

Good evening, everyone.

First of all, I'd like to thank Mr. Francois for inviting me to speak. It's an honor for me to be a part of this event in recognition of your academic accomplishments. I'd like to congratulate each of you, as well as your parents, on your achievements, and tonight, I'd like to encourage you to strive for even higher goals.

*I thought I would start by giving you a little bit of my background. I actually grew up outside of Mineral Point on a family farm near Waldwick and graduated from Mineral Point High School. After graduation, I attended Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, for a couple of years and subsequently the UW-Madison, where I received a bachelor of music degree in performance. Oboe was my main instrument, piano my second. Upon graduation from the UW-Madison, I moved to Chicago to freelance as an oboist. I was a substitute with the Chicago Symphony, the St. Louis Symphony, and various other orchestras, played background music for television commercials and cd's, and I also worked part time as a secretary to support myself. After two years in Chicago, there was an opening for the position of Assistant Principal Oboe in the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C. I auditioned, was chosen for the position, and spent 27 years with them. During that time, in addition to our regular weekly performances, we did a lot of national and international touring, made cd's, some of which won Grammys, played for inaugurations, state dinners, did tv specials, etc. I retired from the orchestra in 2006 and since that time have been teaching piano. Two years ago, I decided to move back to Wisconsin to be closer to my family. I now live in Madison and continue to teach piano.*

I remember sitting where you sit tonight, having studied hard, putting in the necessary hours and hours of studying for tests, midterms, finals, completing homework, papers, and projects. What you have achieved thus far has taught you lifelong skills and laid the groundwork for a successful future. And tonight, I, along with your parents and teachers and all of those involved in your accomplishments, applaud you for a job well done.

Now I want to encourage you to go even farther. There are countless opportunities awaiting every one of you with many places to go and paths to follow. The question I am most often asked is how I got from Mineral Point where there was no orchestra to the Kennedy Center. When I was ten years old, I attended a meeting that I'm sure was similar to a meeting many of you have attended -- selecting an instrument to play in the band. My band director at the time, Mr. Hal Hokenson, suggested I try the oboe. I had no idea what an oboe was, but I agreed to try it and discovered I liked it. Never be afraid to try new things. You have no idea where they could lead you.

Everyone starts somewhere. Everyone has a talent and a gift, whether it's in music, accounting, law, healthcare, or simply being an amazing parent. Those first few notes that I played I'm sure did not sound the best, but with persistence, those notes progressed to scales, to songs, to lessons, to making my own reeds, to eventually spending 27 years in the National Symphony Orchestra.

Little did I know a potential to play the oboe would lead to a passion to play the oboe. That passion drove me to practice, practice and practice some more. It drove me to find out everything I could about the oboe and the kinds of jobs available. I was very fortunate to have a band director who believed in me and encouraged me immensely, but he also let me know that talent alone doesn't necessarily translate to success. People can have talent and never achieve what they want. There's much more involved. There's self-discipline, commitment, skill, perseverance, and patience, to name a few. There are hours, days, weeks and years of working to hone your craft. I searched out the best teachers I could find, mentors, people who were doing what I wanted to do, and I learned from them. I decided that I would never settle for mediocrity. I spent many hours practicing, making reeds, and listening to recordings. There were times I had to sight read concerts because someone got sick or we just didn't have time to rehearse. If I had not been prepared, I would have lost my job because I was expected to be able to play anything at any time. The reason **you** are here tonight is because you didn't settle for mediocrity. You have obviously worked hard and made wise choices. You've learned the importance of discipline, sacrifice, and perseverance.

When you apply those principles to something you have a passion for, nothing will be able to stop you from reaching your goals. You will always do your best work when you are doing something you love and believe in. Have the courage to follow your dreams, and have the courage to follow those dreams even in the face of discouragement.

I auditioned for seven other orchestras before I got the job with the National Symphony Orchestra. I had colleagues that had taken 20-30 auditions before landing their position. In the orchestra business, jobs are scarce. There are roughly 20 orchestras in the country that are full-time, big-budget orchestras. And when you consider there are only three oboes per orchestra, that doesn't leave many positions available. People don't leave their jobs unless they retire, die, or get fired. And when a position opens, it's not unusual to get 200 applicants. The key is to **never give up**. Be determined to go the distance, because many times the things you desire the most take the longest to achieve.

There will always be obstacles, opposition, and adversity, but have the attitude you're going to learn from it, and it will never defeat you. Obstacles and challenges are not always detrimental...they're just part of your development. There were people who didn't understand and told me it would be unlikely I would get the kind of job I wanted coming from a small town and not attending a Julliard or a music conservatory, but in the end it wasn't true. If you keep your eye on the goal, with determination, you will reach it. Don't let the doubts of others discourage or limit you. Remember that great things come from small beginnings, and if you give up on playing the scales, you'll miss the opportunity to discover your potential.

I had many opportunities to give up or be discouraged. The conductor who hired me, Mstislav Rostropovich, was a famous Russian cellist. He came from a culture where men dominated the orchestras. After hiring me and another female, he said the orchestra is beginning to look like a kitchen. At that time, there were only 20 women out of 105 members. There will always be things you have to overcome, but don't allow them to affect you negatively. Believe in yourself and rely on those qualities that have gotten you this far.

It doesn't make a difference if you're from a small town. As a matter of fact, you're probably better equipped because you have been grounded with family values, community support, and knowing what it means to put in a hard day's work. You will always run up against competition, people who think they can do it better than you, but the combination of good character, talent, and confidence is hard to find.

Never let your hunger for success get in the way of who you are and where you have come from. Always remain humble. Treat others with respect, courtesy, and concern, and the impression you leave on them will last a lifetime and take you to new heights. Character and integrity are essential to success, and you are the positive role model that may change someone's life.

So in closing, I want to encourage you that whatever it is you want to do, be persistent, be relentless, have faith and never stop learning. Every hour you put into studying now is an hour you are investing into your future. Success is never an accident, so seize every opportunity. I know you have already dedicated yourself to excel and perform at a higher standard, but always be inspired to set the bar even higher. You have so many people surrounding you who are extremely proud of you and the fact that you're sitting here tonight. So I encourage you to continue to strive for excellence and be the best that you can be. Know you have what it takes, and don't ever let that go. Thank you.