A very good evening to one and all who have chosen to make the trek up to St Andrew this evening and enjoy our wonderful Tree Planting site which was made possible thanks to the energy of Kammie Holder, the partnership of Mr Hugh Foster who gave us permission to use his land, the able assistance and direction of Barney Gibbs and Rae Milne and a couple of hundred volunteers who completed the 350.org challenge in 2009! This area will be, in years to come a wonderful orchard of fruit trees. Thanks too to Global Drug Supply, the Down Family and most especially to the Soil Conservation Unit who maintain the bush and keep the trees happy! What a glorious view, don’t you think?

I am honoured to have such an esteemed crowd here this evening to celebrate, from what I understand, is my work with Counterpart Caribbean and the Future Centre Trust over the past eight years and the realism of my imminent departure from the post and from Barbados. More on that later... We are joined tonight by many, and all of you are here because you have contributed to my journey while on this beautiful rock in the sea! Firstly, I would like to identify, Senator Dr Frances Chandler, as a recent awardee of an OBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List, and GCM awardee Dr Basil Springer, who, on behalf of Counterpart Caribbean, invited me to return to Barbados and continue this most life changing work! With deep sincerity I thank you for asking me to return and for choosing to be present here tonight. We also have:

The current Board of the FCT, Mr Peter Williams of The Barbados Light and Power Company, Mr Ralph ‘Bizzy’ Williams of Williams Industries, Other Funding partners, volunteers, friends.

While I am on the thank you’s and identifying people, and this may be someone else’s job as I am not the organiser of tonight, but I have a few thank you’s for the team (of whom I am aware) who have spent a good set of time these last weeks organising this event:

Ayana Moosa
Vicky Merrick
Vivian-Anne Gittens
Kammie Holder
David Spieler
Lani Edghill (who cannot be here tonight due to illness)
Barney Gibbs
Fraser Young

You have certainly ‘done well’ as my dad would say and I am grateful for your energies, your time and sincere interest in creating a special evening. You have excelled! Thank you all for your contributions,

Wow, you never really know where the road will lead you on this journey called life!

I can say that life is a series of choices – some you may wish never happened (but yet it is from these that the greatest learning is received) and others, well others you would never, ever want to change – not even for a minute.

Choosing to come to Barbados in 2004 was one of the best choices, if not THE best choice, I have ever made in my life. I have found a new career, I have found many new skills, I have found many new friends and I have learned a lot about myself that I never had any idea was within.
Many of you know my story, but if I can indulge you with the Readers Digest version\(^1\) for those who may not....

I took a year off in the middle of 2003 to go travelling for a year – mostly Central and South America and included 3 months here. I chose to volunteer with the Future Centre for two months of the three I was here and then left again to continue the travels. A month or so after I left, Dr Basil Springer, Chairman of Counterpart Caribbean, who was operating the Future Centre at the time, asked if I would consider returning for a two year contract. I chose to take the chance and come back a few weeks later. Two years became four, Four became six and then six became eight and now I bring to a close this phase of my life journey. I leave with a heavy heart, but of course, am so VERY grateful that the hard work all of us/you have invested in this concept which has allowed the FCT to continue and grow.

These past three years particularly, have been the most active and have provided a wonderful impetus for change and action within the communities in which we work – Green Business, CoRe NETWORK, Bri and Luk, Future Trees, Mobile Learning, Clean Up Barbados, Hudson Permaculture Garden, Murals, Fairs, Art Auctions, Golf Tournaments and the list goes on. It is a great honour and pleasure to see the shared passion and goals of our team who operate often on air, although that is not the preferred option, but we find that positivity and focus, and just getting in there to get things done has helped! Of course we are also blessed with some wonderfully supportive funding partners, some of whom have joined us tonight. I am confident and content that the FCT will continue to provide this country with an active, knowledgeable, helpful resource for the betterment of the holistic environment of this country. FCT is in good hands!

The next stage of my own journey is intended to provide more personal growth with studies in the near future in Development Practice, Environmental Education and Environmental Management which will be spread across 2 continents and another big island that is my ‘other home’! Once that is finished, if there is a project that I can assist with here, I would be happy to return. Barbados is, and always will be, in my heart and if the signs show me the way to return, I would love to follow them!

I am a great believer in everything happening for a reason. You are meant to experience everything that happens in your life - to help you appreciate your joy and happiness and understand sadness or anger. But above all, it is to experience LOVE. Each one of you here this evening against this most beautiful backdrop of St Andrew and beyond are examples of love and each of you have contributed to my experience, my growth and the growth and experience that is the FCT.

All of this to say that I am eternally grateful for the acceptance, support, encouragement and love, you and the people of Barbados have provided and shown me. People have said that I have done so much for Barbados, but it is Barbados that has done much more for me!

Thank you again for choosing to come meet the trees, meet some people and to help celebrate what was and welcome what will be. There is a saying that says – Don’t cry because it’s gone – smile because it happened!

Thank you.

\(^1\) Borrowed from the beautiful Iyanla Vanzant!