

Mr. Chancellor, Madam President, Members of the Board of Governors, Members of Senate, Elders, honoured guests, graduates, ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls

Tansi – Good morning

We give thanks to the Great Spirit for bringing us together to celebrate the achievements of those who are graduating today in Education, Human Ecology and Human and Nutritional Sciences.

Graduates, today is your day, the day you receive your reward for your hard work, commitment and the many sacrifices you have made along the way to prepare yourselves for your chosen vocation. As a teacher, I can relate to those who are entering the teaching profession.

As I thought of your extensive preparation of five years or more, I remembered my own experience over 50 years ago. Fresh out of grade twelve, my preparation was a 6-week summer school at the Manitoba Normal School. It was a crash course in teaching after which we received a permit to teach. All I can recall about that summer school is learning how to balance an attendance register, playing softball and going for walks in Assiniboine Park. The Normal School that became the Teachers' College is now the Mennonite University.

There was a serious shortage of teachers at that time and grade eleven and twelve students were encouraged to obtain permits to teach. I started out in a one-room school with 30 children in grades one to eight at a salary of \$1600 a year or \$152 a month after deductions. Now you will likely make more than that in a day (and I can make it in an hour).

How does a person teach 30 children in eight different grades? What a challenge! I'll tell you how I survived. I survived by the example of my favourite teachers.

--I liked the teachers who were kind to me ...who showed me respect and who trusted me.

--I liked the teachers who believed in me, challenged me and gave me responsibilities.

--I like the teachers who took the time to visit my family, who joined us in the playground, who tramped through the snow with us to get a Christmas tree.

--I liked the teachers who laughed.

I was fortunate to have such teachers. I thank the Great Spirit for those teachers because they taught me by example, which is the traditional method practiced by our people. It isn't enough to have knowledge, to be smart, to be outstanding in science, math or English. I believe that, more importantly, it is the human qualities that determine your effectiveness and success as a teacher.

We are not always conscious of how we gain those human qualities. What I do know is that to possess those qualities of respect, understanding, trust and kindness, one must believe in the potential of all people. One must respect the cultural and linguistic differences of all races of people.

Today, as teachers, you will have a very different classroom from those of 50 years ago.

Today, you will in all very likely have students from virtually anywhere in the world. Can you be an expert in all cultures? Not likely ---but if you practice the old adage of our people that "everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner", you can validate the unique experiences of each child in your class.

What we must acknowledge is the fact that, we, in Canada, do not have one common culture with a homogeneous set of values. To assume we do, is to perpetuate the practice of assimilation that defeats the purpose of education. Students deserve an education that "will enhance their sense of identity and confidence in their personal worth and ability".

The challenge lies with you, the graduates of today, to make a difference in our classrooms... to create a truly Canadian mosaic with all its richness.

**Graduates, may you be remembered as a favourite teacher.
Congratulations human ecology, human nutritional sciences graduates,**

and fellow teachers. I am honoured to share this day with you and to receive an honorary degree from the University of Manitoba

**Kesa manito, meaninan muskowitzewin Great spirit, give us strength
Kwask kita isi pimatisiyak to live a good life,
Kuniwaniminan, kiskinootahinan keep us, guide us
Oma ka kisikak, mena kakikay this day and forevermore**

Ekosi

All my relations.

**Verna J. Kirkness
May 29, 2008**