

BELINDA STRONACH

To the Key to Success Gala

St. Peter's College
Sept. 16, 2008

Honored guests, students and alumni, ladies and gentlemen —

It's a privilege to be here with you and with our gala co-chairs, Wayne and Rod Zimmer, on such an important evening in the life of St. Peter's College.

This is a celebration not only of this school's academic achievement, proud history and distinguished alumni. It's also a celebration of a bright future and many accomplishments to come.

On a night devoted to recognizing achievement, it seems fitting that I've been asked to speak on the theme of success.

And it's equally fitting that the man who invited me here tonight is himself the very embodiment of success — Senator Rod Zimmer.

He's one of your own at St. Peter's, and you should be very proud of that.

Rod is formally addressed these days as "Senator" — but there are so many other titles that apply to him: community leader, business leader, activist, philanthropist, humanitarian.

He has been a supporter of the arts and an advocate for the disadvantaged. He's also been a mentor to me.

In fact, he's such a great guy that we should probably overlook, at least for this evening, the sad fact that he's a Blue Bombers fan.

I can testify to the scope and intensity of Rod's determination. He played a central role in the international campaign to save the life of Nazanin Fatehi, a young Iranian girl sentenced to be executed for stabbing a man who was trying to rape her.

Working with other concerned citizens of the world, Rod was generous with his time and tireless in his efforts on Nazanin's behalf.

And it ultimately paid off with her release from prison.

With his work on Parliament Hill and here on the Prairies, Senator Zimmer is a tremendous ambassador not only for this school — but for the people of Western Canada.

Before I get to my formal remarks, I think it's only fair to offer a word of warning.

I've just spent five years in politics — so it's been a long time since I've given a speech where I've had to worry about being entertaining or having a point.

Usually I just start talking about productivity and I keep talking until everyone is face down in their salad.

In Ottawa, that's how we know when to stop.

But I'm a risk taker. I'm willing to try this whole "having a point" thing. When talk turns to the idea of "success," I don't know about you — but I find myself picturing the self-help section of a book store: row after row of smiling authors, each promising to reveal the secret roadmap to a lifetime of surefire success.

I can remember flipping through one not long ago. It promised to teach me how to change the world. And I thought to myself] finally, someone who gets it- someone who understands: @ not the problem, the world is the problem.

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In the self-help world, success cannot be achieved without process. You have to craft personal mission statements. You have to take action steps and follow action strategies.

Do this and, lo and behold, that raise will be yours, the corner office will be yours, success will be yours.

But the truth of course is that genuine success is intangible — it's not winning a trophy, it's not affording a better car. Despite what the author of *The Secret* might believe, you can't order success by politely asking the universe for it.

Genuine success manifests itself in only one form: contentment. The landscape of my path to success and yours may be very different - but they lead us to the same destination.

We know we're successful if we're happy.

Our world may grow increasingly complex, but in many ways what we seek as women and men has never changed. We aspire to the kind of experience that brings deeper meaning to our lives.

Nowadays people pursue happiness more methodically than ever. Pick up a magazine, watch TV, go online -- happiness is the new black.

There are guides on how to achieve it. Rules for how to secure it. Contentment has become a commodity.

Our pursuit of happiness has intensified. Our lives have become more comfortable, luxury goods more attainable, psychological drugs more plentiful. But researchers tell us that people are no happier today than 20 or 30 or 50 years ago.

We can't seem to find that genuine success. We're a tough species to please.

One author has put it this way; he says: "Human beings have largely conquered nature, but they have still to conquer themselves?"

And so we've got scholars exploring 18th century philosophy and 19th century psychology, trying to crack the code and let the world in on the secret of how to be happy.

They even have a name for this new academic field. They call it "happiness studies."

It's time to think about this: I picture a bunch of professors at a college like this one, working in the Happiness department. You walk down the corridors and there are clowns and puppies everywhere.

According to an economist who wrote a book called "Happiness: Lessons From a New Science," one reason we have trouble achieving a lasting happiness is that we're stuck on what's known as the hedonic treadmill.

We aspire to a bigger house, a nicer car, a higher standard of what constitutes success. We convince ourselves these things will make us happy. And when we attain them, they do make us happy. For a while.

And then, emotionally speaking, we're back to where we started. We aspire again to bigger and nicer.

I won't dare to try to tell you what specifically will make your life happier.

The best I can do is tell you what's worked for me, and the peculiar course I've followed over the past several years to get there.

My background is in business. My father came to Canada more than 50 years ago.

He left Austria with a one-way boat ticket and about \$40 in his pocket. He got a job retrieving golf balls. He washed dishes.

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Ultimately, over years of hard work and smart choices, he built an auto-parts company, Magna International.

Today, Magna is one of this country's largest corporations with tens of thousands of employees around the world.

Dad even got his own episode of Life & Times on CBC — a documentary special about his life. He's right up there with Joni Mitchell and Mr. Dressup.

I grew up determined to follow in my father's footsteps. And in a very limited sense I succeeded.

At the age of 34, I became Magna's president and chief executive at Magna.

It was an incredible privilege and a tremendous responsibility.

On my watch, the company grew and became even more successful.

Now, I know what you're thinking: You're listening to my story — the inspiring tale of the daughter of a billionaire who somehow beat the odds to get a job in the family business.

Who doesn't love a good underdog epic like that?

Anyone can triumph over adversity. But here before you stands one who has triumphed over opulence.

But hang on a moment. I'm getting to the part where things start to suck.

The job at Magna was challenging and, to a degree, satisfying. I was making good money. I led a fast-paced lifestyle. I had an assistant who would go get me a muffin whenever I wanted one.

But as clichéd as it sounds, there was something missing from my life. I couldn't shake the urge to do something where I'd be making more of a difference.

I felt the desire to be part of something bigger than one person or one corporation.

I realize it's a bit of an old-fashioned notion, but that's why I decided to enter politics.

This is a cynical age, and politicians tend to be held in the kind of esteem historically reserved for used car salesmen and plagues.

But I believed then — and still believe today — that there is a nobility to service, and a deeper satisfaction that can only be achieved by working for a greater good.

What I've come to understand, however, is that the "greater good" isn't the exclusive domain of politics. There are many other ways to serve it.

In 2006 I had the honour of traveling in Africa with Dr. Jeffrey Sachs. He's the author of the book *The End of Poverty*.

My journey with him affected me deeply. I saw material poverty at its worst, and human hope at its best.

We visited Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Djibouti and Ethiopia. I won't ever forget the time I spent there, nor the people I met.

I listened as young children spoke of friends who had died at the hands of malaria.

The statistics tell us that what we're witnessing is nothing less than another lost generation of African youth ——— millions killed at such an early age.

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Yet these kids I'd meet- they were so matter-of-fact about it. Simply, tragically, this disease and the toll it takes are a part of their daily lives.

As we traveled, I was inspired as well by Jeff's passionate belief that citizens can make a real difference, no matter how big or small their number, no matter how huge or complex the challenge.

And I was reminded of something that June Callwood had once said. "If any of you happens to see an injustice, you are no longer a spectator, you are a participant. And you have an obligation to do something."
Joining us on the trip was Rick Mercer.

As you know, Rick is gifted when it comes to satire. Pessimism is his day job. But he's apparently an optimist by night.

He and I joined together to launch Spread the Net- an organization dedicated to the purchase and delivery of bed nets to African families.

We did so with the help of UNICEF. And we did so to follow as Jeff Sachs's disciples — to make a difference, and to help and encourage others to do the same.

Spread the Net has been a big success — a success that has been built one person and one donation at a time.

We're not a huge organization — we're modest in size.

We don't promise to change the world — we promise to take your \$10 and use it to deliver an insecticide—treated bed net to a family in Rwanda or Liberia. So far we've been able to donate more than 180,000 nets.

Part of the thrill of being involved in a grassroots effort like ours is the satisfaction you feel when others embrace the cause. And they've been doing so with such passion.

Malaria is a brutal disease. It's painful and it kills.

Yet even given the huge scope of the challenge at hand, people are motivated by this campaign — by the idea of "action" being so closely connected with "reaction."

What I mean by that is the net itself has come to be perceived as both a tool and a symbol- a practical tool for shielding a family from the mosquitoes that transmit the disease; and a powerful symbol of the tangible benefits of charitable work.

We can hold up the net and say, "You — all by yourself- you can save a life.

"You don't need a massive bureaucracy. You don't need Bill Gates money.

"You make a modest donation. The money buys a net. The net is delivered to a family. The family sleeps in safety."

Investing in malaria prevention and treatment works as a cold, hard business analysis.

But to me what will always be most important is that it works on the level of common sense and human decency.

To me, this isn't merely a policy option — it's a moral imperative.

I've traveled pretty extensively since then. I've become increasingly involved not only in a number of agencies dedicated to fighting malaria — but in a range of philanthropic pursuits.

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This spring I was in Haiti. I traveled with musician Wyclef Jean and his cousin Jeny Duplessis — or Jeny Wonder, as he's known.

Jeny and I were walking through Cite Soleil, a slum in Port-au-Prince that is home to a million people. No sewers, little electricity, few police.

Jeny was born in Haiti. This was a place familiar to him.

And as we walked past people whose very struggle to survive consumed the better part of their lives, Jerry was both distressed for these people and inspired by them.

He said to me: "The most powerful force in nature is the strength of the human spirit."

That strength must be nurtured. Later this fall, I will be officially launching my own foundation dedicated to fighting disease, empowering people and encouraging social change here in Canada and abroad.

That's how I want to make use of my resources. That's how I want to spend my time. And to me, that feels like success.

I don't often feel that I've attained any insight valuable enough to be passed off as wisdom, but I will say this: Success is not about status. It doesn't come from how others perceive and define you. It comes from how you perceive and define yourself.

Success is a lot like good art — you know it when you see it. You know it when you feel it.

To extend the art metaphor, it may turn out that your idea of success — the great art of your life — may look to someone else like a bunch of dogs playing poker.

But you shouldn't listen. And you shouldn't care.

We live in a society that grows more fragmented every day. Our lives are busier. Friendships are harder to maintain. For some, families are harder to hold to ether — or even to get together for dinner.

The world grows more crowded and yet we feel increasingly alone.

The same things that brought people happiness decades ago can bring people happiness today. They're just more difficult to achieve.

We need to work harder to make and keep a connection with others.

We need to work harder to feel part of something, to contribute to our wider world.

For the students of this great college, St. Peter's motto can serve as a philosophy for life after school: Begin, Belong, Become.

Begin your journey. Belong to the world. Become part of the solution.

Don't just witness problems, help tackle them. Don't just live in your country, help build it.

As a society, we are richer than those who came before us. We are more advanced. We are destined to live longer and in greater comfort than our ancestors.

And yet we are still pilgrims. We are still in search of something.

We seek deeper meaning in our lives. We strive for happiness. We seek success.

And we can achieve it — if we chart our own path, following our own convictions, guided by our own instincts.

And if we never forget that the most powerful force in nature is the strength of the human spirit.

Thank you.