

Chancellor, Judge Lex Mpati

Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Sizwe Mabizela

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Peter Clayton

President of the Old Rhodian Union, Prof. Rod Walker, and the committee members of the Old Rhodian Union

The Alumni Office in its entirety

Old Rhodians – Aged by graduation, all of whom I believe whole heartedly are young at heart,

Ladies and Gentleman,

Good afternoon. Sanibonani.

First and foremost let me start off by saying thank you for having me here this weekend, at a homecoming for me of sorts, and let me note how truly humbled I am to be a recipient of the Emerging Old Rhodian Award. Finding words to express how much this honour means to me has been difficult to say the least. Looking at the list of past and today's other recipients of their awards, I am honoured to be included in such great company of change makers.

I can assure you – this was not inside job. I was just as surprised at the nomination as anyone, particularly because, with a milestone birthday at the end of this year....as if I wasn't feeling old enough...here comes an award with the word 'OLD' its name!

However, it's the first word that resonates with me dearly. By definition "Emerging" means to "enter the picture" ...to "come into view" ... to "become apparent or prominent". It will take a minute for it all to sink in, that I am here and that by me simply living my life the best way that I know how to, by getting involved and trying to make my little difference in my various communities, has had a few people notice that along the way. It has led to all that it has and this was never my goal or intention. The intention was - as it has always been in my family and still is to make a difference in your world, growing the size of that 'world', one community at a time.

I also would like to take a moment to acknowledge my family on both sides - the Hlophes and Maziyas, the Dlamini and Masukus - who are back home eSwatini. Coming from a Swazi family-as nomadic as my upbringing has been-my roots have grounded me time and time again. Today is no different. They are all here with me today in spirit. I would also like to take the opportunity to take a moment to acknowledge my chosen family of dear friends who have been so supportive, particularly since my student activism days here at Rhodes.

At this time, I also would like to acknowledge Miss. Andiswa Sibhukwana – a student helper in the Alumni Office - who I am told nominated me. I would like to thank you for being moved enough to nominate me. It means more than words to know that someone holds you with such high regard and esteem that, without having ever met you, they deem you worthy of such an honour. It humbles you. I am thankful to you for your random act of kindness.

It is said that “Everyone is gifted, but some people never open their package.”

A little over ten years ago, I was blessed enough to begin opening mine. I arrived in Grahamstown having truly made the best decision of my life up to that point. My parents left the decision for a choice in tertiary education and degree of choice completely up to me. My high school at the time also assisted its students by posting up lists where you could write your name under the institutions you wanted to request application forms from. For me, Rhodes was the best fit. It was my first choice. It was the one that spoke best to me, from application to orientation week to undergraduate and postgraduate ‘culture fit’. I felt at home away from home.

From a teenager who had no idea where her random subject choices would lead her, from my time at Helen Joseph House on the hill, as a part of Nelson Mandela Hall, to a young woman who found her place on Rhodes campus at the Politics department, through tutoring, working at the Library, volunteering with the Community Engagement Centre and serving several committees before chairing Amnesty International here, the journey was long and interesting. Like any long road to freedom, there were difficult times, times of strife and turmoil – both inward and outward-and it all helped mould the woman I still believe that I am becoming, the one who you see in front of you today.

I truly believed then as I do now that you could not go wrong with a school whose main themed colour is a passionate purple and where its slogan decrees that **this** is where leaders learn. I was always hungry for knowledge, a hunger that remains with me today. My parents instilled such ‘norms’ as respect for academia, the freedom and value of choice, they exposed me to knowing women role-models with higher education in traditionally-male dominated fields, working moms and stay-at-home dads, and the role that public service performed by private citizens plays in shaping a balanced world throughout my childhood.

I arrived at Rhodes sure that I would earn a Masters one day because I was raised in a household where this was also the norm. It took a movement like “Fees must fall” to truly appreciate the privilege of having had parents who not only could afford to pay for my education but were well educated themselves. I began my Masters studies here, and while the reason for me not being to complete them here is my one regret from my time here, today marks a crowning moment in my Rhodes career and perhaps a happier Segway into what I thought was a closed chapter of my life.

Rhodes was where I tested those ‘norms’-some standards held, most of them didn’t-and for those that didn’t, being much younger and much more brazen-faced back then, these were the catalysts for change in my eyes.

The spark was lit. That's why for me, in life, the worst thing any *one* or any *firm* or any international *body* can say to me is "No"...because you'll never truly know the answer unless you try. The questioning began here and it continues on in my life-whether I am wearing my consultant's hat as a sayer, with my expertise and conviction with words; or wearing my social activist hat as a doer, on the ground or online; or whether I am simply showing up -as I am, no hat necessary - as humanly as possible – those questions needs answers. I am happy to be part of not only the ones asking the questions but finding the answers to them as well.

One of most popular questions I get all the time, especially when people find out that I went to Rhodes is, "What did you learn the most about leadership from Rhodes" with a couple of variations at the end of that sentence: "as a Black African woman; As a Swazi woman; As an academic; As a student activist?" I would be happy to run through the several different answers verbally in confidence, on a one-on-one basis but there is always a common thread: "I got answers to questions that I never knew existed and probably would have never asked before Rhodes".

I would like to share what I believe are the three biggest answers to questions I never knew, the most important takeaways for me that came from testing out those norms, particularly at and since Rhodes. The first being a familiar maxim, the second being somewhat of a mantra of mine and the third being my current living philosophy.

The maxim is *umuntfu ngumuntfu ngabantfu* – simply translated as "a person is a person through other people". Our dignity is interconnected and interrelated is such a way that, when we fail one person, we have failed a whole community. So we must lift each other up, individual by individual, to see our communities rise.

My mantra is an African Proverb: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." My journey thus far, the accomplishments I have achieved and acknowledgement I have received could never be and should never be my own. Be it being a social entrepreneur in the making, with the hopes of solving youth unemployment for young women, one job at a time. Be it as an ambassador of One Young World. Be it through the Global Shapers Community and World Economic Forum. Be it as a Queen's Young Leader, an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society or as an Associate of Nexus Africa.

The bigger, the bolder and the more audacious the dream, the more likely that there will be plenty of unsung heroes who worked just as long, just as hard and were just as committed to the various causes that have resounded in communities and societies, in person and online, on national and international levels. I learned a long time ago that team work makes the dream work and I pay homage to these many teams and networks that I have been and am a part of today.

The final one, my living philosophy, emerged during the tail end of my full-time student years here at Rhodes. The updated, aptly acronymed version of 'Carpe Diem' – YOLO- succinctly points to a simple truth of this life. You Only Live Once. Rather than using it to justify how reckless and absent

we tend to be from an increasingly plugged in existence, be present. Know that this moment may be your only moment, to be here, to be fully present, to bring meaning to the world and all those around us.

Having lost many dear friends and family, often tragically at a young age, I know that tomorrow is not promised. I believe in the here and now. I believe that my days are in God's hands and that where the journey takes me – however long or short – is a blessed one.

Having the gift – God given, genetic and diligence wise, among others - was never enough. Having begun to unwrap the package, Rhodes played a key role in me honing that potential as a leader and for that, I am eternally grateful to this institution and the people that made it what it was for me then and continue to make it that way for future leaders of tomorrow. Hopefully, this is only the beginning of greater, truer and wiser things to come in this life.

It is with that, that I thank you once again for the Emerging Old Rhodian Award and wish you all a happy Founders Day!