

Valedictory Address
Jennifer Nicholson, B.Ed.
June 4, 2006 10:00 a.m.
81st University of Winnipeg Convocation

Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, distinguished guests, fellow graduates, ladies and gentlemen.

Here we are in a gym with friends and strangers, unashamedly dressed in unflattering gowns and awkward hoods and hats, beaming with pride over a piece of paper... it's funny how much context and tradition can add significance to material things! For this is a momentous day and joins others in the landmarks along our life journeys.

It's appropriate today to be in the Duckworth Centre, our gym. This once foreign University is now the home of many memories. We can show others how to get to the mezzanine floor; we know of a few free parking options, and we know where to go to "study" when we really want to socialize or sleep. It has taken time to be able to call this our own. Some of us left the comfort zone of our high schools, families or jobs, and others, a previous university, city or country, all in the pursuit of a desire, a goal, a gift, a dream. If we think back on those first experiences at the University of Winnipeg, we will recall the apprehension and nervousness but the anticipation and excitement. Let's remember the fears we conquered and obstacles we overcame to be able to sit here today.

It's appropriate that today we are gathered as graduates, faculty and guests. If there is one lesson we have learned from university it's that "it is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18, NKJV). We did not know that the strangers we nervously worked with in labs or group projects our first year would become supportive friends in our later years and friends that we will have for life. We are thankful for the diversity of people we have been introduced to in this place. Throughout our studies, we also relied on our professors to leave their doors open which many so graciously did. We are thankful to you for being approachable and for giving us feedback and guidance. Finally we are thankful for our friends and family whom we've turned to for encouragement and understanding as we crammed for one more test, skipped out on one more social event, and celebrated one more completed assignment. Let's remember these who

affirmed us with their presence, their time, financially and emotionally for us to be able to sit here today.

It's appropriate that today we are men and women in black. As singer and songwriter Johnny Cash (1971) explained in one song, "just so we're reminded of the ones who are held back, Up front there ought'a be a Man In Black" ("Man in Black"). According to the United Nation's Human Development Report of 2003, 25% of adults in the developing world are unable to even read and write; In fact, according to the same report, there are 879 million adults who are illiterate in the world. We have worked hard to be here and can be proud of the opportunity we've embraced, and yet we do have a responsibility to our community both locally and globally. Let's remember that today we celebrate a rare blessing and privilege in being able to sit here today.

And that is why it's appropriate that today we receive a simple piece of paper. As we discovered in our studies, there will always be more to learn. Knowledge is boundless. How and what we choose to do with what we do know will impact those around us. Even though she won a Noble Peace prize and established foundations to care for the poorest of the poor in 123 countries before she died¹, it was Mother Teresa who said, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."² Wherever we end up next, however significant or insignificant it may seem, let's not forget to put into it the joy and passion we have in our hearts as we sit here today.

As we leave the familiarity of this place to step forward into an unpredictable future, may we forget the material things but be granted courage, community, humility and love instead. Thank you. God bless.

Jennifer Nicholson

¹ Krantz, L. (2003, October 16). Mother Teresa, 1910-1997. *CBC News Online*, Retrieved June 3, 2006 from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/motherteresa/>

² Stern, A. (Ed.) (2000). *Everything starts from prayer: Mother Teresa's meditations on spiritual life for people*. Oregon: White Cloud Press.