

IT'S THE END THAT MATTERS!

Keynote address by **Dr Stella Anyangwe, nee Nwigwe**, class of 1969

At the 50th Jubilee celebrations of Saker Baptist College

Limbe, Saturday 28th January, 2012

SBC is 50 years old! Hearty congratulations to the Cameroon Baptist Convention for nurturing the tiny seed planted 50 years ago by the North American Baptist Conference. The thirty six young girls who climbed the Saker hill to start their secondary school education on the 29th of January in 1962 had no clue how their stay in Saker would be, not to mention how it would end! I'm sure that the missionaries, the teachers and those young students who started SBC could not in their wildest dreams imagine what it would look like 50 years down the road.

A 50 year-old woman is confident, at ease with herself and her looks, as well as with her environment. She usually is past trying to impress. She has made her mistakes and most likely learnt from them. She's come to the realization that life is not fair, that friends might not be loyal, that marriages end but that life goes on, that children grow up and move out and that no one owes her anything. She says "what you see is what you get: take it or leave it". It's great to be 50 and I know what I'm talking about!

Now back to the theme "It's the end that matters". The 36 youngsters that came to Saker in 1962 came from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Thank God for uniforms, uniformity and strict rules. It was and still is near impossible to determine a student's background, or her likelihood to succeed, when you look at a group of students in uniform. Teaching is done in a uniform manner and not according to the status of the students. Thus, all stand a chance to succeed in this level playing field. However, a lot would depend on how much effort each student puts in, and how much support she gets from her environment. Good luck and good genes play only a small part in this.

I, in particular, and many others like me, am grateful that such was, and hopefully still is the nature of education in Saker, and in many other church-run schools. We would not have stood a chance otherwise. Let me tell you a

little bit about myself. I, Stella Chinwe Efosi Nwigwe, am the only child of the marriage between a Nigerian father who served in the Southern Cameroons police force in Buea, and a Cameroonian mother and primary school teacher, both of whom were very young when I was born. My mother, Elizabeth Nkuku Ekwe, was a teenager who had just completed a 3-year teacher's training course in Nigeria after her primary school, and who had just started her life as a primary school teacher in Buea. My dad was a flashy young man and a secondary school graduate, who had been recruited into the Nigerian police force because he was an athlete. He was also an accomplished ballroom dancer and I'm told he swept my mum off her feet on a dance floor in Buea. My mother, daughter of Ruth Malafa and granddaughter of Pa Malafa who was one of the founders of Mispah Baptist church, became pregnant and had to urgently marry my dad, Christian Nwigwe, as was the required thing in Victoria then. Their marriage didn't last, and I was brought up by a single mother who struggled to further her own education and raise me. Life was tough, treats were few and my mother's mantra was that only hard work would lift us up from poverty. Failure was not an option for me. My mother and I became very good "managers" indeed. We managed (as in just getting by) with everything, like getting rents paid, having enough to eat, having school fees paid etc. My mother's maternal uncles, the Malafa brothers, Pen and Isaac, and a few other benefactors, ensured that my primary and secondary school fees were paid, and were encouraged by the fact that I passed exams. They filled the material gap, while my mother drummed it in my psyche that I could become anything that I dared to dream of becoming. And that it was free to dream! However, dreaming had to be coupled with reality. When I was in standard 6 (class 7), she made me study typing and shorthand after school each day, and to take and pass the Pitman's exam, just in case there was no money to send me to secondary school, and I had to work as a clerk or secretary. That training was not wasted, even when I luckily was sponsored to go to college. I was always one of the fastest note-takers in my class. My mother, the grade 3 teacher, refused to end her career at that level. She bundled me with her to Nigeria where she went to teacher training college for a grade 2 teacher's certificate. She succeeded. I finished primary school and started secondary school in Nigeria, in 1964, and my Form 1 fees were paid for by an American Peace Corps volunteer in the college, who couldn't bear the thought of a bright child being dismissed for failing to complete school fees. I decided that since I could never be popular for being one of

the richest kids in class, I would be well known for being one of the brightest. I read every book I saw from cover to cover, including the Oxford English dictionary! I started form 4 in January 1967 but the Biafra war disrupted school. My mother and I escaped from the war in Nigeria and returned virtually destitute to Cameroon in September 1967. We did not give up but with the support of my mother's family, I was admitted to Saker and started form 4 again in October 1967. My childhood classmates were already in form 5. I was heart-broken but not devastated! I decided to take the GCE O level exams in form 4, and I passed in the 4 papers I took, including English and French. After passing in 8 GCE O level papers in form 5 in 1969, a government scholarship sponsored my education in CCAST, Bambili, from where I passed in 3 A level subjects in 1971. Medical school was also paid for by government and in 1977, a young lady from a poor, broken home, but who had been nurtured with much love and encouragement by family, school and church, became Dr Stella Nwigwe. Who would have thought? What did I do to deserve this favour? What special preparations did I receive for the way my life was turning out? None, except for the bits and pieces of wisdom gleaned from various life experiences.

By the way, as I was being blessed, so was my hard-working mother. She got a Danish scholarship and trained in nursery education, as I finished Saker. She went on to become a Grade 1 teacher, then a Licentiate of the College of Perceptors, ran the only government nursery school in the then West Cameroon for 10 years, and ended her professional career as the Fako Divisional Inspector of Nursery Education. I had attended a Catholic girls' secondary school from form 1 to form 3, and then went to an Anglican girls' secondary school for form 4 before the Biafra war disrupted my education in Nigeria. But it was the "spiritual emphasis" that I found in Saker that introduced me to a personal relationship with my God. I finally could understand the bible, and I found a father to whom I could talk freely, and ask anything of. And I asked perpetually for a lot of things! Although I came from a singing maternal family, Saker helped me discover that I had a voice that could really be used to praise God. I thank Mr Donald Witt, our then Principal, for making me believe in myself. And I have used this voice extensively. I was in Saker for only two academic years, but those two years changed my life forever.

After becoming a medical doctor, I got married, bore two children, went for further studies in the USA, bagged a PhD on top of the MD, taught in

medical school and then got an international job in public health. The World Health Organization has been my employer for 16 years and I have been WHO Representative in 4 countries, including South Africa, Africa's most sophisticated and most complex middle income country. Just two weeks ago, I started my last assignment with the WHO before my retirement next year, when I will be 62 years young. I am now the Regional Coordinator for Disaster Prevention and response for the entire African region of 46 countries. Was my humble beginning any indication of what I would become, or of the life I would know and live? Of course not! Was I the best of the pack? Of course not! Did I believe I could become anything I dreamt of becoming? Yes, I did. Did I do this alone? No, I relied on several things and on several people. I rely on the promises of God and I remind Him of them every single day of my life. I rely on His Word. I believed my single mother who consistently reminded me that your name will be made by what you become, not by what you start out with. Someone said: "your life is God's gift to you, but what you make of your life is your gift to God". It is clear from my life's story that if our future were to be determined by how our lives start, then my life has definitely not followed that rule. My story, and that of many others like me, has proven that we are capable of changing what would seem the obvious course of our life. Several examples abound. Oprah Winfrey was born poor in the deep south of the USA, was sexually abused as a child and dropped out of school. But she picked her life up, worked hard at what she did and is now one of the most celebrated personalities on earth! Ruth and Esther in the bible were young women from disadvantaged backgrounds, the one a childless widow and the other an adopted orphan. They both worked hard to rise above their lowly estate. Ruth, who unashamedly worked the fields, picking up leftover grain for food, became the wife of the wealthy landowner. Esther, the orphan Jewish girl became the queen of the mighty King Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces, and as queen averted the plot to destroy the Jews. Which Anglophone Cameroonian of my generation did not know the story of Mr. Dan Nangah, the businessman extraordinaire who had only a primary school education, who sold groundnuts on the road side as a young man, but who worked hard to become one of the most successful businessmen in Cameroon? The story of the thief who was crucified beside Jesus on Calvary is a poignant one. Imagine him having lived a life of sin all through, and having been rightly punished for his misdeeds. He however gave his life to Christ as he hung

there dying, and guess what? Christ assured him of being with him in paradise that day. What an end!

Let me once again thank Saker Baptist College for those two short years that I spent here, but which completely changed my life. Let me thank all the principals, past and present, for the sterling job they have done and are still doing, in keeping the school focused on what is important in life, and that is our relationship with our Lord and creator, while molding women of substance. Mr Witt, Dr Haupt, Baba Tayui, Mr Body Lawson, Mr Haddison and our very first female Principal, Mrs Lyonga. We honour you, we bless you and we thank you most sincerely.

For Sakerettes, past and present, let us remember that the beginning can either positively or negatively influence the end. It is incumbent on each one of us to ensure that our beginning does not put us in a straight jacket, such that we are unable to break free from what seems to be the pre-destined path for our life. Being born or raised in a household of little means does not signify that we cannot break the chain of poverty. Being born with a silver spoon in our mouth does not guarantee that we will succeed in life. We must work hard and pray hard to succeed because it's the only sure way. Our beloved alma mater, Saker Baptist College, inculcates in us the culture of hard work, dedication and reliance on God. No kanda stick, no mungang, no horoscope can beat this culture. We thank you Saker! It is indeed the end that matters, whatever the beginning was.

God bless.

“WE THANK YOU” by Jim Reeves

Jim Reeves—WE THANK THEE

We thank Thee each morning for a new born day
Where we may work the fields of new mown hay
We thank Thee for the sunshine and the air that we breathe oh Lord we
thank Thee
Thank Thee for the rivers that run all day
Thank Thee for the little birds that sing along the way
Thank Thee for the trees and the deep blue sea oh Lord we thank Thee
Oh yes we thank Thee Lord for every flower that blooms

Birds that sing fish that swim and the light of the moon
We thank Thee every day as we kneel and pray
That we were born with eyes to see these things
Thank Thee for the fields where the clover is grown
Thank Thee for the pastures where cattle may roam
Thank Thee for Thy love so pure and free oh Lord we thank Thee
Oh yes we thank Thee Lord...