

IMSA Convocation
August 17, 2009
Keynote Address by Dr. Tuwanda Williamson '91

GOOD MORNING IMSA FAMILY!

I SAY 'FAMILY' BECAUSE I AM AT HOME HERE. IMSA WAS MY HOME DURING SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT YEARS OF MY LIFE... AND THERE IS NO PLACE WHERE I FEEL MORE AT HOME THAN IN THIS VERY GYMNASIUM.

THIS IS WHERE I ENDURED MANY VIGOROUS VOLLEYBALL, BASKETBALL, AND SOFTBALL PRACTICES, AND WHERE COACHES LIKE KIM MCCLAREN, FORMERLY KNOWN AS KIM VITEK, DEMANDED BLOOD, SWEAT, AND TEARS IN A PRACTICE FULL OF SPRINTS AND SUICIDES.

I PROUDLY GAVE HER 2 OUT OF 3 WITHOUT THE BLOOD.
IT WAS COACHES LIKE KIM WHO TAUGHT ME TO NEVER STOP SHORT OF MY BEST (A PRINCIPLE THAT I HAVE APPLIED TO EVERY ASPECT OF MY LIFE).

AS I WALK THROUGH THE MAZE OF HALLWAYS TODAY THROUGHOUT THE REST OF THE BUILDING, I AM REMINDED OF THE MANY (IMSA) TEACHERS WHO WERE EXTREMELY INFLUENTIAL IN MY DEVELOPMENT.

THERE WAS THE LATE MARY VANVERST WHO NOT ONLY TAUGHT ME THE LANGUAGE OF ORGANIC CHEMISTRY, BUT ALSO AN APPRECIATION FOR MUSIC AND THE ARTS THROUGH MULTIPLE TRIPS WITH HER AND HER HUSBAND TO THE CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA.

DR. DANA GOODMAN INTRODUCED ME TO WALT WHITMAN, AND BARBARA TAYLOR TO FROST AND EMERSON. DR. JAMES VICTORY SHOWED ME HOW TO SEE THE LARGER SCOPE AND EFFECT OF WORLD HISTORY ON OUR PRESENT LIVES.

GEORGE MILAUSKAS ENCOURAGED ME THROUH A VERY TOUGH SEMESTER OF GEOMETRY. YES, MATH WAS NOT MY STRENGTH. I WAS A SCIENCE GIRL, AND NOT LIKE MANY OF YOU SUPER DIFFERENTIAL CALCULUS MATHLETES WHO COULD EQUATE ME UNDER THE TABLE.

AND SANDRA BODINI, MY MOST DEMANDING SPANISH PROFESSOR, OFTEN CORNERED ME IN DEAD-END HALLWAYS AND FORCED ME TO SPEAK SPANISH TO HER. AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, I HID FROM HER AT ALL TIMES. BUT I ALSO BECAME A SPANISH MAJOR AND SPENT A SEMESTER STUDYING AT A UNIVERSITY IN HER HOME CITY OF SANTIAGO, CHILE, ONCE SHE HAD MOVED BACK. BY THEN, I WAS NO LONGER HIDING FROM HER, AND WAS EXCITED TO SHOW OFF MY SPANISH. IT IS SHE THAT SPARKED MY FIRST INTEREST IN LANGUAGES. I NOW SPEAK SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE FLUENTLY AND AM LEARNING SWAHILI.

I COULD GO ON FOR HOURS TELLING YOU HOW SO MANY OTHER TEACHERS HERE AT IMSA, THAT I HAVE NOT YET NAMED, WHO HAVE INFLUENCED ME IN SUCH MONUMENTAL WAYS. BUT I DO NOT BELIEVE YOU TO HAVE THE TIME OR PATIENCE TO LISTEN TO ALL OF MY STORIES.

I CAN TELL YOU, HOWEVER, HOW TIME AT IMSA HELPED ME TO EASILY TRANSITION ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY, AND EMOTIONALLY WITH COLLEGE.

-MORE-

PAGE 2 IMSA CONVOCATION ADDRESS - DR. TUWANDA WILLIAMSON

DORM LIFE HERE AT IMSA PREPARED ME FOR THE DIFFICULTIES OF LIVING AWAY FROM HOME, AND LEARNING HOW TO COEXIST WITH ANOTHER HUMAN BEING IN VERY CLOSE QUARTERS. I HAD THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY OF LIVING WITH A CHARTER CLASS SENIOR DURING MY FIRST YEAR AT IMSA. I WAS QUIET AND VERY MUCH INTO PLEASING WHILE SHE WAS CONFIDENT, BOISTEROUS, AND VERY USED TO HAVING THINGS HER WAY.

SHE INADVERTANTLY TAUGHT ME HOW TO HAVE A VOICE, AND ALSO HOW TO PICK MY BATTLES. DUE TO THE DIVERSITY OF OUR PERSONALITIES, TO THIS DAY I STILL SAY THAT SHE PREPARED ME EVEN BETTER THAN MY YOUNGER SISTER ON HOW TO LIVE PEACEFULLY WITH ANYONE.

ACADEMICALLY, I EXCELLED IN COLLEGE. I SKIPPED THE FRESHMAN BASIC WEEDER CLASSES THROUGH ADVANCED PLACEMENT (THANKS TO IMSA) AND HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE FUN CHALLENGING COURSES WITH SOPHOMORES, JUNIORS, AND SENIORS. THE BEST EXAMPLES OF THAT ARE OF BIOCHEMISTRY AND ORGANIC CHEMISTRY WHICH I TOOK MY FIRST YEAR OF COLLEGE AND DID NOT STRUGGLE LIKE THE REST OF MY UPPERCLASSMAN COLLEAGUES, DUE TO IT BEING MY SECOND TIME AROUND, AFTER HAVING DONE THESE COURSES AT IMSA.

COLLEGE WAS EASY BECAUSE I HAD ALREADY LEARNED TO WORK HARD. IT WAS EASY TO TRIPLE MAJOR IN BIOLOGY, CHEMISTRY, AND SPANISH DUE TO MY HEAD START AT IMSA. I HAD TIME TO TRAVEL AND STUDY IN BOLIVIA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, AND CHILE AND FURTHER DEVELOP MY SPANISH SKILLS.

IMSA ALSO HAS INFLUENCED MY DESIRE TO WORK IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES THROUGH ITS MANDATORY COMMUNITY SERVICE REQUIREMENTS. I NOW WORK AS A FAMILY MEDICINE PHYSICIAN AND HAVE MADE SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM MEDICAL SERVICE TRIPS TO MULTIPLE UNDERSERVED COUNTRIES. I ALSO AM NOW WORKING IN A FEDERALLY QUALIFIED COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER ON THE WEST SIDE OF CHICAGO, AND CONTINUE TO SERVE AS A MEDICAL DIRECTOR FOR A VOLUNTEER COMMUNITY CLINIC IN BOLINGBROOK.

I NEVER CONTINUE TO BE SURPRISED BY THE NUMBER OF IMSA GRADUATES FROM VARIOUS CLASSES THAT I FIND WORKING IN VERY SIMILAR AREAS ALSO SERVING NEEDY COMMUNITIES. I LOVE WHAT I DO, AND CAN THANK MY IMSA FAMILY FOR MAKING ME INTO THE PERSON I AM TODAY.

I LOOK OUT AT EACH OF YOU TODAY AND AM EXTREMELY EXCITED BECAUSE I KNOW THAT ONE DAY, I WILL SEE AND READ ABOUT YOUR MANY FUTURE SUCCESSES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS DUE TO YOUR STRONG IMSA FOUNDATION.

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO START THIS YEAR WITH EXCITEMENT KNOWING THAT YOU ARE EMBARKING ON A LIFE JOURNEY THAT DOES NOT BEGIN WITH YOUR GRADUATION FROM IMSA, BUT WITH EVERY MOMENT SPENT IN THE WALLS OF YOUR NEW IMSA HOME.