

CORTLAND HIGH SCHOOL – CLASS OF 2007 – COMMENCEMENT

Catherine Bertini, Class of 1967

ALL THAT IS NECESSARY FOR THE FORCES OF EVIL
TO WIN IN THE WORLD
IS FOR ENOUGH GOOD PEOPLE TO DO NOTHING.

This was the quote printed under my senior picture in the CO-HI-AN. When I was sitting in YOUR seat, I knew I wanted to make a difference. But I didn't know where, or what, or how.

It could have been as a Cortland County legislator, or as a mother, or as a volunteer at Loaves and Fishes.

I certainly didn't sit in your seat and think that some day I would live in Rome, Italy and lead a huge organization feeding 787 million starving people worldwide; I didn't think that I would change the US food stamp program from coupon distribution to electronic technology, making the system easier to use and more secure; or that I would have the title of Under Secretary General of the United Nations; or that I would win the World Food Prize; or that now I would be an advisor to the most generous foundation in the world, dedicated to helping poor African women farmers work their way out of poverty.

YOU

As you celebrate this great day and your achievement of high school graduation, you may wonder: Where will your life lead YOU? What will YOU do?

When you are celebrating YOUR 40th CHS reunion in 2047, will you say: "I did something to make my family, my community, my country, my world, just a little bit better?"

Here are FIVE PRINCIPLES I learned at Cortland High School that I hope you learned and that you will live by in the future:

1. GOOD FRIENDS ARE FOREVER

Don't be too sad about moving apart from friends. Even if college or the military or marriage keeps you away from your old friends for a while, the friends you made at CHS will always be there for you, if you are there for them. In fact, seven of my classmates from CHS celebrated our 50th birthdays together in Italy.

2. DO THE RIGHT THING, EVEN IF IT IS DIFFICULT

Money, good health, even family, is sometimes elusive. But what you have, for your whole life, are your principles. No one can take them away, except you.

3. GO WHERE YOU NEED TO GO; DO WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

You don't have to follow the crowd, but rather, follow your instincts and a combination of your heart and your judgment. That way, even if you later change paths, you will never lose.

4. WORK HARD, STAY FOCUSED, AND YOU CAN SUCCEED, EVEN BEYOND YOUR IMAGINATION.

We come from Cortland, New York. We are rich in family and community but not necessarily in money. That doesn't matter. Hard work, loyalty, commitment, values, inspiration – THESE matter. We all learned them in Cortland. And I am here to tell you – they can take you ANYWHERE.

5. SPEAK UP FOR OTHERS WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE

This could be a kid struggling to make friends, or someone who needs tutoring to pass math class. It also could be a parent who can't make enough money to feed her family, or an African child who doesn't have the food to have the energy to walk to school.

No matter what our situation - yours and mine - we are better off than someone else. It is ALWAYS our duty to find ways to use our God-given talents to help others.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, as I say congratulations to the Class of 2007, and to their parents, teachers, families, and friends, I reach back FORTY years to my CO-HI-AN quote, and back TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY years to the British philosopher Edmund Burke, who wrote those words, to confirm that, with your diploma from Cortland High School, YOU, TOO, CAN CHANGE THE WORLD.

Start by supporting your friends, standing on principle, following your heart and your mind, working hard, and reaching out to help others.

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Congratulations, Class of 2007!