

## **Class speaker to class of 2012: "If it is to be, it is to be you"**

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/18648/class-speaker-to-class-of-2012-if-it-is-to-be-it-is-to-be-you/>

Nana Adjoa Sankoa Coleman, an accounting major from Glendale by way of West Africa, spoke to her peers during the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's 2 p.m. Commencement ceremony.

Here is a transcript of her speech:

“Good afternoon Chancellor Wells, Provost Earns, faculty, academic staff members, parents, graduates, friends and families. I am honored to have been chosen to represent the class of 2012. Earlier on in my life, it was my greatest desire to go to school up to the university level, but I did not consider my desire to be remotely possible, nor did I ever imagine I could be the student speaker at my college commencement. Everyone here has a unique story to tell – graduates, family and friends and UW Oshkosh faculty and staff.

“I want to tell you one of those stories, as we together celebrate this moment in all of our life sagas. Many years ago, there was a small girl living in Ghana, a country in West Africa, about the size of the State of Oregon. The house she lived in was crowded with many people since family members often lived together. But the little girl was especially lucky to have a room at all, since her mother had been ejected from her husband’s house for not agreeing that he marry a second wife. That decision meant making a home in a new place -- four children and one adult all living in one room. There was no electricity in the room and the roof was half ripped off, which made it difficult to sleep comfortably when it rained. Not only did the family share the room with their luggage and the little food, but they also had to contend with the presence of rats. Their condition was unbearable yet, mouths had to be fed, and that meant everyone pulling their weight.

“With the two older brothers learning a trade, one sister in school and the little girl’s mother pregnant with her fifth child, the little girl from Ghana sold fruits and other foods on the streets. The little girl was certainly old enough to be in school with her sister, but someone had to help with bringing money into the house. The little girl had to watch every day as her classmates headed off to school, carrying their books and lunch bags. It was very hot work, with temperatures often in the 90s. Carrying mangoes and oranges in a large pan on her head kept the little girl in constant pain. She also sold ice water to the thirsty fishermen and fishmongers, weaving among them with a bucket of water on her head.

“It was during these years of trying to earn money on the streets while her peers went off to school that the little girl resolved to one day get a full education. She wanted to be a lawyer, since witnessing her brother’s arrest for some infraction and seeing the sadness and frustration felt by her mother, who had no money to hire a legal representative for her son. The little girl set herself a goal. She would never allow her family to struggle again, and even as young as she was, she understood that the right for legal representation for everyone should be always recognized, whether rich, middle class or poverty stricken.

“The little girl then had a break; her uncle made a sacrificial choice to help her achieve her goals. He saw

that she received a full education in Ghana, paying for it himself. Even though she was one of the few villagers in almost all her classes, the little girl was extremely determined to make effective steps to reach her goals so she did not pay heed to all the mockeries she received in school. She knew that she has the power in her hands to make her life better through the quality education her uncle was willing to provide her. After her secondary education, the girl was sent by her uncle sent to the U.S for higher education. Not surprisingly, the little girl chose accounting as her major, with continued plans to become an attorney in corporate law.

“We hear these rags-to-riches stories all the time -- many are true, and these people do exist. I am one of those people. I am the little girl from Ghana. The combination of hard work, support from ones that believe in you, and your own personal determination and planning can break down any barriers to gaining a good education. Parents, uncles, aunties, grandparents and family members gathered here, my graduating class and I are grateful for your belief in us and the support we have received from you all till this day.

“To my graduating class: We all have loads to carry and responsibilities to meet. What you do with your education is as important as getting that education. The world needs you now more than ever. Our society is sometimes splintered and taking care of yourself seems the easiest road to walk. But do not take that road. I was helped all along the way. I will never ever forget the compassionate acts of people that made it possible for me to be here. Once I came here to the U.S, other people helped. Faculty members at UW Oshkosh such as Professor Wendy Potratz, as well as the Office of International Education and some community members all contributed to my success. Think about your own stories now, graduates; visualize the faces of the people that helped you reach this day. Then continue your journey by helping to bring cohesiveness back to our communities, our world. Share your strengths to make others stronger and impart your knowledge.

“To everyone gathered here: The advice I have to give comes from my aunt, Ms. Theresa Osei-Tutu, “If it is to be, it is to be you.” If it is to be that you will achieve your goal; if it is to be that you will reach that golden dream; if it is to be that you reach out for the piece of good news within you, it is up to you to be very determined and stay focused on all that you do. Wherever you are, whatever condition you find yourself in, whatever load you are carrying, always remember that if a little girl can survive all this and come to school in a foreign land to finish an accounting degree with 135 credits in three years, you can also do what you need to do in the next chapter of your story.

“To the faculty members in this great school: I will forever remember the love I received from you and I promise that the seed of quality education you have sown in me will grow and produce good fruits everywhere I go. On behalf of my graduating classmates, we say a big thank you for all that you do for this school. To parents, family members and friends here: I say thank you for your constant support of your children and loved ones. Continue to give your love and support to us as we leave school because with your wisdom and direction, we will be able to survive in the world. Now to everyone, if this country is to remain a beacon of light for other countries, a source of strength and pride, then we must work harder than ever. We must work hard – not alone, but together, for the good of all, so that the fruits of our labor are shared by all.

“Graduates, with the help of your supporters and educators, you have carried your loads, and now, you are ready for more, but do not forget that if it is to be, it is to be you.

“Congratulations, Class of 2012!”

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