



GEORGIAN COURT UNIVERSITY

THE MERCY UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

Brianna P. Marrone '17
President of the Student Government Association Executive Board
GCU Undergraduate Commencement Remarks
May 25, 2017

Good Morning, Board of Trustees, President Marbach, Provost Behre, Father Rohr, Deacon Knipper, Administrators, Faculty, Staff, Alumni, Family, Friends, and my fellow graduates.

It has been an honor to have served as your student body president and an even greater honor to be speaking in front of you today, the Georgian Court University graduating Class of 2017.

Like you, I am feeling overwhelmed with emotions at this very moment: excitement, joy, nostalgia, sadness, and most of all, I am feeling quite anxious to be speaking in front of this many people.

Madeleine Albright, the first female Secretary of State, once said to graduating seniors, "Commencement is one of the five great milestones of life, along with birth, marriage, death, and the day you finally pay off your student loans."

I'm unsure as to whether she mentioned death *before* paying off student loans purposely because—let's face it—that might be the order these events will occur, or if it could be just a coincidence.

And although, Georgian Court University might have been one of the largest investments of your life, I hope that it was also one of your best, because I know that it was for me.

I'm sure for many of you, these last four years have been a journey filled with challenges, and at times, what felt like insurmountable odds; to the point where you weren't even sure if you would ever make it to graduation. But you did, and you're here NOW.

Some of you might be the first in your family to graduate college, and you should be more than proud of yourselves to have completed this monumental achievement. Some of you overcame academic hurdles, personal struggles, and some of you even had to take time off.

Whatever the case may be . . . you all persisted . . . you all overcame . . . and because of this . . . we are all here together today. Not everyone reaches this milestone. So I ask that you take a moment and simply be present.

Not think about the future, not think about the past, just be here and now.

There are many lessons I have learned while here at Georgian Court, but there are three very important ones I would like to share with you today. The first lesson, and one of the hardest, is just that: to be present. This sounds easy, but how many of you are thinking about how you're going to celebrate after the ceremony? Or where you're going to be eating? You may even be trying to snapchat one last GCU memory at this very moment.

Our generation is "future-obsessed." We are always thinking about the next five steps. Nothing is ever enough. Many of us do not take the time to be present and to experience the moment which is at hand. If you are always worried about the future and what is yet to come, then at what point do you enjoy the time you're in right now?

The second lesson I have learned during my time here at GCU is the difference between hearing and listening. Many people only listen with the intent to reply, not the intent to understand.

How many times have you caught yourself wanting to respond to what someone has to say, even before they're done speaking? Or writing mental to-do lists while in class, or half-listening to your parents lecture you . . . on how you're only half-listening to them?

Most of the time we only hear what someone has to say; we don't truly listen. We need to learn how to become better listeners because you never know how imperative, or even life-changing, someone's words may be.

Words are power. Words have the ability to change lives. They can either destroy and devastate or empower and heal.

Lesson number three is to be there for someone, the same way someone has been there for you over these last four years.

If we look around the room right now, you will see many of your loved ones beaming with pride and joy while waiting for you to walk across this stage to receive your hard-earned diploma. And at this time, I would like to give them a big round of applause for all that they have done to help us throughout this journey so far.

Now, think about how different your experience would have been without having that support, that number-one fan, always telling you, even when you didn't think it was possible, that you would be sitting in the seat you are today.

I would not have had the same amazing experience here at Georgian Court without the support of my nursing cohort that consists of people whom I consider lifelong friends, the amazing faculty members—especially those who have taught within the School of Nursing—and of course, my endearing, extremely supportive, yet crazy family, which includes my number-one fan, my one-of-a-kind, inspiring, mother.

However, there is one person whom I would like to mention who is not with us today. I'm sure some of you can relate, as you may be thinking about someone who has had a tremendous impact on your life whom you wish was here.

Although they may not be here physically, I can confidently say that they are with you, as they would not miss this moment for the world.

My nanny was my all-time best friend. Like most grandparents, I could do no wrong in her eyes and contrary to my mother's opinion that I was a complex, misunderstood, bratty teenager, my nanny saw me as an angel sent from above.

My nanny and I spent a lot of time together when I was growing up, and she eventually moved in with us as she got older.

However, in my junior year of high school, my nanny was diagnosed with mesothelioma, a type of cancer.

During this difficult time, I tried to do whatever I could to make my nanny comfortable. Whether it was to hold her hand while she was sick and scared or simply spend time watching TV together . . . *I was there for her.*

Then one day my nanny said something to me that altered my life. It was simple, and I wouldn't have caught it if I wasn't listening. If I wasn't in the moment. If I wasn't present.

We were having a casual conversation while I was sitting at her bedside, when out of nowhere, she turned to me, with sincerity in her blue eyes, and told me she thought I would make an amazing nurse because of the compassion and the dignity I had shown her.

You cannot plan when a defining moment will happen. Most of the time it occurs when you least expect it.

I wasn't sure of my career path, and with that one statement—from my best friend, my number-one supporter—it shaped the rest of my life.

She is the reason I applied to the nursing program here at Georgian Court. She is the reason that four years later, I am graduating with my Bachelor of Science in Nursing, and she is the reason I am here today speaking in front of all of you.

I'm sure many of you have similar stories of someone who has inspired you to make monumental and positive changes in your life.

Just know that at some point, if you are not already, you could be someone's "reason why," and your words can change someone's life. Be a mentor, be someone's motivation, and be an inspiration.

I know I will be a good nurse because of the impact my nanny had on my life, but I know I am leaving GCU a better person because of the valuable lessons Georgian Court has taught me.

GCU challenged me to think differently, to think critically, so that I could truly understand what it was I was learning. I took these skills and applied them to my past as well as my present, which led to these three lessons I have shared today; *to be present, to listen with the intent to understand, and to be there for someone.*

They say you find yourself in college, but I think Georgian Court found me. Georgian Court has gifted us with the opportunity to seek out our future. But it is up to us to find our purpose because, after all, this is the end to a new beginning.

Thank you, and again, Congratulations, Class of 2017.