

Everything is Perfect...I Changed!

Good afternoon!

This is such a great day. What an honor to share in this wonderful event in your lives.

I want to thank Dr. Ann Stuart, Chancellor and President of Texas Women's University for inviting me to be here.

Most importantly, I want to thank TWU for insisting I wear this robe. I didn't have to shop for a dress or worry about what to wear.

GRADUATES!!! CONGRATULATIONS!!!

You have done something wonderful for yourselves.

Today, you create a legacy for you and your family. Your parents and supporters can brag all about you, you...yes, you can brag on yourself. Most importantly, your children can check the box that their mom or dad is a college graduate. You have now become a bigger role model for them, and they, because of you, will seek a higher education.

In short, you just changed the world!

Change is why I have been asked to be here today. I want to tell you about my life and the unexpected and ever changing opportunities that come everyone's way. Hence, the title of this speech; "Everything is Perfect...I Changed."

I graduated from Southern Methodist University with a degree in Film and Journalism. I chose it because my mom thought I would look really good on television. My first job was at Channel 5 in Dallas. I arrived on my first day around 7:30 and by lunch wondered what I had done. I knew of every crime in the city, phoned the county morgue several times a day for updates and drove home that evening to add another lock on my door. I didn't last that long in the business...I changed!

I was an only child of entrepreneurial parents and as a kid I lived in a very creative, imaginary world. I had all kinds of animal friends that existed only in my mind. After college, I was young, my cost of living was low, the news career was over and I had no commitments to anyone, I decided to follow my heart and my imagination. I began my toy company in 1983 with six bear samples...not that I liked bears, I really preferred rabbits and cats, but at the time, bears were the most popular gift item that stores wanted to buy. I hired sales rep groups all over the nation to sell my products. This means that I loaded my bear samples into a huge duffle bag, went into the Dallas Market Center and showed my samples to every sales group that would look

at them until I found the group that was the perfect match to sell my products. Several months passed and after they were pleased with my sales, I asked them to recommend me to other sales groups at all the leading markets such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta and New York. I was around twenty-one years old and my business was born!

My big break came in early 1984 when the buyer for Neiman Marcus called. The Republican National Convention was coming to Dallas and she wanted to know if I had elephants. I excitedly replied; "Of course I did!" Well, I didn't...I had only six bears in my line. So with fearless thinking, I loped all the heads off the bears, sewed elephant heads on, and was in her office the next morning...with elephants. I had my other samples with me and she bought the whole line. The relationship and business never stopped growing.

I set up my production locally around the Fair Park area of Dallas. The eighties were all about growth and creativity. The nineties brought increasing pressure to take my production to China. My suppliers were closing in the U.S. and moving overseas, retailers were demanding cheaper products and my profits were dwindling with every shipment. I have a very high standard for how my product is made and a very involved management style. I had been present for every product we produced and so had most of my employees, whom had been with me from the beginning. How do I do this? It was a difficult time both emotionally and financially. I made certain my employees had other jobs...I changed!

At the end of 2000, I began production overseas. It was going to be perfect. The move allowed me to bring costs down and increase production. Not being involved in the day-to-day allowed my creativity to flow. I was able to compete like never before. The buyer for Victoria's Secret was shopping at a boutique in New York and found my product. She called to see if I could produce for them...and of course, I could...game on! Our first-ever shipment, from China, for Neiman Marcus and boutiques got on the water (that means large quantity of finished toys on the ship coming to the U.S.) The first product for Victoria's Secret was in the beginning stages of production... 9/11 happened. If all of my orders didn't cancel they got cut in half. Victoria's Secret cut their order from 40,000 pieces to 20,000 pieces. For three weeks, after 9/11, every time the phone rang my hand shook...I changed!

Retail was so beaten down by the fears brought by 9/11, that for the following two years everything would have to be very easy to sell. My wildly creative production turned to animals and colors that were limited to only the best sellers. It was time to play safe. That meant that everything had to be pink or white and only a bear, rabbit or cat. Around 2005, everything came back. Buyers wanted more creative products...again...game on!

Then in 2008 and 2009 the U.S. economy tanked...retail dwindled and a new toy regulation was enacted in response to the poor quality and mass quantity oversights by some really big toy companies. This new law raises the testing price for each product and in some cases, doubles or triples the costs. For some small companies, it can cost one year of total revenue just to meet the requirements of this law. The law is for any product marketed to a child age twelve and under and for any product made anywhere...even here. It has frozen many small and midsize companies leaving the companies that caused the problems in the first place as some of the only

companies that can afford to stay in business. Financially, it caused me to temporarily halt my business...I changed!

Why am I here today speaking to you about toys, because I am one of you. I just finished my Chemistry final yesterday...I changed!

I met Dr. Stuart around 2006. She would often ask about my business (which was fine, at the time) and somehow became aware that in my free time I read health magazines and nutritional journals. In the early part of 2008, we passed each other in a hallway...she looking elegant, going somewhere and I, with an armload of magazines. That moment forever changed my life...she was standing at the elevator when I looked back at her...she said, "Phebe, why don't you actually study it instead of reading articles about it. We wrote the book on nutrition, I'll send you some information"...and then the kicker! "You have another thirty-years of great work...what are you going to do with it?...why don't you grow?" Those words swirled in my head daily and she was dead right.

A few months later my husband and I decided to relax by the ocean and hike in the hills of New Port and Laguna Beach, California. We arrived on a Saturday for what was to become one of the most horrific events in our lives. Mac got a very toxic food poisoning which led to a bowel obstruction. (I have since googled it and 6000 people a year die from this) He was losing consciousness, turning yellow and as a relatively thin guy had almost instantly swollen to appear eight months pregnant. As we entered the ER at Hoag Memorial Center, I was asked what kind of chaplain I needed. There was a possibility he wasn't going to make it. I never let go of his feet. I thought if I held tight enough he wouldn't be taken. Heaven was going to have to wrestle me for him. After eighteen hours of stomach pumping, bags and bags of fluid, morphine, tubes going in every direction and days in the hospital...today he is fine...I changed!

At the time, the new toy regulation (the one I just told you about), that currently has my toy line on hold, had not yet happened. However, it had become evident that my business was getting more difficult to run. It required the factory in China, far, far away, to make a perfect product, buyers in the U.S. to buy for their stores and a customer to buy it for my company to be successful and profitable...events totally out of my control. The reality that I could be left alone in the world with such an uncertain future frightens me...I changed!

I enrolled in classes to get all the prerequisites needed for a Master's in Clinical Nutrition. I am still in the prerequisite part and will begin the Master's in a year or two. After this much time and effort, I have full plans for a Doctorate. I chose nutrition because it is interesting. It is a field with endless and ageless possibilities, for those next thirty years that Dr. Stuart mentioned. It is portable, useful anytime, anyplace and gives me an independence that I desire.

You have all made a fabulous choice! Not only have you changed yourself and your world by graduating today, you can rule the world, because those that produce, prepare and handle the world's food supply, control the world. Health depends upon nutrition more than any other single factor and as Gandhi said, "Man becomes what he eats."

As for me, along with school, a new toy line is being developed and I am transforming my characters into storybooks soon to be published and hopefully brought forth to live in the world of children's media. I am also creating different products for other stores outside of the children's market. I stand before you as an example that change will be with you your entire life, that one is never too old or set in their ideas to change and on occasion a glass of lemonade, made from life's lemons, can taste pretty good. Change is the rudder that guides each person's destiny and advanced education increases independence and reduces uncertainty. Your degree is yours forever. It is something that money cannot walk up and buy...it is only earned by you. It will not be diminished in times of poor health nor reduced in economic downturns. It stands solid as a great achievement. When change happens it will give you more options. If you are receiving your Bachelor's, consider a Master's. If you are receiving your Master's, consider a Doctorate and if you are receiving your Doctorate, I salute you. For those of you listening, wishing you could start college or go back to college...you really can...it just takes some changing. As you encounter change, I encourage you to adopt the choice of one of my book characters. She is born into a stark, black and white world. To become what she wants and needs to be she changes her thoughts...which changes her perspective...which changes herself...which changes her world!

I wish you all a life of health, clarity and the courage to face life's changes and grow!