



MY POST- GRADUATION EXPERIENCE PRESENTED AT THE 3RD CONGREGATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH AND ALLIED SCIENCES (UHAS), HO

By

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SALUTATIONS

It is with much appreciation and utmost delight that I join you this day for the 3RD CONGREGATION CEREMONY to address most especially 616 graduands who will be commencing their life stories more formally henceforth.

As I was mulling through my head and reading around some literature on how to package my personal post –graduation story to you, I came across a quote from our venerable and illustrious first President of Ghana: I quote:

“...the task ahead is great indeed and heavy is the responsibility and yet it is a noble and glorious challenge - a challenge which calls for the courage to dream, courage to believe , courage to dare, courage to envision, the courage to fight, the courage to work, courage to achieve the highest excellencies and the fullest greatness of man. Dare we ask for more in life?” Un quote.

For me this quote is heavily pregnant with the thoughts and feelings that I had several years ago in 1984 and up till now when I joined the many excited young and some mature class of 1987 Nursing students. I think we were about 25 in number and considered the largest class then. We were part of the wider group of graduands of the year 1987 to present ourselves at the famous Great Hall of the University of Ghana-Legon to receive our honours for the Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing with Psychology. Young as I was, I struggled with fixing the academic gown or acapee as we all popularly call it that I had gone to rent as was required of all to look presentable with my slim body. Then I struggled with the hood and continued to tug at it to sit still. We were eager for the ceremonies to be over so we could take pictures with our family and friends and to go for our lunches and dinners planned for us by our proud parents ready to show off their graduated children.

That time I had no worries. Finished university, waiting to move into my final year (4th year Nursing Professional Programme) to enable me take the licensure examinations so I can practice Nursing, Midwifery and Public Health Nursing (we were lucky then to be allowed to write all the 3 examinations. Aspirations were high and I knew I had the drive to inspire and challenge myself beyond the average limit as my mentors, family and teachers expected me to do.

With my first degree and license to practice, come March 1988, I was posted to the Ridge Hospital to serve as a TEMPORARY STAFF NURSE WHEN MY RANK SHOULD HAVE BEEN NURSING OFFICER. Why? Because our job establishments were yet to be completed. So the first shocker of life met me right in the face. My colleagues and I did not know then that the battle of young graduate nurses was the root cause. Senior nurses felt we were too young and inexperienced to be called Nursing Officers. The realities of life hit my colleagues and myself hard. We were angry and did not understand why. It is there that Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's quote of the need for ***courage to fight and the courage to work was activated***. After some years of persistent visits to the MOH and engagements with the powers that be, we received the Nursing Officer grade (not to talk about the challenge of back pay). By that time the experience of being a clinical nurse was building up my confidence and I could be a charge nurse unsupervised. One fateful night whilst on night duty, I had a visit from a mentor that changed my trajectory from being a clinical nurse to what I am today. Charismatic Christians like myself will call it divine helpers, others call it fate, whilst others would say its luck. Prof. Ayodele Akiwumi of blessed memory walked into my Ward and said, *Jemima, I hear you are married now and interested in moving to Kumasi*. I said yes, though shocked that she seemed to know more about me than I thought.

She added: *The UK Government is starting a Health Education Project at Kumasi Metropolis and they have requested for a graduate nurse. This is a contact to call for an interview.*

This door set in motion ***my courage to dream*** beyond my current circumstances. It was a lot of hard work, giving of self, tolerance, and more courage to fight as I was venturing into an area that was then commonly seen as the purview of Environmental Health Officers. They were surely displeased that nurses should venture into their domain. Through it I got a British Council scholarship to read my Masters in HEALTH PROMOTION AND HEALTH EDUCATION at the famous Edinburgh University in Scotland-UK. Learning in a foreign country had its own challenges. Today it is enlightening for Ghana to be running these programmes locally and I am happy to see some of you are graduating with degrees from these programmes today.

After my 2nd degree, the courage to believe, that I can do it despite the odds, was set in motion. This drove me to run the Kumasi Health Education Unit which was initially funded by the UK government. Under my direction, the program grew from just a district to the National Health Learning Materials Programme supported by the Dutch Government to support preservice institutions of the MOH. This was successfully implemented up to 2003 when I decided to venture with ***the courage to dare***.

The courage to dare arose when mentors and friends saw research reports I was putting together for office work and consultancies. They wondered why I was not pursuing a PhD. So with the courage to dare and self-funding, I ventured into pursuing my doctorate at De Montfort University in Leicester-UK where I was awarded a PhD in 2006.

*Now the issue was: A PhD so what? I needed to activate the ***courage of envisioning***. What did I want to do with my PhD? Which direction did I want to go? I chose the path of international development work*

with Population Council , American College of Nurse Midwives, the International Confederation of Midwives, head quartered in the Hague-Netherlands and all these opened magnificent opportunities to apply all the skills I had garnered with over 20 years of experience to touch the lives of mothers and their newborns through the strengthening of midwifery systems in 10 African countries and globally as I had the privilege to sit at the table of great men and women at the WHO-Geneva, UNFPA, JHPIEGO , and many organisations as globally we battled with addressing the Millennium Development Goals. Note that I did all these without re-locating outside Ghana. I lived in Ghana and continue to live here whilst touching my country and also the world.

Today I stand before you in all humility as the First and Foundation President of Ghana College of Nurses and Midwives: An institution I have invested 5years of my career and Professional life in to lead and establish with only the law (ACT 833 part 3 of 2011) in hand and a seed money from the Ministry of Health. Today we have almost 200 nurses and midwives in 9 post graduate residency programmes to become Nurse or Midwife Specialists. We are believing to add more programmes in 2019. I also serve on International Boards and temporal advisory positions to a number of international programmes and run a consultancy firm. It is a pretty busy schedule but by the Grace of God and a very supportive family of a husband, 2 daughters and wider family and good friends including mentors, I have come this far:

Dear graduating CLASS OF 2018: I know all these great men and women seated on this high dais and some among the crowd may have greater stories than mine and I dove my hat to you all. You all have done well. I walked through the stages as described by the quote of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. A tortuous but rewarding journey traversing over 40 countries but not without challenges: there are thorns, rocks, boulders, watery and mirky roads and ravines to traverse and there are also flowery well- manicured lawns available to you to breathe the fresh air of a rewarding life.

*I believe I still need the last **courage to achieve the highest excellencies and the fullest greatness of man** by the favour of God.*

To some of you, you are just starting, some are in the middle of the journey and for some you are still pondering over what next. Remember there is no short-cut to success. Rather you have the potential to travel on a winding journey of the wilderness period towards great leadership and achievement. At every point of the journey you need to be courageous, daring, committed, loyal, have character and patience to build your life-time competencies. Ghana needs you. The current technological advancements offer you the platform for innovation towards great success and leadership. You have the potential to challenge yourself beyond myself and all the accomplished persons gathered here. Your future is before you for it is not just what you have underneath that matters. Rather, it is what you do that defines you.

I will end with this quote from MAYA ANGELOU

“We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty. If you don’t like something, change it. If you can’t change it, change your attitude”.

THANK YOU ALL FOR YOUR ATTENTION