

University of Missouri–St. Louis Commencement

College of Education - May 17, 2015

Gladys Coggsell

I thank Dr. Clark Hickman who nominated me for this prestigious Honorary Doctors degree.

I really appreciate him for believing that I am a worthy candidate. We have been friends for more than twenty years and staunch proponents of education and storytelling.

I thank the University of Missouri–St. Louis and the Board of Curators of the University of Missouri for voting to confer this degree upon me.

I live in Hannibal, Missouri and I'd like to invite you all to visit. You must stop by the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum.

While you are there, I will tell you a story that Mark Twain had published in 1874 about a woman's experiences as a slave. The title is "A True Story" and the Mark Twain Museum is where I work part time as a storyteller in residence.

I would not be here today if it were not for a young woman named Angela Williams. She drove me here and among many other things, she is also a fellow storyteller and video producer, a great one at that. So thank you Angela.

There are so many people that I need to thank but it would take more than 5 minutes, that's the time I have been given to speak. So I am just going to say thank you to those who are here with me today and to those who are not, but wanted to be.

From the bottom of my heart, I am so grateful to all of you for all that you have done. Storytelling has been my passion. It is a powerful teaching and learning tool.

When people tell of their experiences in story form, they can tell stories of survival, compassion, humor, spirituality or any of life's lessons. I see the light in the listener's faces and I know I want to preserve that exchange.

That is why I tell stories. I want to make a positive difference in other's lives. The listeners may also make a positive difference in someone else's life by telling them that same story or another story.

I am going to tell you a short story that I hope you will always remember as you go through your journey in this life. It's called The Head Hog in Charge.

A woman who was a dedicated and very proper secretary was quite surprised and a bit annoyed when she answered the telephone one morning. The gruff voice on the other end of the phone said,

"Hey, I wanna speak to da head hog in chargah". The woman's head jerked a little, indicating that she had been caught off guard. Trying hard to keep her delicate composure, she slowly said to him, "I beg your pardon sir."

"I know's ya hurd me. I said I wannah speak to da head hog in chargah'." Trying to remain calm she gently replied, "uh, sir we don't have anyone here that answers to that name. Would you be referring to the Reverend or deacon?"

She just wanted to hang up on this crude man, but instead thought she would leave him with a polite closing statement. "I'm so sorry, but we don't have a head hog in charge here."

He said, "Oh yeah, well I was gonna donate him this here ten thousand dollars that I got laying around."

Before he could get the "good bye" out of his mouth, she said, "wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, I think I see that big pig walking through the door right now."

She changed her attitude right away, which just goes to show you, it doesn't pay to judge a person too quickly because we never know from whence our blessings may come.

Congratulations again to all of the graduates as you take your place in this world. You are on your way and I am sure you'll have many stories to share to make this world a better place. The best to you, and I thank you.