GOOD AFTERNOON! THANK YOU

Trustees', Faculty and Administration, Distinguished Guests, Graduates, Family and Friends.

- I CANNOT TELL YOU WHAT AN HONOR IT IS FOR ME TO SPEAK TO YOU ALL TODAY! THROUGHOUT MY CAREER I HAVE DONE RESEARCH AND SPOKEN ABOUT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT, AND EVERY TIME I TRACE THE DEVELOPMENT OF MY OWN SKILLS, I AM TAKEN BACK TO MY DAYS AND EXPERIENCES IN COLLEGE.

I WANTED VERY MUCH TO STAND HERE TODAY AND OFFER YOU THE DEFINITIVE RECIPE FOR SUCCESS – I ONLY WISH I HAD DISCOVERED IT SO THAT I COULD SHARE IT WITH ALL OF YOU! SANDWICHED IN BETWEEN THE GENERATION OF WOMEN, MOMS, WHO ALL STAYED HOME TO RAISE US, AND THE GENERATION THAT WOULD FOLLOW US – A GENERATION THAT HAD CHOICES TO MAKE ABOUT STAYING HOME OR GOING TO WORK, MY GENERATION WAS NOT ONLY TOLD WE COULD HAVE IT ALL, WE WERE EXPECTED TO PAVE THE ROAD THAT
WOULD GET US THERE AT THE SAME TIME THAT WE TRAVELLED IT. IT WAS BUMPY AT BEST – LEAVING ME TO ALWAYS ANSWER THE QUESTION I AM REPEATEDLY ASKED – “HOW DO YOU DO IT ALL?” WITH FOUR SIMPLE WORDS: “SOMEDAYS BETTER THAN OTHERS”.

BUT – I HAVE GARNERED WHAT SOME WOULD CALL WISDOM AND OTHERS MIGHT SAY LESSONS LEARNED, FROM MY ALMOST 60 YEARS OF LIFE, AND THOUGHT TODAY I WOULD SHARE A FEW POINTS BASED ON THAT.

I GRADUATED FROM SUNY ONEONTA IN 1978 – WITH A BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN THE VERY LUCRATIVE FIELD OF STUDIO ART – WITH ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA THAT SOMEDAY I WOULD LEAD THE UNITED STATES ARM THAT SUPPORTS THE ORGANIZATION THAT HAS SAVED MORE CHILDREN’S LIVES THAN ANY OTHER HUMANITARIAN CAUSE
EVER HAS. AT THAT TIME I HAD MY HEART SET ON GETTING ONE OF MY PAINTINGS INTO A MAJOR MUSEUM AND FINDING NO WAITING INVITATION TO DO SO, AND FACING THE REALITY THAT STARVING ARTISTS ACTUALLY REALLY COULD NOT AFFORD TO EAT – I RETURNED TO GRADUATE SCHOOL AND WENT IN A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT DIRECTION.

BUT WHEN I LOOK BACK, I REALIZE HAD I TRULY TAKEN STOCK OF WHO I WAS – NOT JUST OF WHAT I FELT LIKE STUDYING AT THE TIME, I MIGHT VERY WELL HAVE PREDICTED THAT I WOULD END UP DOING SOMETHING AKIN TO WHERE I AM TODAY. BECAUSE, I HAVE A PICTURE THAT STAYS IN MY MIND, WITH EVERYTHING I DO. IT IS A PICTURE OF A LITTLE GIRL, STANDING ON A DOCK, HOLDING THE HAND OF A LITTLE BOY. THE GIRL IS SIX YEARS OLD, THE BOY FOUR. THEY ARE GETTING READY TO BOARD A SHIP – BOUND FOR A COUNTRY THEY’VE NEVER BEFORE VISITED; THAT SPEAKS A LANGUAGE NEITHER OF THEM SPEAK; AND WHERE THEY ARE NOW EXPECTED TO LIVE. THEY’VE ONLY LEARNED THEY’D BE TRAVELLING A FEW SHORT DAYS BEFORE AND THEY
ARE TRAVELLING WITH NEITHER THEIR MOTHER OR THEIR FATHER, BUT
INSTEAD ARE ACCOMPANIED BY A WOMEN WHOSE LAST NAME THEY
KNOW – BUT WHOSE FIRST NAME THEY WILL NEVER KNOW – AND
WHOM AFTER THE JOURNEY THEY WILL NEVER SEE AGAIN. THE YEAR IS
1939, THE SHIP IS BOUND FOR THE UNITED STATES. THE LITTLE GIRL IN
THE PICTURE IS MY MOM – THE BOY, HER BROTHER, MY UNCLE & THEY
ARE BEING FRANTICALLY SENT AWAY BY THEIR PARENTS IN THE HOPES
THAT AS JEWS, THEY WILL BE SPARED THE HORRORS THAT THE NAZIS ARE
BRINGING TO BEAR ON THEIR COMMUNITY IN VIENNA. IT IS THE
ANONYMOUS WOMAN, WHOSE EFFORTS SAVED THE LIVES OF MY
MOTHER AND MY BROTHER, WHOSE LEGACY TAUGHT ME A LIFE
LESSON THAT IS TRULY PART OF THE FABRIC OF WHO I AM – THAT
LESSON: THAT INDEED, ONE PERSON CAN AND OFTEN DOES MAKE A
DIFFERENCE. I STAND HERE TODAY AS LIVING PROOF OF THE
DIFFERENCE HER ACTIONS MADE.

BUT THERE IS ANOTHER SHIP THAT LOOMS LARGE IN MY LIFE. THIS SHIP
WAS ONE THAT MY GRANDFATHER BOARDED, HAVING SPENT HIS LAST
DIME TO GAIN ACCESS TO IT AND TO THE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS THAT HE
HOPED WOULD SAVE HIS LIFE AS WELL. THAT SHIP, THE SS ST. LOUIS,
OFTEN REFERRED TO AS THE VOYAGE OF THE DAMN, DEPARTED FROM
EUROPE, BOUND FOR CUBA. MY GRANDFATHER BOARDED LIKE
EVERYONE ELSE, WITH PLANS TO SETTLE IN CUBA, SEND FOR HIS
CHILDREN AND ATTEMPT TO START LIFE AGAIN. HOWEVER, WHEN THE
BOAT ENTERED INTO CUBA’S HARBOR, CUBAN AUTHORITIES CAME
ABOARD AND INFORMED THE PASSENGERS THAT THEIR DOCUMENTS
WERE FRAUDULENT AND THEY WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED INTO THE
COUNTRY. THE BOAT SAT IN THE HARBOR FOR 40 DAYS WHILE THE
WORLD DEBATED THE FATE OF ITS PASSENGERS… EVEN THE UNITED
STATES REFUSED TO HELP, ULTIMATELY FORCING THE SHIP’S RETURN TO
EUROPE, WHERE MOST IF ITS PASSENGERS PERISHED AT THE HANDS OF
THE NAZIS. BUT MY GRANTHFATHER WAS ONE OF VERY FEW WHO
SURVIVED AND I HAD THE PRIVILEGE TO KNOW HIM AND LEARN FROM
HIM, AN EQUALLY IMPORTANT LESSON -- JUST WHAT HAPPENS WHEN
THE WORLD TURNS ITS BACK, IGNORES THE FACTS, AND ALLOWS
INNOCENT PEOPLE TO DIE.
THESE TWO LESSONS PROPELLED ME INTO VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES THAT ULTIMATELY GAVE ME A CAREER. BUT EVEN IF THE ACTIONS THEY RESULTED IN HAD REMAINED IN THE VOLUNTEER REALM, THEY TAUGHT ME THAT - WHEN I CARE, WHEN I ACT, WHEN I GIVE, MY LIFE IS AT ITS RICHEST. THIS UNIVERSITY UNDERSTANDS THAT MISSION; COMMITTED TO DIVERSITY AND GROWTH OF IDEAS, COMMITTED TO GIVING BACK. THIS IS AN INSTITUTION WHOSE STUDENTS CHOOSE COMMUNITY SERVICE TRIPS OVER TRADITIONAL SPRING BREAKS; AN INSTITUTION THAT RAISES MONEY FOR RELIEF EFFORTS IN HAITI, AND A COMMUNITY WHO Comes TOGETHER FOR A DAY OF SERVICE.

MY WORK, WHILE COMPLETELY SATISFYING, HAS SHOWN ME ANOTHER BIT OF WISDOM. THAT IS – THAT WE EACH TEND TO ISOLATE WHAT WE HEAR TO THOSE THINGS WE LISTEN FOR – INSTEAD OF LISTENING TO ALL THAT IS BEING SAID AROUND US. FOR EXAMPLE - DID YOU KNOW, THAT TODAY, AS WE CELEBRATE THIS MILESTONE IN YOUR LIVES, 17,000 CHILDREN, ALL UNDER THE AGE OF FIVE, WILL DIE OF CAUSES WE ALREADY KNOW HOW TO PREVENT, BUT JUST DON'T? AND 17,000
MY TRAVELS HAVE TAUGHT ME THAT – MOST PARENTS, REGARDLESS OF COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OR ECONOMIC SUCCESS, WANT THE SAME THINGS FOR OUR CHILDREN – WE WANT THEM TO BE HAPPY, WE WANT THEM TO BE EDUCATED, WE WANT THEM NOT TO GO HUNGRY, NOT TO BE SCARED, WE WANT THEM TO BE SAFE, WE WANT THEM TO BE ENABLED TO PURSUE WHATEVER DREAM THEY MIGHT HAVE. WE WANT THEM TO HAVE THE CHILDHOOD THEY DESERVE AND TO BE ENABLED TO ENJOY THE ADULTHOOD THAT FOLLOWS – Plain AND SIMPLE. THESE NOTIONS ARE NO MORE DEFINED BY OUR COUNTRY OF ORIGIN THAN CHILDREN SHOULD BE – IT IS TIME WE STOP DEFINING CHILDREN BY THEIR BORDERS - THEY ARE NOT KENYA’S CHILDREN, HAITI’S CHILDREN, VIETNAM’S CHILDREN, ETC – THEY ARE CHILDREN – DEFINED BY THEIR AGE - OUR CHILDREN – AND WE ARE THE GROWN-UPS. THE UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD STANDS TO PREPARE FUTURE LEADERS. IT AIMS TO ARM STUDENTS WITH THE TOOLS TO ACT, AND THE TOOLS TO LOOK OUT FOR THOSE WHO NEED HELP. STUDENTS WHO ARE TRULY, AS THE UNIVERSITY MOTTO SAYS, FOR HUMANITY.
TODAY, AS YOU GRADUATE, YOU JOIN THE RANKS OF ADULTHOOD. AT UNICEF WE HAVE COMMITTED TO WORK UNTIL THAT NUMBER, 17,000, IS BROUGHT ALL THE WAY DOWN TO ZERO. I BELIEVE ZERO IS POSSIBLE – I BELIEVE ANYTHING LESS IS UNACCEPTABLE. YOU CAN BE PART OF THAT EFFORT - I INVITE YOU TO OPEN YOUR EYES, YOUR EARS AND YOUR HEART BY GIVING VOICE TO THOSE LESS FORTUNATE THAN YOURSELF. YOU WILL NOT BE SORRY.

IF I AM LUCKY, I HOPE TO LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO GET A FEW YEARS IN ON MY FRONT PORCH, ROCKING IN MY FAVORITE CHAIR AND REFLECTING ON MY LIFE. IF I GET THAT CHANCE, I KNOW I WILL MEASURE MY SUCCESS FAR MORE BY THE DIFFERENCE I HAVE MADE THAN BY THE DOLLARS I HAVE EARNED. BUT THAT ALONE WILL NOT SUM IT UP.... WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY FINAL LESSON FOR SUCCESS—WHICH, QUITE SIMPLY IS, SHARE YOUR LIFE – DON’T FORGET TO TAKE TIME TO FALL IN LOVE. YOU WILL NOT FILL YOUR ENTIRE LIFE – IT WILL BE FILLED BY THOSE YOU LET INTO IT – BY THOSE WHO HAVE TRAVELLED
NEAR AND FAR TO BE WITH YOU TODAY, AND THOSE WHO WILL BE THERE FOR ALL OF YOUR FUTURE MILESTONES. I AM A LUCKY WOMAN FOR MANY REASONS – I HAD THE PRIVILEGE TO RECEIVE AN EDUCATION THAT ALLOWED ME TO GROW IN SO MANY WAYS...AND GAVE ME THE SKILLS AND THE CONFIDENCE TO GO WHERE LIFE LED ME – YOU TOO NOW HAVE ALL OF THAT... AND, I HAVE A CAREER THAT I LOVE, WITH A CAUSE THAT I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT, AND AM SUCCESSFUL ENOUGH TO STAND PROUD. BUT, THE TRUE SECRET TO MY SUCCESS IS THE FAMILY I GO HOME TO AND THE BLESSING OF THE FRIENDS THAT SURROUND US. THEY MAKE IT ALL WORTHWHILE. GRADUATES OF 2015, I WISH YOU ALL THIS AND MORE.