

Speech given at Caritas Academy Graduation

on

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Dr. Timothy Bleecker, Caritas Academy, Honored Guests and Distinguished Visitors, Alumni, and the Graduating Class of 2007:

It is an honor for me to have been invited as a speaker on this special day. Today, you are taking another step forward towards your dreams in life.

Winston Churchill once said, "All our dreams can come true...if we have the courage to pursue them." Former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, had this to say about dreams, "The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. began one of the great speeches of the 20th century by saying, "I have a dream..." America is a country built by the work and sacrifice of many people who came here to fulfill their dreams. The earliest explorers came dreaming of Norumbega (the legendary city where the streets were paved with gold) or the wealth of land or fish or furs. The 1600s and 1700s brought the Puritans and Quakers and others who came dreaming of a land where they could practice their religion in peace. The 1700s brought the Founding Fathers who dreamed of a country ruled by law and reason rather than a monarch. The 1800s brought dreams, again, of wealth and gold so many trekked across an almost unknown wilderness to California. Some found the gold, others found even more wealth in supplying the prospectors. Each had their dream, and worked to fulfill it. The 1800s also brought the dream of ending slavery to fruition, and more people came, the "poor and huddled masses, yearning to be free" came here and fed the expansion into the West. Men dreamed, and the transcontinental railroad was built. Men dreamed, and the prairies became farms and ranches. Men dreamed and bridges were built, factories and industries sprang up which provided a better place for those immigrants than the situations they left behind. And the dreams continued. Public education spread. Colleges continued to spring up, and from the schools and the colleges came more dreams, dreams of a better life, dreams of a better way of living, dreams of the inherent worth of every man; and those dreams spread and were carried to everyone who could attend a speech or read a newspaper. And men dreamed of free libraries and worked and saw them built. People read and thought and had more dreams, dreams of peace and worldwide brotherhood, dreams that were shattered by two world wars where Americans had to fight and die so their dreams could live. And we dreamed on, dreamed of a better world and trying to spread the reality of that dream through the world; for a dream without the determination and work to bring it to fruition will forever remain just a dream.

In life, there are dreams...some may seem unrealistic, but dare to dream anyway. Even if people tell you that your dreams are unattainable, believe in yourself and know that if you believe it, you can achieve it! Remember the Bible story of Joseph, when he had his dream and told it to his brothers, they hated him even more (Genesis 27:5) and, yet, he continued to dream.

Living in America, I know how fortunate, blessed, and honored you are to have the advantage of attending the school of your choice, where you can envision your future and, at the same time, pursue your dreams. You are privileged to have parents and grandparents who are willing to stand behind you and help to cheer you on as you follow your future endeavors. Not everyone is so fortunate.

See if you can imagine this: Where I come from, AIDS continues to take more than 3,000 lives weekly. Many of the children, who are your age, are both parents to their younger siblings and students at the same time. Most of these young people rise early in the morning to do house chores before thinking of doing anything else that day. They walk several miles to get a day's worth of water for their siblings **before** walking another five to eight miles to attend their nearest schools. So many of them do not have lunch because there isn't enough food for them to take with them or because they do not have any extra pocket money to buy food. It is unfortunate, but many of them drop out of school because they must stay at home to nurse their ailing and dying parents. If they are fortunate enough to live on a farm, then they are expected to tend to the animals and work in the gardens so they can sell their produce at the village markets, as a means of survival. At this point, you are probably asking yourself what any of this has to do with your graduation.

The reason I am sharing this with you is so that you do not take for granted the awesome opportunities that have been given to you and the even better ones that await you down the road. Most certainly, you must know how blessed you are to choose which institution of higher education you will attend. In Africa, students just like you do not have choices as to where they will go to school. Many of them learn in high schools that are dilapidated, there are no books from which they can learn. Some of them learn by sitting under trees...yes...this will surprise you to know that these "schools" are actually not indoors but, rather, outdoors and, not having the proper tools with which to work, the children must depend on remembering what they have learned. In other words, their book, pencil, and paper are actually their memory, a stick, and the dirt on the ground. Yet, with all of these odds against them, they continue to dream...just like you. You can see for yourself a child who grew up in that same situation. Here I stand before you, I went to school without shoes on my feet and no money in my pocket and, **look**, here I am as your graduation speaker! The reason why I am here today is because I did not allow poverty to stop me from dreaming. I knew my parents were poor and they had nothing to give me other than their **love** and, yet, I continued to dream. Dreams, of course, remain dreams unless they are backed with determination, work, and, often, a little help from Above. I did work, and learn, and pray. My wife and I became pastors of a small church. She received an opportunity to study here at Boston University. It was her dream, brought to fruition by people we did not even suspect existed until they appeared in our lives. Their dream was to help clergy in our situation. And when my wife left for America, dreams were being fulfilled. I stayed at the church with our daughters so those dreams could be fulfilled. And I continued to dream, and work, and pray. Two years later, the Bishop told me that there was a position open in Maynard, Massachusetts, and that I could take the girls with me and rejoin my wife. Again: dreams plus work plus prayer and some unexpected help.

In this country, students are given numerous opportunities and paths to follow, they have parents who go out of their way to provide and educate their children to the best of their abilities in the hopes that their children might have something better than they had. They have, or had, their dreams, and now work to support you in yours. Recognize their support and be thankful to God that you have it. Remember it, and be supportive of each other. Each of us is here for a reason. Man is a complex creature who exists through his interaction with others, by supporting each other's endeavors, each other's dreams. Support your family and friends in their dreams, and they will support you.

So...what can stop you from pursuing your dreams? **You!** To you I say, "**Do not stop dreaming!**"