

I should probably start by acknowledging your disappointment that I'm not Jon Stewart. But look at the bright side—your disappointment will only last 10 minutes---whereas I am disappointed every single day that I'm not Jon Stewart.

Seriously--this is an enormous honor for me.

Since this is the School of Fine Arts, it seems fair to assume some of you may be considering a career in the arts. I've spent a lot of my life in that world. I was born in Beverly Hills, my parents made movies, my husbands made music, and I began my acting career on the New York stage when I was 18 years old.

I love working—and also not working—which, for you future actors out there, is more important than you might imagine. At any given moment 99% of my union is unemployed. But unlike me at your age, you have a college education. Congratulations!!! So many opportunities and choices lie ahead for you.

David Brooks wrote about two distinct ways of thinking about the future. The first- the more obvious- is the 'planned life:' the risk of a planned life is that you might not achieve your goal, or that the goal turns out not to be worth pursuing.

The second way of thinking he called 'a summoned life,' where we are summoned by, and we respond to circumstances, opportunities, inspirations, problems and needs around us.

Some people choose to go deep, go intensely into one field. They are important. We need such thinkers-in all disciplines. But everyone has many facets. We can do many things; if we choose, we can jump tracks into something new. And we can jump back again. It's ok to diversify.

Years ago my 5 year old daughter declared, "I wanna be a doctor, a ballerina, a mermaid and a man." I told her-- you go for it. YES! You can do it all.

Nobody ever told me that when I was young. So I'm saying, as you move along, feel empowered to change lanes. People say you have to decide to be this or that. I say we can do many different things. Personally, I'm still diversifying.

Some of the most meaningful times of my life have taken place far from Hollywood and Broadway. I have encountered people who moved me away from everything that was familiar to me, and caused to do things I never imagined I would or could do.

During my travels, I've met people whose needs I felt unable to turn away from. One of the first was Halima- a woman I met in Darfur in 2004. She insisted that I have this -- a

protection amulet. Halima's village, like countless across Darfur, was bombed and burned in the ethnic cleaning campaign that ravaged the region. Halima was raped, and children were killed before her eyes. She clasped my hands and said, "Tell people what is happening here. Tell them we need help."

In the plane coming home I tried to process all I had witnessed. I've always told my own kids that 'with knowledge comes responsibility.' An inescapable knowing was now mine. But I was a mother, and an actor--what exactly was I supposed to DO? At that point I knew only that I had promises to keep – and I would have to do my utmost to tell people what is happening -- with the hope that good people would rise up to end the first genocide of this century.

That experience triggered a journey that has taken me around the world. If I may, I'd like you to meet some of the people I have spent time with, who made me reach outside my field of choice and beyond everything I thought I was capable of.

DVD OF DARFUR HERE

I have done my best to tell stories from Darfur, like Halima's, and from the other conflict areas you've just seen. I have written scores of editorials. I, who was once so painfully shy, found myself speaking at the United Nations Security Council, at Congressional and Senate hearings and on countless campuses across this country. I am filming in Darfur's refugee camps, documenting and preserving the cultural traditions of those tribes targeted for elimination. That archive is being hosted here at your own UConn.

And I, a person without a college degree, am standing before you on this august occasion. So never be constrained by what others -- or you yourself – think your limitations are.

People sometimes ask me what is the most important thing I could convey to my own 14 kids. If I had to boil it down to one word, that word would surely be 'responsibility'. Responsibility to our families, our communities, to the planet we have inherited, and to our brothers and sisters everywhere within the human family.

This is the best kept secret of all: the greatest privilege and the most enduring and meaningful joy in life can be ours, if we can just find a way to give back to this world. Each of us can reach out to those who are suffering and in need -- in our own communities or beyond.

Maybe the most pathetic person on earth is the one who did nothing because they could only do a little.

Remember this -- our own feelings of hopelessness or helplessness are our worst enemies. They are the enemies of all progress.

On my own trajectory, I know how easy it is to feel overwhelmed or helpless. But then I think of the people you have just seen. I think of their courage, their resilience, their grace and the fact that they can HOPE so fervently -- even when they don't know whether they will survive the night -- they hope. So feeling hopeless or helpless is a luxury I don't feel entitled to.

Do the things you want to do, but don't be afraid to do what you think you cannot do. Our comfort zones can also be prisons of a kind. Push the envelope. Dare to be bold. And forget about patience. Patience is way over rated. Not helpful. Really -- I don't know how it got to be a virtue at all. Be very impatient.

Do all the good you can, by all the means available, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, for all the people you can, for as long as ever you can.

Robert Kennedy wrote;

“Let no one be discouraged by the belief that there is nothing one man or one woman can do against the enormous array of the world's ills — against misery and ignorance, injustice and violence...”

Each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation.

It is from the numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped.

Congratulations to each and every one of you, and God speed!!