits student when I first met her in the detention cells of Johannesburg Prison. The other is a friend and former client who is a member of this University – Journalism Professor Guy Berger – whose enquiring mind and opposition to oppression led him to solitary confinement and then years in the political cells of Pretoria Central Prison.
18. In my more recent life I entered the judiciary. Shortly after doing so I wrote to the then Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development pointing out that my female life's partner was excluded from judicial benefits such as a pension and asking him to rectify the situation. I applaud a country where I could write such a letter and know that my job, my livelihood and my self worth would not be jeopardized because I had done so. Unfortunately, we had to resort to litigation which no one enjoyed. Again I applaud a Constitution which protects and preserve the dignity of the minority, the marginalized, the unrecognized and the unfashionable. My most special guest tonight is my life partner – Lesley Carnelley.
19. I grew to adulthood and spent most of my working life at the height of the apartheid era. Many of my contemporaries at Rhodes in the late 60s and early 70s left South Africa and made lives abroad. They did so for many reasons, not least because some of them felt they could not live in an unjust society and they did not believe that apartheid oppression would ever be ended.
20. I ask you to be different from my generation. Although South Africa remains troubled and challenged in many ways, don't give up on our country because of its difficulties. Stay here and contribute

to ensuring that everyone enjoys “human dignity, equality and freedom” as promised in our Constitution. My final two special guests tonight – my stepdaughter and son in law – Jaqui and Neil Hobkirk – are two young or youngish South Africans. They live in Johannesburg where they have a daughter at school. They both work for international companies, have traveled the world and been offered employment on other continents. Yet they choose to live and work in South Africa. They are here because they see a future for themselves and their family in this country. They work hard and contribute to the South African economy and therefore to the South African community and, in the long run, to our peace and development. I ask that you do as well.

Your Debts of Honour and Your Life Journeys

21. You may be thinking to yourselves, my biographical acknowledgment of debts of honour, has little to do with your graduation tonight. I would suggest that we have more in common than you might think.

22. Firstly, we all have debts of honour.

23. You are the Rhodes graduates of tonight because someone, somewhere recognized that you had potential and gave you opportunities. You are the product of the aspirations and hopes of your biological or created families. They wanted you to fulfill your dreams, use your talents, enjoy a good life. At some time in your life you have been inspired or encouraged by others to try harder, to achieve a little bit more or simply to take the step next forward. You can never claim to have done it alone, to have reached today's success without the assistance of others. If not your parents or family then your teachers. If not them, then a role model to whom you may be close or about whom you may only have read or heard. Not least the South African taxpayer has contributed towards your success tonight – whether he or she be a mining magnate or a factory worker.

24. Tonight, we all acknowledge that our lives are the culmination of many people's love, hopes, interventions, support and guidance. None of us have done anything alone. To the graduands I would say:

Bakhumbuleni, nibahoye, futhi nibabonise imbeko. Remember them, honour them. Umntu ngumntu ngabantu.

25. Secondly, my life's journey shows that it has never been easy for anyone to be a South African.

26. I venture to suggest that it is not easy now to be proudly South African. We know the disappointments and failures in today's society. If I may quote from a recent article written by the former Minister of Science and Technology, Mosibudi Mangena:

“Mandela's legacy is a blend of honour, sincerity, sacrifice, hard work, commitment, patience, patriotism, selfless service to others and to your country.

It seems these admirable values are fading in our public life. In their place we see the relentless pursuit of easy or illicit riches acquired as quickly as possible, and by any means necessary. We know that our kids learn more by watching us than by taking instructions from us. They would know that you don't have to be skilled or knowledgeable to win a tender. You need only to be connected through family or political affiliations, the golf course or social drinking. Our kids might just gain the impression that councilors and municipal managers don't have to be competent. They can see dirty streets, potholes everywhere, uncollected refuse, and yet the municipal manager is having a conspicuously good and easy life.

It seems we might be nurturing a society that worships bling, but exchews hard work, honesty, service and commitment. It would be easy to realize governments' priorities if every man and woman did his or her work with competence, dedication and honesty – and if they were appointed after answering the question ‘What can you do?’ instead of the question ‘Who are you connected with?’ “

(The Star, February 23 2010)

27. I doubt that we will disagree with the former Ministers' concerns and sentiments. But all is not doom and gloom. At an occasion such as this graduation, we are entitled to feel that this pessimism will be shortlived. We look at all of you tonight. You have demonstrated hard work, honesty, service and commitment. You will always be

able to answer the question ‘What can you do?’ with confidence and pride. You will be successful because of who and what you are and what you know and how you can put your knowledge into action. You are not chained to South Africa’s past. You are our future.

28. That future has great possibilities as well as great demands. But none of our current difficulties are insurmountable. Whichever and wherever you seek your future, remember what President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela said at his inauguration on 10 May 1994 “Our daily deeds as ordinary South Africans must produce an actual South African reality that will reinforce humanity’s belief in justice, strengthen its confidence in the nobility of the human soul and sustain all our hopes for a glorious life for all”.
29. All of us here in this hall tonight would like what Mr Mandela called your “daily deeds” to contribute to a similar result. Let your daily deeds rise above the current despondency and disillusionment. Be amongst those who do try to reinforce belief in justice. It is within your powers to strengthen confidence in the nobility of the human soul every day in little ways. Let your “daily deeds” work towards a better life for all.

Our humanity arises from other people

30. Tonight this University sends out into the world 198 graduates in the field of education, 65 graduates in the field of law and 56 graduates in the pharmaceutical sciences. This is a proud contribution to the South African community and to the wider world. And I am so pleased to have the opportunity to congratulate graduates in these fields tonight.
31. I have a special fondness for the field of education. I did a postgraduate National Higher Education Diploma while at Rhodes. I did teaching practices at schools some of you may know – Grey High School in Port Elizabeth and Victoria Girls High School in Grahamstown. I supported myself through my law degree teaching at DSG in Grahamstown and teaching night classes at the Technical College in Grahamstown. I loved teaching. I hope you do too.

32. If you have joined the teaching profession or returned to it or if you are engaged in education policy, we applaud you for so many reasons. We hope you will open minds to knowledge, enquiry and debate. You will show young people what it means to challenge and think for themselves instead of following demagogues. You will ensure that young people have skills which enable them to live rich lives and to participate fully in South African society. You will pass on the message that one can hold one's head high when answering the question "What can you do".
33. Unsurprisingly, I have a special interest in the future careers of young lawyers. We judges are notoriously short tempered over all the tasks which are given to junior lawyers – the indexing and pagination of papers, the missing pages, the lost annexures. So, if I have been cruel to any of you in court, just whisper to the Chancellor when he caps you and he'll take away my degree.
34. You may have chosen to practice law in the private or public sectors. You may have decided that you are best suited to the world of business. You may have gone into the public service. Whichever it is practice your profession with integrity. If you work in BEE deals bring ingenuity and fairness to the contracts not cronies or frontmen. Add value to everything you do, don't be party to corruption. Choose to advise corporate clients how they can protect the environment not how they can evade environmental law and regulation. Have convictions and principles in your practice of the law and don't just represent those who are evading conviction. If you work in a parastatal or joined the civil service - remember the operative words – service and civility.
35. When I lived in Hobson House, the clever girls did pharmacy. These students had endlessly long pracs every afternoon. They also seemed to take endless long walks in the Botanical Gardens with handsome Pharmacist boyfriends in the even later afternoon.
36. Last year I began to take new interest in the pharmaceutical profession. On 29 September I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had a bilateral mastectomy and since then I have undergone some quite powerful and terrible chemotherapy. I am now on a less destructive chemotherapy which has been specially rearranged to

allow me to travel to this event. I have been in very scary whirlpools and I have been hauled out of them by love and friendship. I hope to live because of the skills of a great many people including surgeons and oncologists. Behind the current experts who look after me is your profession - the pharmacists, scientists and medics who have invented or discovered Adriamycin, Cyclophosphamide, Kyrtril, Decadron, Taxol, Phenergan, Herceptin and all the other drugs on which I, and so many others, rely. Thank you.

37. Some of you will do research pharmacy – thank you again.

Encourage the companies for whom you work to bring your products within the reach of those who need it. Currently it is not always accessible. You will remember that it took the very public activism of the TAC to ensure that ARV treatment is available at affordable price to those millions of South Africans who would otherwise have died of AIDS. The one drug which will save my life costs well over half a million rand. My medical aid scheme will not pay this cost. I ask that in your work as research and management pharmacists you bear in mind the need for your products to be available to those who need them. Health before profits.

38. If you decide to work as a dispensing pharmacist, remember there are people like me who rely on your scientific knowledge, who look to you for solutions to what seem insurmountable problems and I can assure you, when we visit your pharmacies in our need, we value your patience and kindness.

Conclusion

39. Whatever your futures, the value of your lives will emerge from your interactions with others – your families and friends, your colleagues and peers, professional and community leaders in the wider South African and even international community. Each of your humanity will emerge and develop because of those other men and women and children whose lives you will touch and influence.

40. That you will influence the lives of others is beyond doubt. You have shown your intelligence. Your capacity for hard work is being acknowledged tonight. You have received a superior education. As

- a result you Rhodes graduates enjoy privileged status and carry boundless responsibilities. As South Africans and Africans you face special challenges. You can be a resource and offer leadership to all who live in this country and on this continent. Your “daily deeds” will be judged by what you give to the lives of others.
41. I hope you will have love and fulfillment in your private lives and homes. I hope you will be active in your communities – whether in churches, mosques, shuls, civic and social groups
42. But I would suggest that your humanity or ubuntu will emerge not only from comfortable and easy relationships and activities. Ubuntu will be a quality tested and challenged and truly developed in difficult and uncomfortable times. I hope that you use your status and influence to raise your voice on behalf of those who have no voice. Identify not only with the influential but with the marginalized and powerless. Take up issues and fight for them on behalf, not only of yourselves, but for others weaker than yourselves.
43. Tonight, in this gathering of your families, friends and teacher, we proudly celebrate your achievements. But we expect more of you in those “daily deeds” of which Mr Mandela spoke. We ask that in future years there will be other people in South Africa and elsewhere whose humanity and dignity you have acknowledged and enriched. They will then be the people who will affirm your humanity and dignity. Umntu ngumntu ngabantu.
44. Thank you ladies and gentlemen, manene manenekazi. To the graduates I say “good luck” “ndinifisela konke okuhle kukho konke enizonkwenza”
45. Thank you Mr Chancellor.