**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**TASHA FEASTER**

**FINAL**

Hello everyone!!! It’s great to be here this evening... I’d like to acknowledge some people who have given me the opportunity to speak tonight... To \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,  and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ thank you for your thoughtfulness and for extending this invitation.... As well as it’s provided a chance for me to meet and get to know you, to hear your stories, and find out how you, the honorees got here, it’s given **ME** a chance to think... and to remember what it was like to be in your shoes... How did **I** get here? What has it taken for me to overcome the obstacles... to learn from adversity... and embrace **ALL** of the lessons learned along the way??? What “wisdom” would the adult me want to share with the younger me??? What do I wish I would have known as I began on my journey??? We’ve got a few minutes... let’s talk about this...

Because this is such an incredible opportunity, I realized the importance of the process of digging deep and searching for the most important message I might be able to impart from my point of view, to all of you that are being honored here today. The truth is that anything I would say, from the heart, would be a universal message... for **ALL** of us to learn.... including myself. It’s at events and crossroads like these that we get the chance to hold a mirror up to our lives... to review our hopes... dreams... and our own challenges and realities... and it’s a time when we are given a gift.... we get to remind ourselves of some vital points:

* **Never forget who you are and where you started on your path**...remember who you are, from where you’ve come, what motivated you in the first place, and what dreams and goals you’ve established for yourself.
* **Don’t discount adversity...** some of the most precious and important lessons in strength, endurance, and perseverance come from the harder lessons in life
* **Once you reach the top, reach down and pull someone else up....** and by the way, the “**TOP**” is only visible in hindsight.... a hint for this piece of advice is... **ALWAYS** be prepared to reach down and pull someone else up.... more about this in a bit.

 When I was asked to speak today, I contemplated what I would say. And then it came to me. What would the older me say to the younger me? What tips or advice would have helped me avoid the pitfalls and mistakes I made.... and if I couldn’t actually avoid them, how would I find value in the negatives? What did I resist?? What conditions persisted? How did I break cycles that held me back from achieving whatever I thought was possible? What was I able to accomplish once I began to believe in my capabilities and talents? Where and how did I discover my “**hustle**,” and how did I begin to “**work it**” to my benefit???? And so the obvious became even clearer... I realized the importance of sharing what I **WISHED** I would have known along my own journey. Oh. And by the way, I am very aware that we, when we are younger and less experienced, live with a condition I sometimes refer to as “The arrogance of youth.” When we’re younger, we think we know it all. We think we have the “secret sauce” to make life happen, that no one for generations that preceded us, **EVER**. **FIGURED**. **OUT**. **Uh huh**.... (**wait for the laugh**). You’re special... but you’re not **THAT** special!!! There’s an expression that I sometimes use to snap me back to reality... just when I think I have all the answers... “**I don’t know what I don’t know.**”.... you have **NO IDEA** of how much you **DON’T KNOW.**.. at **ANY** stage of life... so the first bit of advice I would give my younger self is.... **STOP. LOOK. LISTEN. LEARN**.... if we do that, we just might discover some of life’s treasures from people and circumstances that know more than we do...

(**In a few sentences, give the audience a brief summary of your background.... where you grew up, the challenges and obstacles you faced, the dream/vision you had of your future, and how you pushed to overcome and accomplish your goals**). Everyone has a story... when we start comparing notes, we begin to realize that we all face challenges. We all think we are special.... and we are.... and we probably all look at our dreams and think of our future with a considerable mix of both hope and despair.... “I **KNOW** what I want..... **HOW** do I get there???” Or we might think... “What the **HECK** am I going to be able to do with my life, coming from **HERE**???” Trust me... I’ve had **ALL THE THOUGHTS too**...

For those of you that may not know, I grew up in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and faced\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. (**Continue with your story**).

As we start out in life, we have a small experience of the world.... what it holds... and how we fit in. As we grow up, the world around us expands... it “grows up” with us. It gets wider... deeper... more complicated. I think that’s kind of a divine plan... the more we grow... the more we are exposed to... the more we have a chance to learn.... the more we **HAVE TO** grow.... it’s a cycle. If we resist accepting the lessons laid out before us... whether good or bad... the growth process gets jammed.... the less we know, the less we grow.... and guess what???? This goes on through our entire lives!!! We **NEVER** stop learning.... we **NEVER** stop growing... that’s the secret... and the **PUNCHLINE**... to life. Our fulfillment as human beings is based on our willingness to **LEARN** to **LEARN**... to have faith in ourselves and in our abilities.... to **BELIEVE** that what we feel in our deepest gut is what will see us through.... and to have the strength and courage to seek and accept guidance from those that might be able to support our missions along the way.... **BELIEVE ME**, if I had known all of **THAT** when I was a kid.... (**Wait for the laugh**). In the growing up process, we probably all face resistance... to wisdom, to authority, to ideas that don’t seem to be authentic to who we believe we are. Remember what I said earlier.... our lives start small and the view expands with the experiences we live through.

It’s so important to learn, at as young an age as possible, to bend with the circumstances, to “go with the flow” while maintaining your principles, to be able to “adapt or die...” literally... as times and conditions shift and change.... the value of resilience cannot be overstated at any age, at any time, or at any stage of life. In case you haven’t noticed, this world is constantly changing... sometimes for the better, sometimes not. In order to be prepared for life and the curve balls aimed at us, we must develop the ability to be resilient. Here’s some points that I wish I could have told my younger self when it comes to being able to bend and stretch with the times...

* Don’t be paralyzed by fear, obstacles, or the unknown. Take a deep breath. Consider the situation... try to imagine it from all angles... ask yourself... What’s at risk? What do I stand to lose? What’s the **WORST** thing that can happen? How will I... how **CAN** I survive??? Have a plan... discuss your thoughts and considerations with those that might be able to guide you. Oh... and like I said, don’t forget to **BREATHE**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).
* Look at setbacks and failure as an opportunity.... Let’s be real... failure is a measure of an action taken... it means you **DID SOMETHING**... even if the something you did was **NOTHING**... that was your **CHOICE** at the time. Were you embarrassed? Did you feel like your skin was about to crawl??? Did you **LIKE** the way that shame felt?? **NO**??? Then **LEARN FROM IT.** Commit to doing a better job next time. Be good to yourself. Acknowledge your mistakes.. take responsibility... and do your best to improve your performance... whatever it may be. It’s **ALL** up to you.
* Resilient people concentrate their efforts on actions and accomplishments within their control... Do you do that?? **CAN** you do that? Are you **WILLING** to **LEARN** to do that?? Once again, regarding your actions, are you willing to own them and be responsible for the results they yield in your life? A **HUGE** part of growing up is learning responsibility and accountability. So many of us choose to learn this lesson kicking and screaming all the way... One day, each one of us wakes up and **TA DA**!!! It’s our turn to be grownups... we really need to be prepared!!
* Resilient people are committed to the goals they set for themselves.... they’re passionate about their self worth and how to achieve personal fulfillment... they figure out how to get “there” by more than one route... “If this doesn’t work, try that...”. Resilient people think outside the box... they learn to view opportunities and challenges from the outside... “from the top down,” as it were.... they are able to step outside of a situation.... look at the elements... realize what’s important ... and “recalculate” as needed... Think about it... are you able to honestly say that you can do that?? Time to start practicing!!! I know my younger self would have really valued this bit.... in fact, even at **THIS** stage of my life and career, I **STILL** find this wisdom valuable!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Whether we like it or not, pressure and stress are integral parts of life. Our own personal satisfaction and fulfillment is based on how well we can handle that pressure... the bad times... the adversity. If it’s any consolation... remember that a diamond comes from carbon. It is only through extreme pressure and heat that it becomes a brilliant, faceted, rare, and valued gem. Someone named Ana Claudia

Antunes reminds us, “Life keeps throwing me stones. And I keep finding the diamonds.” When the “pressure” is on, with grace, determination, and faith, you, too, can find the diamonds.... even in the most unlikely of places. I find that the most successful, well rounded people that I have met in life... both professionally and personally, are those that can get through life with a positive, can do attitude, no matter what. They are resourceful and determined, even in the worst situations, to find the crack that will let the light.... and strength... come through... I remember hearing of a young woman.... at a very low point in her life... her mother had died... her father had just died... she was going to make funeral arrangements...and on the way to the chapel, she realized it was a brisk October day.... the thought occurred to her, “At least the sun is shining.” Sometimes, that is **ALL** we may have to keep us going... but we must keep on.... and we must keep on learning. Adversity can be one of our greatest teachers... it’s not that we **LOOK** for it... it’s not that we invite it in and want it to **STAY FOR A WHILE.**.. I know **I DON’T** want **THAT**... but like with the cycle of life, we **LEARN**... we grow stronger... we move on... and we have a greater appreciation of life. Think about it... if all we had were happy go lucky good times, we would get pretty bored... wouldn’t we?? Trust me... we **WOULD**!!! It’s the dark days that allow us to appreciate the light. A wise woman once said, “We don’t develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity.” Malcolm X said, “There is nothing better than adversity. Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss, contains its own seed, it’s own lesson on how to improve your performance next time.” It’s a hard lesson, but one that’s worth it.

No matter where we are in life... academically, professionally, personally, no matter how much we may think we haven’t grown or achieved or accomplished, we **have**. We owe it to ourselves to stop and take a look over our shoulders... check the path behind us, set our sights on the road ahead, think of how we got where we are, and extend our own hand to someone that crosses our path. “No man... or woman... is an island.” It is with the grace, kindness, patience, and generosity of those that watched out for us, that got us where we are today.... and it is with our own gratitude and consideration that we will lift our brothers and sisters so that they may find their path and continue to “pay it forward.” We are in this thing called life “**TOGETHER**.” There is an expression from an English poem that teaches us, “I am part of all that I have met.” When we remember that, we realize just who makes up our “community.” These days, it can be local....virtual... global... outstretched hands reaching out to lift each other. To be a part of an ever extending worldwide movement of kindness and consideration is something that is sorely needed in this world.

You’re all **winners**. To have the opportunity, as young, smart, gifted, and talented people, like you, our scholarship honorees, to learn from a young age to be kind, thoughtful, and supportive, is something that will give this world a fighting chance in the future.... actually, **YOU'RE IT.**.. **YOU** are all we have... to repair the rifts... to heal the hearts... to think of solutions... to **ACT** in a positive way with dignity. The future is yours.... my younger... and current self.... is proud of you.... Here we have \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ scholarship recipients.... it’s a **start**. As I have thought how I would address and encourage **MYSELF**, I want to request something... be mindful... be aware... of the world around you... of the struggles you face... of the people in your lives and in your communities that **need** encouragement.... and remember.... you’ve been **EXPOSED**!!!! You’re already leaders!!! Lead by example... teach others the value of integrity and education, and using that to improve the world around you... and beyond... you’ve acknowledged your gifts and talents, and so have we. Now go and inspire!!! Remember to feed your minds and souls with positivity and compassion... and most of all, Congratulations!!! Thank you all!!