

My Rhodes Journey: Creating the Ties that Bind

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Bon Voyage Weekend Dinner
The Mayflower Hotel
Washington D.C., 27 September 2014

Thank you for inviting me to be here with you tonight. I am truly honored and delighted to have been asked to participate in this “Bon Voyage” weekend for you – the 110th class of American Rhodes Scholars. It’s so delightful to see familiar faces and to experience the vibrant American Rhodes Scholars community.

I looked back through the list of recent speakers, and I’m humbled to be included in such a group. As some of you might know, I was in the 77th class of Rhodes Scholars—yes, that was 33 years ago! We, like you, had a fantastic class – it’s great to see Ila Burdette and Dan Vincent with us this evening—and as our relationships continue to season over the years, they become even more precious. We, like you, carried with us portfolios of past achievements and triumphs over adversity, along with hopes and dreams for our futures. And, we, like you, wrestled with the notion of “fighting the worlds fight” – and continue to wrestle with it. What is it? How am I doing?

Tonight, I hope to share with you a little more about my personal journey and some thoughts on how it fits with Cecil Rhodes’ vision. Indeed, his will encourages Rhodes Scholars –you, me, so many of us in this room - ‘to esteem the performance of public duties as [their] highest aim’¹. American Rhodes Scholars have answered that call: Alain Locke, a short, gay

¹ Cecil Rhodes’ 1899 Will, paragraph 23

man that had the mettle to become the first African-American Rhodes Scholar in 1907, went on to become one of the primary architects of the Harlem Renaissance and Chair the department of Philosophy at Howard University²; Edwin Hubble, class of 1910, focused his scholarship on the study of law and ultimately became arguably the most important observational cosmologist of the 20th century; Supreme Court Justice, Byron “Whizzer” White from Ft Collins Colorado rose to serve as associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. More recently, Rhodes scholars like President Bill Clinton, and Naomi Wolf, have been public servants in one way or another³.

And, I’m not the only Armed Forces Rhodes Scholar: Admiral Turner with us this evening, General Wesley Clark, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during the Balkans War, Admiral Dennis Blair, former commander of the largest geographic command in the world—Pacific Command, Lt Gen Frank Klotz, the first commander of Air Force Global Strike Command, and Lt Gen Chris Miller, an endowed chair at our Air Force Academy all started their military career as Rhodes scholars⁴. It is to this distinguished group of alumni you are joining – it is an impressive group.

But, this list clearly doesn’t fully represent all Rhodes scholars. Nor does it fully represent the sheer breadth of the notion of “the world’s fight.” I find it helpful to recall that these distinguished Rhodes scholars started just like you in this room. Many are now scholars, artists, educators, writers, community leaders, doctors, lawyers, business leaders...parents and neighbors, whose names, like mine, are not so famous. Yet, in their corners of the world, they’re fighting the fight. They sat with their classmates at a dinner prior to their voyage – for many of

² Sellers, Frances Stead, “The Long Way Home,” *The Washington Post Magazine*, 14 Sep 2014

³ See <http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/about/rhodes-scholars/rhodes-scholars-complete-list> for a complete list of American Rhodes Scholars – accessed 26 September 2014

⁴ Ibid.

us from a certain vintage, literally an ocean voyage; in fact, my class sailed from New York City on the Queen Elizabeth II in 1981 – and wondered how they’d do, what they’d learn, and if they would live up to the expectations laid out in Rhodes’ will.

Cecil Rhodes was quite particular with what he was looking for in a Rhodes Scholar⁵: literary and scholarly attainments—something Rhodes off-the-cuff referred to as “smug.”⁶ Fondness and success in sports, such as cricket, football and the like—Rhodes referred to this attribute as “brutality,” though I’m not so sure when it comes to cricket. Do we have any cricket players in the room aside from Ambassador Westmacott? Rhodes also wanted to measure candidates on “tact and leadership,” listed in his will as qualities of “manhood,” which I’ll return to later, like truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness and fellowship. Finally, Rhodes wanted to emphasize what he called “moral rectitude,” codified in his will as moral force of character and of instincts to lead and take an interest in school mates—basically leadership and character. Ultimately, he suggested that students should not be merely bookworms, but should be future leaders. The American Rhodes Scholar, Frank “Sandy” Tatum, Class of 1947, once remarked, “President Abe Lincoln would have been the ideal candidate.”⁷ So, no pressure!

These qualities may be quite different, at least more broad than any other scholarship to which you might have applied – academics, character, leadership, and physical vigor. This is part of the unique Rhodes scholarship heritage – a past, present, and future you are joining. Cecil Rhodes initially started with a desire to promote bonds of sentiment between the “English

⁵ Cecil Rhodes’ 1899 Will and 1901 codicil, paragraph 23

⁶ See Ziegler, Philip, *Legacy, Cecil Rhodes, the Rhodes Trust, and Rhodes Scholarships*, Yale University Press, 2008, p. 18 for discussion on smug, brutality, tact and leadership, and moral rectitude.

⁷ Quoted in Ziegler, p. 31

speaking-people of the world.⁸” He later would add Germany suggesting that “The object is that an understanding between the three great powers will render war impossible.⁹” It is not clear that these intentions were entirely effective. However, what shines through is the emphasis on the importance of education, the opening of minds, and the suggestion that the way to make war impossible is through “educational relations,” which forge the “strongest tie.¹⁰” From my current office as a college president, termed Superintendent at the United States Air Force Academy to acknowledge I’m also the overall commander, I couldn’t agree more.

In fact, education has been intertwined with my sense of purpose from the start of my career. As a girl growing up in rural Iowa I had a reasonable sense of duty – do your best, tell the truth...and don’t bother other people. At that time I had only scant awareness of the Rhodes Scholarship, Oxford University, the full dimensions of public service, or even military service. Moreover, I was fortunate that I happened to graduate from high school on the bow wave of civil rights changes in the 1970’s. In 1975 President Ford signed legislation that integrated women into the same promotion system as men in the armed forces as well as allowing women to attend the federal military service academies and military pilot training¹¹. Hence, on June 26, 1976 157 young women reported up the “Bring Me Men” ramp at the US Air Force Academy to join about 1,300 male classmates. I arrived a year later when the classes were capped at approximately 12 percent women. Today, about 23% of every entering class are women. Even more happily for

⁸ See Ziegler, p.8

⁹ Quoted from Cecil Rhodes 1899 Will and 1901 codicil.

¹⁰ As quoted in “History of the Rhodes Trust,” <http://www.rhodeshouse.ox.ac.uk/rhodes-trust/history> - accessed 26 September 2014

¹¹ See for example, <http://www.womensmemorial.org/H&C/History/milacad.html> - accessed 26 September 2014

me, in 1976, the English Parliament eliminated the barrier to women when Parliament struck the “qualities of manhood” from the Rhodes scholarship requirements¹².

Attending the Air Force Academy under these circumstances, naïve to the bitter political battles that had been fought to effect this change, was eye opening, to be euphemistic. It was actually pretty shocking in 1977 – yes, 37 years ago when I entered the Academy. I was consistently challenged for my intent and presence. This was one of my first and most intense object lessons in perseverance. Fortunately, however, I found that in spite of the distractions, there were positive mentors at the Academy, and I found that, to the consternation of the detractors, I could actually excel across the Academy’s pillars: academically, athletically, I used to have some skills on the basketball court, and militarily, I was the first female cadet wing commander.

I benefitted from encouraging mentors who broadened my perspective and pressed me outside my comfort zone academically, as well as in leadership roles, and thus helped prepare me to compete for and be selected as the first female Rhodes Scholar from the Academy. By the way, Andrea Hollen, Class of 1980, was West Point’s first women Rhodes Scholar and Emmy Probasco, seated with me this evening, was the first women scholar from Annapolis. So, being with you here tonight brings me back to early fall of 1981, when I was sitting in your seat.

I was an Operations Research major, which balanced math and econometrics, at the Academy and read the Politics and Economics track of the PPE, Politics, Economics, and Philosophy, course of study. I attended Brasenose...it’s in the town center next to the Radcliffe Camera. Are there any scholars heading to Brasenose? As you have surely heard already our routine there was every week having two, one-hour tutorials, one in politics and one in

¹² Ziegler, p. 63.

economics. For each tutorial, either alone or with another student we were to write an essay in response to the week's topic. During one term my Economics tutorial partner was a Marshall Scholar named Richard Cordray, who was to become a Jeopardy champion, and more recently and more predictably, the attorney general of Ohio and now Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau¹³. Each essay, I remember, was meant to take about 30 minutes to read and then for the remainder of the hour we defended our arguments. We did this every week, which helped develop a sense of questioning and defending one's arguments. My primary don in Politics was Vernon Bogdanor, a renowned scholar. I must say I was not one of his most famous students. That list would include the current Prime Minister David Cameron. Nevertheless, I benefitted immensely from his scholarship at a historic time. He had just written his book on Multi-party Politics and the Constitution¹⁴ in the years of the Social Democratic Party (SDP)-Liberal Alliance, not to mention the Cold War and Falklands War. Ancient history no doubt to our new Scholars!

On a practical note, by the way, for those of us who appreciate feedback, the lack thereof at Oxford is part of the experience. There is little input regarding "how am I doing." This is a valuable test in itself. This experience served me well along the way, especially at my post in NATO. My political advisor was a Cambridge man and treasured curmudgeon. We got along swimmingly, according to observers, because I was comfortable with the Oxbridge style of little praise, obscurely delivered. To that point – we only had one set of tests at the end of the two years – 8 three-hour essay tests for the final grade. At the time, in accordance with tradition, my PPE "degree" was considered a second bachelor's degree, a BA side by side with my BS from

¹³ See <http://www.consumerfinance.gov/the-bureau/about-rich-cordray/> - accessed 26 September 2014

¹⁴ Bogdanor, V. *Multi-party Politics and the Constitution*, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

the Academy. Only after seven years of life experience did Oxford send me my MA. I'm not sure if this is still the approach, but it was the Oxbridge way at the time.

Perhaps just as important as these academic experiences, were the opportunities to travel and build friendships. This travel was essential as a way to "season" the academic program. Periodic breaks and student life also gave the opportunity for friendly discourse over a cup of tea or coffee with my fellow students. I must admit as a resident of Frewin Hall at Brasenose I was the envy of my first year friends in other lodgings. You may wonder about the significance – at the time Frewin Hall had the novel, and prized, distinction of an individual shower for every room. With no disrespect to the more far reaching accomplishments of Richard Frewin, this novelty gave us Frewin dwellers a certain cachet, particularly amongst those who trekked one or more blocks to their college lodgings' bathing facilities. However, I am certain that has changed for the better. Recent visits to Oxford have left me amazed with the more posh shops in the High Street and the modern comforts.

I also must admit that with respect to extracurricular activities it took me time to adapt from American intercollegiate basketball to the more constrained norms of netball; and I unremarkably, though enthusiastically rowed for one term as Stroke for the BNC women's eight. Perhaps our greatest achievement was to remain upright. So, with the aid of my flatmate and Rhodes classmate Mary G. Murphy, along with Heather Wilson ('82) and other Rhodes hoopsters, we started a women's basketball club that played and defeated Cambridge.

The point is that I struck up precious, life-long friendships, which developed into a network that still endures. In fact, I owe this wonderful opportunity to come speak with you to the good offices of the Rhodes Trust and our renowned classmate Nick Kristoff of the New York

Times. In our time, Nick, while reading law, intrepidly exhibited his journalist's boldness and made it into Poland when the Solidarity Movement was in its early stages. And, the network wasn't just an American one. Along the way, as life takes us to new places, old ties find their season. For instance, my Rhodes classmate Don Markwell, from Australia, served as Warden of Rhodes House during the time just a few years ago when my family and I were posted in Belgium. We were able to build on our friendship, and he mentored me as I was preparing for my post at the head of the Air Force Academy. His practical experience and scholarship on higher education, particularly liberal education, has enriched my understanding and action in my role as a college president. So, this experience on which you're embarking will provide the opportunities that will reinforce the "strongest tie," whenever that tie might come to fruition, sooner or later.

You'll find these ties will lead to many different paths branching off from the Rhodes experience: further scholarship or professional education, perhaps law, medicine, science or business. Some take a political path. As for me, following my time at Oxford I attended United States Air Force jet pilot training and became a cargo pilot flying C-141s. Keep in mind that in the 1980s, women weren't allowed to fly fighter jets, and we were even prohibited from flying combat missions. To clarify, personnel and cargo airdrop was one of the primary missions of the C-141, which is now carried out using more current cargo aircraft, the C-17s and C-130s. The airdrop mission entails delivering necessary paratroopers or resources by air to humanitarian or combat zones on the ground¹⁵. Until the restriction on women flying combat sorties was officially lifted by Congress in 1991¹⁶, I wasn't able to engage in one of our primary missions. That seems archaic now, but it was only 23 years ago and the topic of women in combat still

¹⁵ See for example, <https://www.heavyairliftwing.org/> - accessed 26 September 2014

¹⁶ Schmitt, E., "Senate votes to remove ban on women as combat pilots," *New York Times*, 1 August 1991.

finds a place on the political stage. Just last year the Department of Defense instructed the services to open all combat positions to women¹⁷.

This leads me back to the challenge from the Rhodes will – to “fight the worlds fight.” I’ve found this to be more aspirational than tangible. Each of us tries to live it in our own way and answer the questions: what does it mean to me? How am I doing? Am I living up to this scholarship? As for me, I’ve had wonderful opportunities over my 33 years of service, but each of you will find your own path.

Some of you may choose to make advancements in the sciences and social sciences, contributing for example to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals,¹⁸ which are working to reduce extreme poverty and bring primary education to all nations. Others of you may elect to pursue the applied sciences and engineering, contributing for example to the variety of “grand challenges¹⁹” outlined by the National Academy of Engineering like reverse-engineering the brain, improving information technologies, and solving sustainability and energy conundrums. Others of you may follow your passion for the humanities becoming artists, writers, or musicians, ultimately improving the human condition that all of us experience. Some of you may find your fulfillment as an active citizen in your local community, setting an example of civil discourse and finding ways to achieve common ground in many of those endeavors that mean the most to us in our civil society. The common theme is serving something greater than oneself. To quote the well-known psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl²⁰: “Don’t aim at success. The more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it.

¹⁷ See announcement at: <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119098> – accessed 26 September 2014

¹⁸ Goals and progress listed at <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> - accessed 26 September 2014

¹⁹ National Academy of Engineering Grand Challenges can be found at <http://www.engineeringchallenges.org/cms/challenges.aspx> - accessed 26 September 2014

²⁰ See the preface in the 1992 edition of Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself.”

Regardless of your path and your approach to “the world’s fight,” you should take comfort in knowing that you are not there alone. In addition to the support structure you’ve established to help you to this point, those “ties that bind,” ties you’re creating tonight, the ties you’ll be forming over these next several years and throughout your life, will provide the genuine support as you pursue your curiosity, as you embrace choices and the people you choose to share experiences with, and as you strive toward the endeavors that will mark your life, whether they be full of fame and accomplishment, or centered on personal relationships in your chosen corner of the world.

Thank you again for the opportunity to come share in this great occasion with you. I’ll leave you with something Cecil Rhodes once evidently conveyed to Lady Warwick²¹: “It is the dreamers that change the world. Practical “men” [people] are so busy being practical that they cannot see beyond their own lifetime. Dreamers and visionaries have made civilizations.” Let us all continue to dream and fight to change the world, in each of our corners, large and small. I wish you the best of luck. Bon Voyage.

²¹ Quoted in Ziegler, p. 13.