COMMUNICATION SPEECH

FOR

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Hello everyone!!! I want to thank Mary Kate Pursley for giving me the opportunity

to share some thoughts with you this evening. I am also thankful for each of you for making up an audience that wants to hear what I have to say. Oftentimes, whenI read inspiring information and want to share it with my children, their response is usually, “oh mom, please stop.” So I am thrilled to be here with you tonight. It’s always a pleasure and a personal challenge to speak to an interesting, wonderful, receptive and diverse group of women like you and today is no exception. It’s so inspiring to me to be in the company of **ALL OF YOU**-whether you’re young and eager and ready to learn or wiser and more seasoned in the ways of the world and of expressing your faith, there is always something each one of us can learn from each other.

When I begin to prepare a topic, I always pray about it and I ask God for help and

clarity. The other dialogue with God goes something like this, “God, I am willing

to speak and share, but you know I am not an expert on any subject and I fail

more times than I succeed. Are you sure about this?” God reminds me that I

just need to be willing and that He will help me. Please know that what I share

with you tonight are things that I have learned along the way that make my life

more meaningful and it is my hope that passing it along, you might hear something that will be helpful to you.

This evening, I want to share some thoughts about communication,

understanding and enlightenment, and how we choose to live our lives with faith,

perseverance and commitment in that period of time known to some as “the

Dash.”

I don’t know if many of you have heard of a woman named Linda Ellis, but she

wrote a poem called “The Dash.” It’s short and sweet-just thirty-six lines, and as

the author said, she never dreamed how those six stanzas would change her life.

You know what? They changed my life too! Those words made me look at

everything differently. They provoked a thought process that I want to bring to

you. Very simply, the poem tells of a man, who, at a friend’s funeral, refers to the

person’s birth date and his death date. Those two dates are the true and major

milestones of life, separated by a simple dash. But when we think about it, that

little dash is where **ALL** of life is lived, and it’s up to us to make our own personal

“dash” count. As I attempted to grasp this simple but profound idea, I also

realized that everything we say and do can have so many different meanings and

impact and it’s up to each one of us to find the way to communicate so that our

intentions are clearly understood. Up until the point that I had read “The Dash,”

that literal line drawn between dates held no significance to me. It was just a

small hyphen-an almost invisible connector only needed for grammatical

purposes. When I mentioned this poem to a friend, I asked her if she knew what

the Dash was. She lives in Los Angeles and without skipping a beat she said,

“Of course! It’s the local bus in my neighborhood!!” I guess one person’s lifetime

can be another’s bus ride! (**Wait for the laugh**). The more I thought about this,

the more I saw how we take simple communication for granted, and I saw how

lack of clarity can have a profound effect on the way each one of us chooses to

spend our time “in the dash,”. …And I mean life and not the bus!! (**Wait for the**

**laugh**).

To give another small example, and I am sure **every one of you** can relate to

this, I’ll tell you a little story about communication and simple enlightenment.

One day during the summer, before I went to work, I left a list of chores for my

son to tackle. On this list was the task to “unload the dishwasher.” When I came

back home a couple of hours later, I walked into the kitchen and found all of the

dishes piled on the counter top. I called my son into the kitchen and pointed out

that all of the dishes need to be put back into the cabinets. Buddy just looked at

me and said, “You said to unload the dishwasher.” You know what? He was

right. So many times we get lost in assumptions. Buddy did what I asked him to

do. I cannot expect him to read my mind. Since that incident, and since reading

the Dash, I have become enlightened. I now do my best to think about what I

want the other person to know or do and I make every attempt to express myself

in such a way that the intent is clear to everyone. Life is too short and time is too

precious to be caught up in untangling seemingly simple misunderstanding, and

if you **DO** find yourself locked in a mess of mixed messages, **LEARN** from the

situation. Take a look at what happened, where the misunderstanding took

place, and vow to have more clarity the next time.

In Psalms 119:130, we learn, “The unfolding of Your words gives light; It gives

understanding to the simple.” In Daniel 2:22, we are awakened with, “It is He

who reveals the profound and hidden things; He knows what is in the darkness,

And the light dwells within him.”

The unfolding of our words gives light too, and it is up to each one of us to be

responsible for how we communicate and how we live our “Dash.” As we gain

patience and strength from our faith, we can begin to really practice being in the

moment and appreciating what we have, our roles in life, and the gifts we are

blessed with. As we live and learn, we can use those experiences to become

more and more aware of who we are, and the miracles that surround us have the

space to be revealed. When we are young, life seems to move at an incredibly

quick pace. There is always something new to explore and experience, and we

can tend to be in “sensory overload.” As we get older and learn from our

experience, our appreciation of those moments deepens and as our knowledge

base grows, we have a duty and a responsibility to sharpen our ability to learn,

understand, and communicate those lessons in order to teach those around us.

And sometimes, like with Buddy, we learn from our children and the younger people we are blessed to have in our lives.

Actions give light and life also. I want to share a story about a man named Mr.

Ransom that I met when I was about 8 years old and I believe that his actions

changed my life. One day, I was with my dad at a farm of one of his friends. I

noticed some horses and walked over to the fence and peered out into the field

watching Mr. Ransom ride. He was a grandfatherly type and he saw me watching

and later told my dad that he would work with me and teach me to ride. I loved

horses and this was a dream come true. That was the beginning of a life long

relationship. He worked with me every day after school and taught me the

proper way to ride horses. Then, as I learned and became more and more

comfortable in the saddle, he wanted me to ride in horse shows. He knew that

my family couldn’t afford the expenses of showing so one Saturday, he and his

wife took me to a tack store and bought a complete riding habit for me to wear in

upcoming shows. For the next several years, Mr. and Mrs. Ransom took me to

different horse shows all over South Carolina. It was great fun and it truly helped

to build confidence and gave me something to be passionate about. I doubt he

ever realized how that simple act of communication and kindness changed the

course of my life. As children, the homes in which we grow up are the major part of our whole world. Although our parents raise us to the best of their abilities, our exposure to new and different experience is limited. Mr. Ransom’s actions opened my eyes and inspired me to see a new and **exciting** part that taught me a lot-**especially** the power of kindness. Although he’s been gone for over thirty years, I will never forget his contribution to my life-it’s really become his legacy-and mine. I still love to ride and so does my daughter Savannah.

Riding is something that we do together and we enjoy passing it on to others by

hosting riding events and giving lessons. I watch these children enjoy the horses

and I always say, “thank you, God.” These children are benefiting from riding

because over 40 years ago, someone cared enough to share his passion with a

little girl. Mr. Ransom might have thought his simple outreach was nothing more

than a favor, but more than a generation later, his kindness and generosity of spirit keep giving and it’s a beautiful demonstration of the power of the “Dash.” Remember the little moments in your life can have the greatest impact.

“It is He who reveals profound hidden things….” The more I live, the more I

witness that so many answers to our questions about life are right in front of us,

waiting to be discovered. Through faith and patience we can learn to be in the

moment-each moment, and as we pay attention to the signs and signals around

us, we can learn to communicate with greater clarity and with the intention of

conveying our message clearly and with care and support for the other person.

As I practice this, it’s like I discover an entirely new world, and it’s been right

there, all the time!!! I almost feel like Dorothy in “The Wizard of Oz!!” Remember

the lesson she learned was that everything she ever needed was right in her own

backyard-she just had to know **HOW** to look for it. That’s probably the key to

each one of us living our lives successfully and with purpose in that space known

as “The Dash.” Someone once said that life is not filled with the number of

breaths we take, but with the moments that take our breath away, and as we

learn to truly **LIVE** each moment, our capacity and ability to be blown away with

appreciation of even the simplest gestures increases, and after all, isn’t that what

it’s all about?

As I just mentioned as a child, my home life was my world, as it is for all of us. When we’re young, it is everything to us, but we’re also too young to realize that **we don’t know what we don’t know**. Although my parents tried their best, back

then, self-awareness was not high on the priority list for many people. Maybe

that’s one of the reasons this topic fascinates me so much. Awareness and communication have come a long way since then. So many of the little moments that might have made up the dash of my early years have been lost to a lack of consciousness and recognition. Probably because of that, I am sensitive to distractions and miscommunication today. I also realize that our lives are tending to get more involved and more complicated, even in this age of technological convenience. People-especially young people tend to be more preoccupied than ever before, and it seems that everyone’s attention spans are growing shorter and more tentative. I believe that, as we get more and more involved with technology and the distractions they can cause by providing so much information and input, it is our duty, for humanity’s sake, to take the time and the care to pay more attention…. to our religious practice, to our own health and well being, to the signs and signals that surround us, and to the way we interact with each other, or we will wind up being a society of solitary, isolated individuals, and that is NOT what God intended for us. Now that we are all familiar with the principles of living your “Dash,” we no longer have any reasons or excuses not to live our lives consciously and with awareness. The newest part of my legacy is to share this inspiration, and now it’s part of **YOURS**.

For those of you who know me, and for all of those new friends that may not

know me so well …. yet, please remember that I know that all that **I know**, all that I have, all that I experience and all that I share comes from my passion for, and faith in God, and through him I know that as opportunities present themselves, each one gives us all a chance to witness the miracles that are possible as long as you **BELIEVE**. While some may disregard seemingly insignificant moments like “Buddy unloading the dishwasher,” or Mr. Ransom reaching out and sharing his knowledge of horses, I know and believe that even the smallest of experiences can shine a light, teach a lesson, and give us the opportunity to find even greater appreciation in the little miracles of life, because it’s **THOSE** little things that, when counted together, comprise most of the Dash that we call life.

I think each one of you will agree that as you look back on the moments in your

lives that mean something, of course the major milestones stand out, but how

many of us really look back and treasure those simple moments that formed us

and made us who we are? And whether you danced with your Grandma in the

kitchen on a Saturday night while she babysat for you, or you helped a child learn

how to draw, it’s all a form of communication and it’s all an opportunity to learn

about someone and experience the miracle of life. Treasure them. It’s those moments of intense human connection that will form your Dash, and I wish that all of you will now be more open to notice many of them. Celebrate life, love, communication and each other and most of all, your faith. Thank you all!