

Thank you. Good afternoon, President Hogan, trustees, faculty and administrators, honorees, proud parents and families. And congratulations, members of the class of 2008.

Let me clear something up right away. I had NOTHING to do with the decision to allot each of you only 4 tickets for your family and friends for this ceremony. I am using only one guest ticket – the other three are on Facebook. My husband is here. His mother's day gift to me was to tell me "Really, a 6'4" chick looks good in a mortar board."

And since I am pregnant, he added, "Maybe they'll let you keep that robe... for when you get really big the last trimester."

Thanks honey.

I am honored to be here. I must admit, I don't remember a single word my commencement speaker said back in 1995. It's not because my commencement speaker was... Michael Bolton. It's because I didn't attend graduation. I was in Colorado, trying out for the Olympic basketball team. So I feel like an honorary member of the Class of '08.

I'm sure there are many proud parents in the audience today. My parents were equally proud when I got my degree. Which is saying something because UConn was the one school my mother did NOT want me to attend. My senior year of high school I had narrowed my choices to Stanford, Notre Dame, Northwestern, Virginia and Uconn. My mother – at the time a guidance counselor in Connecticut – pulled me aside and said, "don't you know that Uconn is a *safety school*?"

Send your angry letters to RuthAnn Lobo care of Granby High School.

My father, also a teacher in Connecticut, didn't say a word. That might have been because he went to Uconn – for two years. Perhaps because he lived in the jungle, his grades were not good, and he was not invited back for his 5th semester. I like to remind him that I was Phi Beta Kappa and he was I Tappa Kegga.

Uconn has changed considerably since my time here. While my dorm for four years – Watson – still looks exactly the same, the rest of the campus --

and its reputation in the Granby High School guidance office -- has been transformed.

Many of my classes were held in Arjona and Monteith and many intensive study sessions took place in Ted's and Huskies. Of course, back then, Huskies wouldn't let anyone in unless they were actually 21...even if they were on the basketball team. I don't know if that's still the case.

Since sixth grade, when I was six feet tall, people have been asking me if I was a basketball player. I am lucky that my mother always told me that I could be anything I wanted to be. So I told her, at age 9, that I wanted to play pro football. She said I could do anything except that.

So I wrote a letter to Red Auerbach and told him I was going to be the first girl to play for the Boston Celtics. It was a pretty ridiculous dream. Even during my senior year in college there was no WNBA – no place in the USA for a woman to play basketball for a living.

I was a Political Science major and when people asked me what I was going to do, I would say, "I'm going to be a lawyer" even though I didn't want to be a lawyer, had no interest in being a lawyer, didn't particularly like lawyers. My brother's a lawyer.

But instead of following the path I thought I had to follow, I chased my ridiculous dream. I was like the dog who chases the car – foolish enough to think I could actually catch it.

And I did. I missed graduation, missed MICHAEL BOLTON, but made the Olympic team. And a year after the Olympics, the WNBA started. And a few years after that, ESPN granted my other wish, to broadcast basketball games, though I'd never taken a single communications class in college. So you never know what can happen in life if you keep chasing the car. I am living testament to the power of delusional thinking.

And I owe almost all of this to the University of Connecticut, whose reach, you will discover, is infinite.

So two months after graduating, I was invited to Washington to jog with President Clinton. A UConn alumnus knew I'd missed my team's national championship visit to the White House so he pulled strings and the next

thing I knew, I was in the White House, at 7 am, watching the President descend the stairs in a Uconn T-Shirt and Uconn hat.

When we were done running, two other sweaty joggers and I rode back to the White House with the President in his limousine. Halfway through the 15 minute ride I realized all the windows were fogged up.

A few years later, I was asked to fly with the President on Air Force One. I boarded the plane and literally took it all in: I took napkins, I took barf bags, I took M&Ms with the Presidential seal on them. A flight attendant – they're probably called something else on Air Force One – told me he was a UConn fan and showed me the ropes.

Each seat had a phone and I was told I could call anyone. I just had to pick up the phone and tell the AF1 operator the phone number. She would dial, and when the person answered, would say, "This is Air Force One and you have a call from Rebecca Lobo." I called every person I knew. And not a single person was home. And the AF1 operator doesn't leave a message. What I would have done to have the number of that American History professor who gave me a B....

So this UConn fan gave me a tour of the plane. We passed a room that had a big carpet with the presidential seal, and a big oak desk – and the President was sitting there working on his speech. He looked up over his glasses and said, "Thanks for joining us Rebecca." No problem.

Then we went to the very front of the plane, to the President's quarters. There is a bed -- for power naps I guess – and a bathroom. Inside the bathroom was a shower and a clothes steamer and a toilet. The flight attendant said to me, "Do you want your picture taken on the president's toilet?"

"Um, no. I have no interest in having my picture taken while sitting on the Prez's toilet."

"It's the photo everyone wants!"

That is when it was clear to me that the tour of the plane must usually be given to men.

The first time I told my husband this story, he said, “I can’t believe you turned down the chance to have your picture taken on the President’s toilet!” But he went to Marquette.

Your UConn degree will open doors for you all over the world. Be prepared to step through those doors. Unless you’re on Air Force One at 35,000 feet. Then wait til you land.

Last December, my husband and I were invited to the White House Christmas Party. It was open bar. They served Sam Adams, appropriately enough. Drinking free beer at the White House, you think: Now these are my tax dollars at work.

We chatted with President and Mrs. Bush. On the way out, we retrieved our coats and the coat-check lady said she was a UConn fan. The coat-check room was actually the White House movie theater. Would we like to come in? And another door opens. She guided me to the president’s seat, front row, next to the wall. We couldn’t resist discreetly rummaging for loose change in the red cushions. Every candidate pledges to bring change to the White House. Perhaps this is what they mean.

When I was with the New York Liberty, we played our games in Madison Square Garden. One evening, I left the locker room and, in the hallway, ran into Justin Timberlake... he was performing that evening. He walked over to me and introduced himself and said, “I really enjoyed watching you play for UCONN... WHEN I WAS A KID.” Ouch.

Somewhere, some grownup is now telling him, “I liked you in NSync when I was a kid.” (While you won’t admit it, some of YOU had ‘Nsync posters on your walls). The lesson is not that time flies by, although you’ll discover that it does, but that whoever you are -whether you are an international rock star or working at the International House of Pancakes – younger people are watching you.

When I was a kid, I was foolish enough to think that I could play professional basketball in the US. Silly enough to think I could participate in

the Olympics. Sufficiently delusional to believe I might one day broadcast ballgames for a living.

In those days, a girl didn't get her number on a wall unless it was preceded by "For a Good Time Call . . ." But people – many people, over many years -- changed that. Some of their numbers are now on that wall.

When I was in 5th grade, a teacher told me, "Rebecca, I'm really worried about you. Your grades are fine but... you need to act more like a girl. You need to dress more like a girl." I was the only girl who played with the boys at recess and ate with the boys at lunch. Looking back – I was just way ahead of my time. When I told my mother what the teacher said, she marched me back to school, and fortunately, the teacher wasn't there... Fortunate for the teacher. My mom got me removed from that class.

Well, thank God my mother supported me, encouraged me, believed in me. Thank God she accepted – and very quickly embraced -- my decision to go to UConn. Thank God all your parents did the same.

I hope to raise my daughters to believe they can be anything they want to be. Anything except a Yankee fan.

A few months ago, I asked my 3-year-old daughter what she was going to be when she grew up. She looked at me like it was the dumbest question she'd ever heard and replied, "A grown-up."

It was the right answer. After all, my question was, "WHAT are you going to be when you grow up." The question should have been, "WHO are you going to be when you grow up." As you graduate, everyone is asking you, "What are you going to do?" After college, "What do you do?" replaces "What's your major?" as the ice-breaker at every party.

But don't ever mistake what you do for who you are.

And that's the question I pose to you today. More important than "What are you going to do", "Who are you going to be?" What will you care about? How will you treat others? Will you do the right thing even when it isn't easy?

I understand that people will always associate me with basketball. I'm 6'4" – with the funny hat 6'5". And I cherish my four years at UConn. But I'm happiest watching my daughters dancing in their diapers in the kitchen. You talk about a dance-off with your pants-off. People say college is the best four years of your life. But I can tell you on this Mother's Day: They are not. The best years of your life are still ahead of you. That's why they call this commencement.

It's time to realize your dreams. It's time to change the world. The other day, my 3-year-old sat frowning on our front stoop with her head in both hands and a new kite at her feet. I asked her what she was doing and she said, "waiting for wind".

I assured her it would be windy later. And without looking up she said, "But later takes a very long time."

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Class of 2008, "Later" has arrived. You've been waiting for wind your whole lives and I'm afraid I've provided it with a long-winded address. Now it's time for you to fly.

"Reach for lofty places, soar through open spaces." Those aren't my words. They're Michael Bolton's.

I didn't get to attend my graduation. Thank you for the privilege of attending yours.