

A close-up photograph of Oprah Winfrey smiling broadly. She is wearing a dark graduation cap with a red tassel and a red graduation gown over a black academic robe. The background is dark and out of focus.

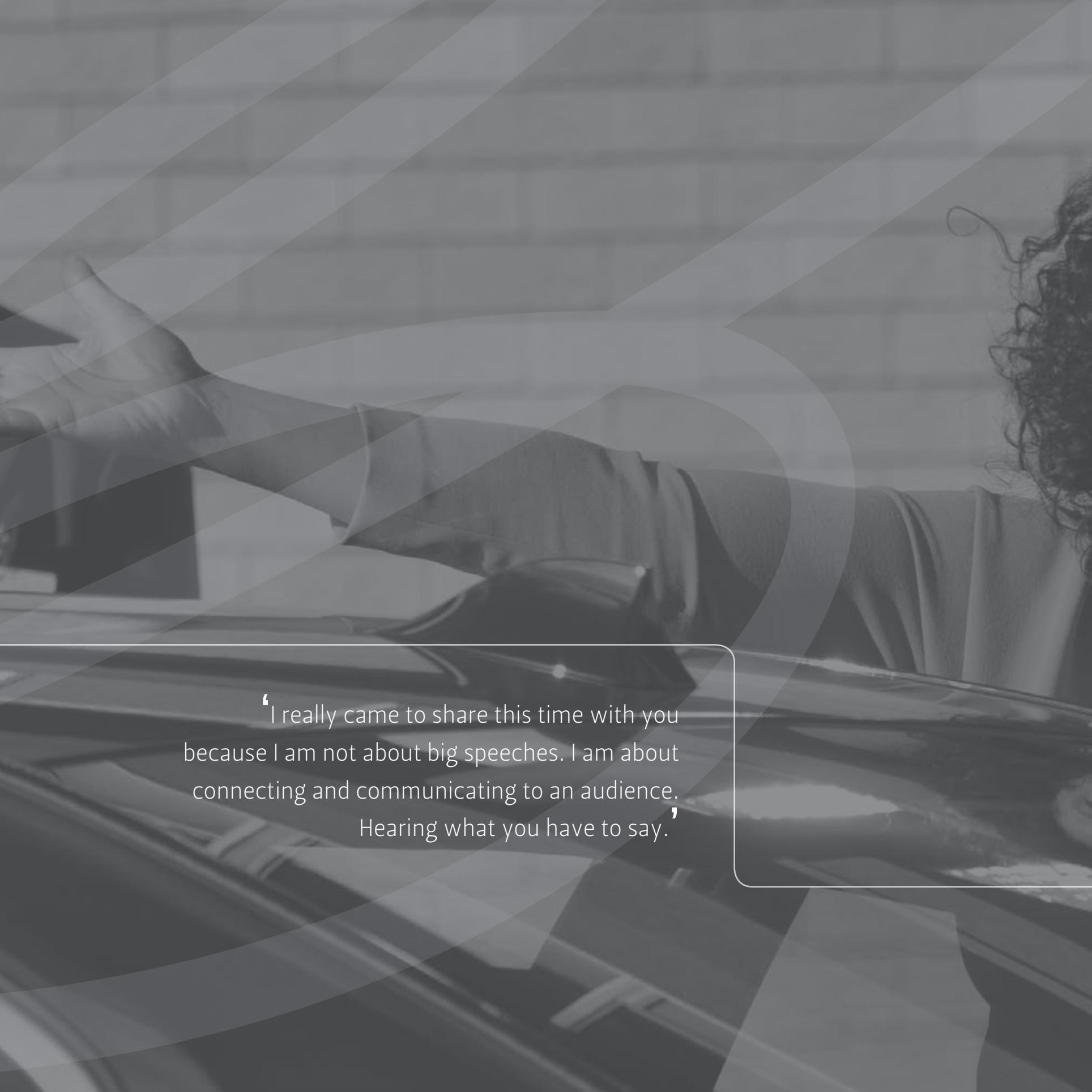
A moment in the life of
the University of the Free State

Oprah Winfrey

receiving an honorary doctorate

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA





‘I really came to share this time with you because I am not about big speeches. I am about connecting and communicating to an audience. Hearing what you have to say.’





Oprah Winfrey at the UFS

Honorary Doctorate in Education, 24 June 2011

She arrived on an icy-cold winter's day at the University of the Free State's (UFS) in Bloemfontein Campus, South Africa, to be honoured with an honorary doctorate in education. She left a capacity audience, and a nation, with a deep sense of belonging and warmth in their hearts.

Oprah Winfrey.

Oprah Winfrey, now Dr Winfrey, touches lives of millions of people all over the world. The UFS honoured her for her unparalleled work as a global media leader and a philanthropist with vision and foresight in the field of education and development.

The graduation ceremony was probably the biggest of its kind in South Africa. The Callie Human Centre on our Bloemfontein Campus was jam-packed with more than 4 500 people who jumped for the opportunity to attend this auspicious moment.

Long queues to obtain tickets to attend, and long queues to get seated, just added to the excitement of the moment to see Ms Oprah Winfrey in real life.

The ceremony was like a huge reunion. A festival. Media cameras and pens shared the moment with the world.

The graduation ceremony was also an emotional moment for Ms Winfrey, who shed silent tears.

Her motivational talk afterwards inspired people. Ms Winfrey said everybody can be successful. They must just apply their minds to what they want. "Never give up. You are not defined by your circumstances. There is hope. Have a vision and let that vision be bigger than you. Allow yourself to live in that space of yourself."

Enjoy the trip down memory lane with this commemorative book. We share moments captured on film, and some of the highlights. The DVD will help to live through the event again, or for the first time.



Oprah visit gives goosebump moments

From the moment it was confirmed that Oprah Winfrey would visit the University of the Free State, a core planning team of about 30 people, meeting almost every day, kicked into gear.

There were more than 20 segments each with a segment leader who had to take charge of everything, from security to transport to invitations to food to ticket control to décor to media and communication to stage management to music arrangements to graduation planning to the public speaking event to campus grounds, and on and on and on.

Hundreds of staff worked flat out, given lead time of less than three weeks. I watched in admiration as students and staff toiled to make this Kovsky event of the century a moment of pride for the campus, the city and the country.

We could not do this alone. Oprah is a walking international brand, and her team of planners in Chicago were on the phone daily to comment and co-direct the “running programme” of more than 20 pages. This was risky for the Americans, something different from managing the stage and audience in the controlled environment of the Oprah Winfrey Show.

Hundreds of people from around the country wanted to give something to the global media icon and philanthropist. Letters came in from everywhere; kind people offered to do her hair in local salons and another group offered a free massage. Paintings and books came through the offices. A man recorded his music to be handed over to Oprah. All kinds of organisations from Johannesburg to Cape Town wanted her flight to be diverted to visit their crèche or disability group or private school.

It was difficult to explain to generous people that we could not simply give plane-loads of gifts to Oprah, and that she could not possibly meet and greet everybody during her stay at the university.

With a mega event such as this, not only were good people attracted to Bloemfontein from around the country; criminals and other opportunists came, too. A group of Nigerians were found selling fake tickets in one of the local malls. We were prepared with the technology to check the authenticity of every ticket. We knew there might be groups who saw the cameras and the celebrities as an ideal opportunity to protest and picket. We were prepared for this as well. There were umbrellas in stock in case it rained, and medical and emergency services on standby in case of any drama inside or outside the main hall.

It is nerve-wracking. As we hugged and said our goodbyes to Oprah, it was with a mixture of gratitude and relief. Imagine something bad happening on campus to one of the world’s most influential leaders?

Then came the moment we had all been waiting for. The cavalcade arrived as we stood outside on the red carpet on one of the coldest days I have ever experienced in South Africa. She looked much taller than I expected, the very high heels making this possible.

“Professor Jansen,” she says, and I then knew she had memorised the detailed plan for she knew ►

most of the people by name from the biographies we emailed to Chicago.

I saw firsthand the genuine humanity of this great woman as she hugged the special visitors, danced with township violinists, and laughed with student leaders. I took her on a photographic tour of the transformation at our university, deciding not to tell, but to show. The small group gathered for the welcoming tea was a mix of student and staff leaders.

She asked penetrating questions about the human experience like nobody else I have ever met.

Then the graduation. As Oprah enters the hall with the brightly robed procession, I could swear the roof of the massive Callie Human Centre was about to be blown away.

“This woman means so much to so many all over the world,” I thought to myself.

How many marriages were saved, faith restored and hope revived in the lives of ordinary people?

The graduation music got to the emotions as the wonderfully diverse and talented Bloemfontein Children’s Choir combined in song with the Bartimea School for the Deaf, the latter miming the words of Plea for Africa led by the inimitable Sibongile Khumalo. You felt the goosebumps.

Then that special moment as I listen to her dear friend John Samuel read one of the most touching graduation citations I’ve ever heard anywhere; John seizes the moment as he turns to the great woman with these words: “Ms Winfrey, you are now a Kovsie.”

The crowd goes wild as they identify with the affectionate name given to every UFS student, and Oprah enters the moment with arms waving in joy.

Off the stage to disrobe, and back onto the stage, she comes to speak to the near 4500-strong audience.

Nobody moves as the newest Kovsie takes the crowd through their paces. Oprah tells the moving story of being born to an accidental couple who did not plan to have her: the man was interested in what lay under the woman’s dress; “and I was born”. This sets the stage for her first of many epithets: no matter the circumstances of your birth, or how you came into the world, “you are not a mistake”. The crowd is delirious.

Oprah has planned this routine with incredible care as she moves between selected video-clips shown on the large screens to face-to-face wisdoms shared with the audience. Nobody moves. Everybody is touched. We are all in a bubble for almost two hours.

We end with that signature song of the civil rights struggle in America that so beautifully links to the struggle for freedom in South Africa, the Battle Hymn of the Republic. Corneil Muller and the children’s choirs belt out the moving lines of “Glory, Glory, Hallelujah, His truth is marching on”. As they sing, Oprah looks in my direction, and I know, we knew that in those moments of joy, everything that happened to our countries and to this campus, every ounce of sweat in the planning - everything was worthwhile.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jansen".

Jonathan Jansen

Vice-Chancellor and Rector

Various printed media, 29 June 2011







From the moment the news of Oprah Winfrey's visit was only a twitter in sky, the whole country couldn't control their excitement. Thousands queued to see the queen of the TV screen in real life.

Local, national and international media carried the news of Oprah's visit to the rest of the world. News was published to agencies' websites as the graduation ceremony unfolded. The media was hosted in a fully-equipped media centre.





Sheer excitement met Oprah when she arrived at our International Institute for Studies in Race, Reconciliation and Social Justice. She received a warm welcome from the Vice-Chancellor and Rector, Prof. Jonathan Jansen, and her friend John Samuel, Interim Director of the Institute.

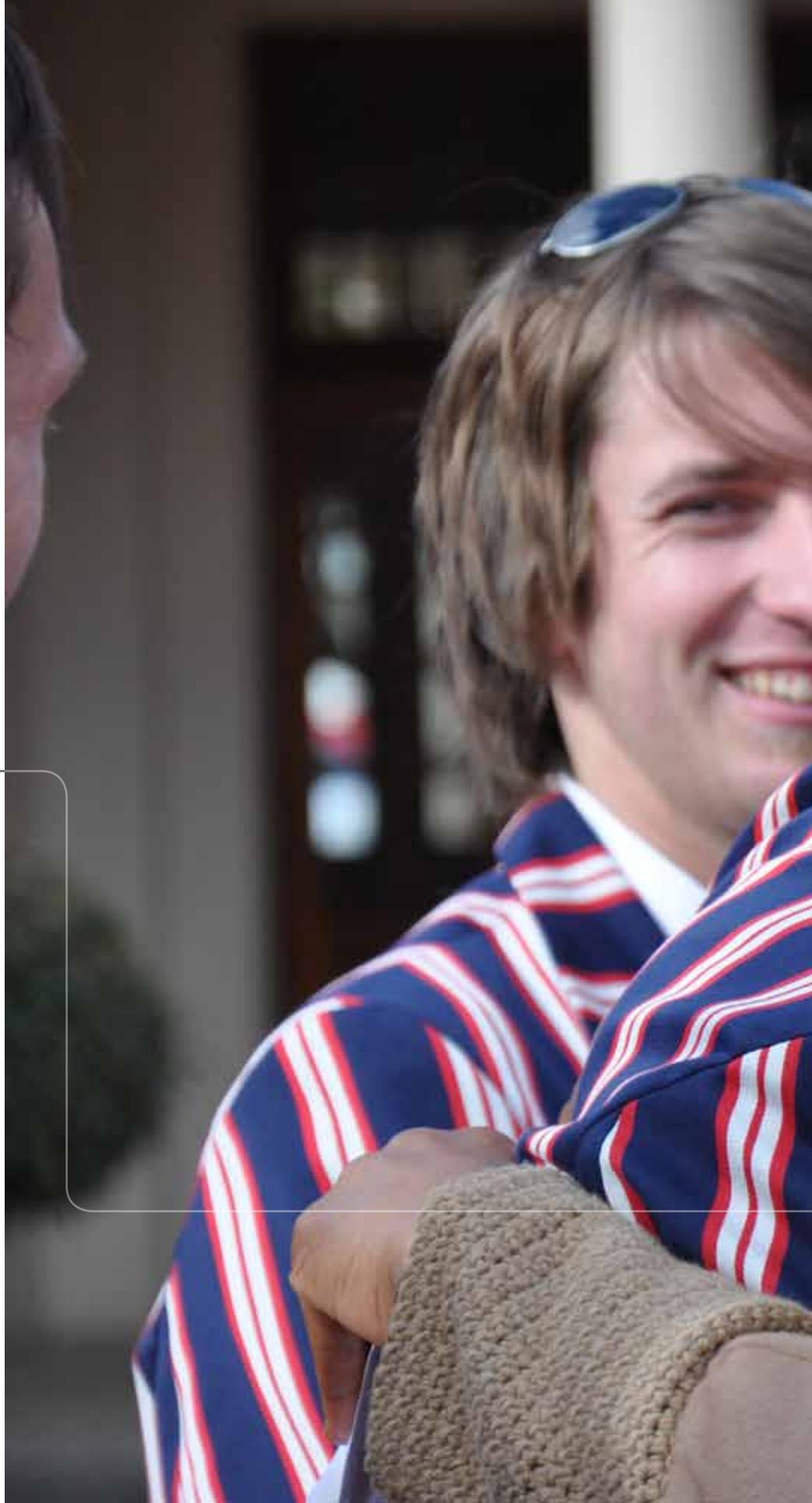


After her arrival there was time to meet senior leadership and student leaders, during a short interval. A proud Vice-Chancellor took her on a photo tour of a proud institution, the University of the Free State.





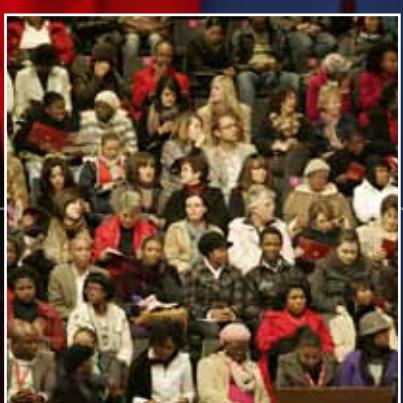
It was a moment to treasure. Oprah Winfrey imprinted lifetime memories in the minds of those who were there to see her, hug her and get hugged.





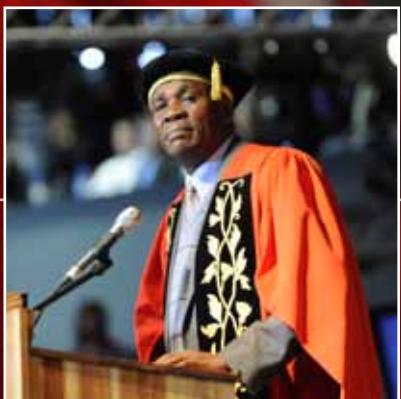
Tension was building up in the jam-packed Callie Human Centre on the Bloemfontein Campus where the Honorary Doctorate in Education was to be conferred. And eventually the crowded centre could get a glimpse of Oprah Winfrey.





‘Rarely has there been an individual who has touched the lives of so many millions of people all over the world in the ways in which Ms Oprah Winfrey has done. By honouring Ms Winfrey with our highest award, the degree Doctor of Education (*honoris causa*), the University of the Free State recognises the candidate for her unparalleled work as a global media leader and a philanthropist with vision and foresight in the field of education and development.’









‘Reaching millions of viewers in over 150 countries with her award-winning programme, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, she has brought genuine change into the lives of ordinary people during its 25 year run. In 2000, she expanded her media reach through the successful creation of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, which then debuted in South Africa in 2002. Earlier this year, she extended her media influence through the launch of a US cable channel, OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network.’

The graduation was also a festival
of song, music and dance to
celebrate a memorable moment in
the life of our university.







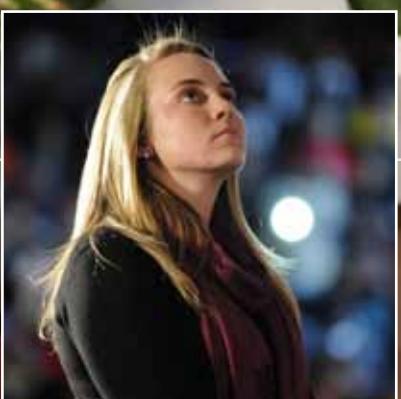
‘As I stood on the stage part of what I was thinking about is the history; the past; all other people for generations passed who have been on this stage. The colour of their skin nowhere matched mine. They would have no idea of a dream that would be possible that an African American woman from the United States would be standing here to receive an honorary doctorate degree, from this university. How extraordinary.’





“What has happened here in the Free State in terms of racial reconciliation, of peace, of harmony, of one heart understanding and opening itself to another heart, is nothing short of a miracle. It is truly what the new South Africa is all about.”

- Oprah Winfrey on the Reitz reconciliation process.





‘I stood here in tears when John Samuel said that I was an honorary daughter of South Africa.’

‘There is a calling for you that is as deep, as strong, as pure, as wide, as broad, as powerful, as gracious, as loving, as the calling for me.’









‘Who you are and what you were
mean’t to be is what you are looking for
in this life. And every single person is
looking to become more of what he is.’





‘I have felt that calling, that yearning to do something and be something that was bigger than myself.’

‘Forgiveness is giving up the hope
that the past could be any different.
You stop holding on to that which
should not have happened.’





DOCTOR EDUCATIONIS (*honoris causa*)

WINFREY, Oprah

Citation

Rarely has there been an individual who has touched the lives of so many millions of people all over the world in the ways in which Ms Oprah Winfrey has done.

By honouring Ms Winfrey with our highest award, the degree Doctor of Education (*honoris causa*), the University of the Free State recognises the candidate for her unparalleled work as a global media leader and a philanthropist with vision and foresight in the field of education and development.

Ms Winfrey already holds Honorary Doctorates from Princeton University as well as Duke University in the United States (USA), among others.

Reaching millions of viewers in over 150 countries with her award-winning programme, The Oprah Winfrey Show, she has brought genuine change into the lives of ordinary people during its 25 year run. In 2000, she expanded her media reach through the successful creation of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, which then debuted in South Africa in 2002. Earlier this year, she extended her media influence through the launch of a US cable channel, OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network.

From an early age, she demonstrated a confidence that was grounded in her ability to read. In her first year at school, she wrote a letter to her school principal suggesting that she should be promoted to the next grade – and she was.

Ms Winfrey excelled at school and was an honours student at her high school, East Nashville High School. It was during these high school years that she developed a love for public speaking and at the early age of 19, while still a college student, she co-anchored the evening news on the local Nashville radio station.

In 1970 she won a scholarship to Tennessee State University, and graduated in Speech and Performing Arts in 1973.

Many people who knew the young Ms Winfrey recognised her ability and talent and knew that she was destined for great things. It was her capacity to empathise and listen with care to her audience that set her apart from the many television talk show personalities.

In 1986, the first episode of The Oprah Winfrey Show was broadcast from Chicago – and so began another chapter in her life that was to take her into the homes and lives of millions of viewers across the world. For the last 25 years, The Oprah Winfrey Show has remained the number one talk show in the USA. While her shows entertained her audiences, she also enlightened and uplifted millions of her viewers. It was this amazing insight into the times and conditions that we live in, and how individuals and societies have been broken, that made her message of hope and healing so powerful. Ms Winfrey did this with an honesty and openness that found deep resonance in the lives and experiences of her viewers.

Capitalising on the power of the media and her standing as a global icon, Ms Winfrey has brought to the attention of her viewers a range of critical social and educational matters. In 1996 she started her Book Club, which has had a dramatic and profound impact on reading habits in America and in other parts of the world. In 1997, she appealed to her viewers to make a difference, and set up a public charity – Oprah's Angel Network – in 1998. Over a period of 12 years the Network raised 80 million dollars, and every dollar raised was used to support the building of 60 schools, women's shelters and youth centres in many different parts of the world.

Through her private charity – The Oprah Winfrey Foundation – hundreds of grants have been awarded in support of empowering women, children and families. The Oprah Winfrey Scholars Program supports hundreds of university students, both in the United States and elsewhere, who are committed





to giving back and making a difference in their communities and country.

While South Africans celebrate her achievements as a global media leader, her connection to our country is deep and genuine. In her words and deeds she has truly become a South African. Ms Winfrey had the whole world to choose from, but she chose our South Africa. She did so because she believed that there was important work to be done here, and she wanted to be part of what Nelson Mandela and others had begun. While we still struggle with many challenges, and in particular with getting ourselves out of the educational crisis we have both inherited and created, she holds the vision of a better South Africa true and fast.

In 2002, Ms Winfrey and her staff spent 21 days in deep rural KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. Getting up at the crack of dawn and not returning until late afternoon, Ms Winfrey travelled into the heart of rural poverty and deprivation. In some areas, roads had to be reconstructed because they were in such a terrible condition. In what was to be known worldwide as Christmas Kindness South Africa, she personally reached 50 thousand school children with gifts of clothing, books, toys and shoes. In addition, 63 rural schools received libraries and teacher education programmes.

During a December 2000 visit with Mr Nelson Mandela, Ms Winfrey pledged to build a school for girls in South Africa. This gift was to become the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls, which opened in 2007.

She later expanded this gift, and the outcome was the opening of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in 2007. The Academy embodied her strong belief in the power of education to change the future. Today, the Academy provides a unique educational opportunity to more than 400 young girls, in Grades 7 through 12, from all over South Africa. These young women from small rural towns and big cities in South Africa share a common background in that they all come from families where the monthly income does not exceed R6000,00.

The girls are selected on the basis of academic and leadership potential, and their educational experience at the Academy

integrates academic excellence and a strong sense of public service. Each girl is expected to give back to her community and her country. In the short time that the Academy has been in existence, it has demonstrated that education can be a powerful force in enhancing life opportunities. Ms Winfrey believes that the Academy can contribute to the development of a new generation of women leaders deeply imbued with a sense of public service. The Academy stands as a beacon of hope in the educational landscape of this country.

More recently, Ms Winfrey has turned her attention to the failing public school system in the United States and has, in dramatic ways, brought to the attention of the American public and policy-makers the impact this has on the lives of many people in America and – more profoundly – how poor education entrenches poverty and social exclusion. In this sense, Ms Winfrey demonstrates in powerful ways the interconnection between education struggles in the USA and South Africa.

Both the Interim Director of the International Institute for Studies in Race, Reconciliation and Social Justice at the University of the Free State and the Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University of the Free State have worked for and with Ms Winfrey on matters of education at her school in Johannesburg, as well as in South Africa in general.

It is a great honour for the University of the Free State to bestow its highest academic accolade on Oprah Winfrey.

Ms Winfrey, by honouring you this afternoon, we welcome you into our community here at the University of the Free State – you are now a Kovsie!

We do this, not only because you have changed the lives of so many through your work in education, but also because you teach us the important lesson that hope and vision must go hand in hand. Your own life has demonstrated this. You also teach us that we must remain open to possibilities in a world that at times can be overwhelming. As a university, we have learnt that education has the power to heal and to make whole that which is broken. This is the lesson you have taught the world – and for this we say: "Thank you, Oprah Winfrey!"





‘I have interviewed over 30 000 people. I have done over 4 780 shows. And never missed a day. I never missed a day because I knew in my life that I had been called to this. That this was what I was supposed to be doing. How do you know you are called? Cause you would do it for free.’

A photograph of a woman with curly hair, wearing a pink dress, smiling and speaking into a microphone at a podium. A man in a suit is visible on the left. The background is dark with some blurred lights.

Compiled by the Strategic Communication Division

University of the Free State

P.O. Box 339

Bloemfontein

South Africa

+ 27 51 401 9111

www.ufs.ac.za

Photographers

Hannes Pieterse, Johan Roux, Rian Horn

Stephen Collett, *Volksblad* photographers