MILITARY SPEECH

FOR

BERNICE KING

Hello everyone. I want to acknowledge all of you on this special Veteran’s Day. This is a particularly remarkable celebration as we’re here to commemorate not only Veteran’s Day but also the 125th Anniversary of the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ School of Nursing. It is an honor to serve our country and it is even more humbling to be included in this distinguished panel of speakers. Colin Powell has said, “There are no secrets to success-it’s the result of hard work, preparation and determination.” I am in awe after listening to the accomplishments of the guests here today. All of us owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to RAs \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and of course to Col \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. These people are true inspirations who have paved the way and raised the bar for all of us that follow in their determined and impressive footsteps.

Sometimes I am asked to explain my reasons for joining the military. I saw it as a means to find and follow a direction to my career, a way to infuse a sense of adventure to my calling, an opportunity to advance my education while allowing me to find the path to fulfill my commitment to service. I’ve had **opportunities** as well as considerable **challenges,** and one common bit of advice that was always shared by every chief nurse I’ve had, no matter where I was or what unit I was assigned to, was simple, sane probably the one gem that has taught me the most. “**Bloom where you are planted**.” Others may have heard it a bit differently in the form of “**adapt or die**,” but no matter how it’s expressed, the wisdom doesn’t escape me and I live by it every day. I will never forget at my first duty station, as my supervisor retired and her (?) supervisor left for another duty station, I was suddenly left responsible for the daily operations of the Family Practice clinic. I found myself in charge of 6 providers, 5 nurses, and 16 medics. I don’t know if anyone had realized it at the time, but the extent of my supervisory experience to that date was when I managed **TWO** nurses!! Talk about initiation by fire!! It’s moments like those, when one is thrown into the proverbial deep end, that we see what we are truly made of. In retrospect I saw what I could handle, I saw my commitment to the common goal, and, more importantly, I managed to serve my superiors, the staff, and our patients.

Other opportunities present themselves as we are faced with new assignments or Permanent Change of Station. I remember when I had been a nurse in the Aeromedical Staging Flight for about six months. Just as I was getting used to the routine and finding my way, OPERATION ENDURING/IRAQI FREEDOM was initiated. During my time in this capacity we launched/recovered 1040 AE missions, and that was only “the beginning.” I was responsible for coordinating care requirements for **SIXTEEN THOUSAND** patients in support of OPERATION ENDURING/IRAQI FREEDOM. Another time, while deployed to a forward operating base in Afghanistan as a medical mentor for Afghan National Army medics, on a 20-bed medical surgical ward, I witnessed a level of care that outperformed the otherwise challenging logistics. Even though conditions were less than ideal, it was clear that our presence was greatly appreciated. An otherwise less than optimal situation was transformed into a gratifying lesson for all of us. While we shared our expertise, our partners taught us \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. To have such a vantage point in such remote circumstances placed new meaning and perspective on what it means to serve.

Once again, the most valuable mantra we can have in these situations is “**Bloom where you are planted**.” (**If you want** **to make a little joke you can say)** I have always done my best to heed that advice…even in low light or poor watering conditions! (**Wait for the laugh**). Just ask the people who knew me when I started. I really have grown thanks to all of you.

Those who are true and dedicated professionals know that every challenge is an opportunity somewhat disguised and just waiting to be discovered. And some wonderful opportunities may be influenced by unforeseeable circumstances like timing. I recall that when I was finally at the point in my career when I knew I wanted to be a Family Nurse Practitioner, I did not met the criteria to apply for a scholarship as I hadn’t been at the base long enough. I also didn’t want to wait two more years to reapply, so I used that time and chose to pursue my education during the hiatus when I was off.

After earning my FNP degree and realizing it was time for me to seize new opportunities, I had to face the reality that positions I thought I had wanted were not available. Remembering **to bloom where I was planted**, I kept my options open and found other equally impactful and rewarding ways to serve. As a member of the Sexual Assault Response Team, I was able to employ my fresh new skills while being mentored and supervised by a very worthy FNP. I am fortunate that she was willing to encourage my continued exploration and education as we shared some shifts at the Naval Hospital.

I have learned so much through my connection to and experiences in the School of Nursing. The variety of courses and disciplines that comprise the DNP leader program provide evidence-based practice, and even though… and I probably shouldn’t be admitting this, but even those Research and statistics courses….(**If you want to make a little pun you can say)**  cause me to think… “What **are the odds”** I was going to get through **THOSE**?? (**Wait for the laugh**) but I have to say, for the first time, I was finally truly able to grasp the concepts taught in those courses.

I learned Leadership by being guided and mentored by the best. And speaking of Mentors, the members of the faculty truly are invested in the success of each student. Working with the teachers, professors, and professionals proved that empathy, compassion, and professional demeanor, when applied, are unique to each student. The teaching methods support comprehension and academic accomplishment that, of course, leads to demonstrated effectiveness in the field.

Our resilience was tested, our bodies were put through their paces, our minds were challenged and ultimately, the pressure, the deadlines, the multi-tasking and the acceptance of the simple fact that life Is lived outside of the comfort zone all contributed to my deepened appreciation of the outstanding education I received at the SON.

As I think of both UMSON and my service in the military, I see common core characteristics that make participation in both exciting, fulfilling and gratifying. While I thought it was such an honor to be taught leadership in the military arena, I found very similar opportunities as I allowed myself to be guided by the SON faculty. I also realize that both atmospheres are filled with pressure and the opportunity for adversity. At the same time they both provide the context to forge lifelong friendships, support, and connections,

To my brothers and sisters standing proudly with me in our uniforms, and to the faculty, alumni, and fellow students who share the battle of the quest for knowledge, professionalism and authenticity, I want to extend my deepest gratitude for allowing me to celebrate this Veteran’s Day with you. Thank you all!