

**Commencement Remarks
Academy of Our Lady of Guam
May 7, 2010
Doris Flores Brooks**

Archbishop Anthony Apuron, President Sister Francis Jerome, Principal Mary Meeks faculty and staff, Parents, Graduates, family and friends:

It is a an honor and a privilege to be your speaker, but it also a daunting task to find the right words to say to you.

Some years ago, I sat where you sit now, in this very same Cathedral anxiously awaiting the presentation of my diploma and hoping that the commencement speaker would not drone on too long.

To be brief, my three basic thoughts are these:

- Learn how to manage your finances;
- Look for a career, you like and enjoy; and
- Lead a purposeful life.

First, about FINANCES!

Your classroom work and the encouragement and dedication of your teachers got you to where you are tonight. But it was your parents' MONEY that paid the bills to send you here. Think about the sacrifices that your parents made so you could have an Academy education.

The Great Recession—as it is characterized today—started in 2007, when you were in you first year of high school. In the news today you hear constantly about financial bailouts—bailouts of banks, the auto industry, bailouts for homeowners.

Now even countries—Greece, Portugal and Spain—need bailouts!

Our national debt exceeds TWELVE TRILLION DOLLARS and it's growing at the rate of a million dollars A MINUTE!

Our own Government of Guam issued nearly half a billion in bonds in 2009; GovGuam's deficit is ONE-QUARTER OF A BILLION DOLLARS. On top of that, another quarter-billion for tax refunds has yet to be paid.

Governments at all levels are in deficits because they promised more than what they can afford. But throughout these years of the Great Recession your parents did what had to be done to get you the education they felt you deserved.

Unlike governments, parents don't get to issue bonds that can be repaid over many years. Parents have to make ends meet day-to-day and pay check-to-pay check. Despite the pressures, your parents cut corners for themselves so you could be an Academy graduate. For those of you continuing to college, they'll be shouldering even more of a financial burden.

Though it's your special night, your parents deserve recognition too. Parents, please stand while we applaud your special efforts on behalf of your daughters.

Now for the basics of finance.

Tonight YOU are in a great position. Unlike governments, and so many individuals, YOU ARE NOT IN DEBT. You haven't bought a house encumbered by a mortgage; you're not financing a car; and you haven't—I hope—yet been introduced to the SEDUCTIVE BUT COSTLY excesses of a credit card.

You are DEBT FREE. Stay that way. In today's new normal, Debt is not King. Cash is King. Avoid financial bondage by minimizing debt.

If you don't have a lot of money, accept that fact. When I say this, I think of my parents. They never had the education they gave to me; theirs was the school of hard work.

My father, who rose to the rank of Chief Petty Officer in the Navy, and my mother, who helped to make ends meet by doing laundry for officer's families, budgeted for NEEDS, not luxuries. My mother cut coupons and saved green stamps. My parents saved to buy things. Even such a thing as a car—something everyone finances today—was paid for in cash. That's how the Chamorros of their generation lived.

When my mother died when I was 14, Dad retired from the Navy and we returned to Guam. Dad was lucky enough to find a second strong Chamorro woman as his wife, my second mom, and together they managed a Mom-and-Pop store and farmed. The mantra was still the same: save and have! As a

result, my parents were able to provide my sister and me a good Catholic education and also send me to college.

In managing your finances, don't just live within your means, live BELOW your means. For if you don't put money aside now, you won't have money later on. It's call paying your self first. Make savings a life-long habit. Good money management will help you avoid a lot of stress in your life.

Second, think carefully about the career you choose.

When I started college at UOG I thought I wanted to be a medical technician. Fortunately, the science courses were filled and so I took an accounting course. I found I liked it and took another accounting course. Long story short, I graduated with a degree in accounting and now have spent over 30 years in various aspects of the accounting profession.

I remember one of my college professors telling me; don't worry if you'll be good at something. If you like it, and enjoy it—you will be good at it. Isn't it true that we do the things we like first and those that we don't we put off as much as we can.

But because you like something, it doesn't mean that it'll always come easy. A kind professor at UOG, the late Pearl Sheldon, urged me to set the goal of being the first Chamorro Certified Public Accountant.

In my senior year at San Jose State University, the Big 8 accounting firms came to interview the top accounting graduates. I got two offers but none from Peat Marwick Mitchell, the only firm that had an office in Guam. Peat turned me down. So how was a girl from Guam going to get home for the job she wanted?

Fortunately my auditing professor knew the Peat Marwick partner in charge of recruiting and put in a good word for me. After another interview I was hired to work in Honolulu, the headquarters for the Guam office.

I could have accepted the first rejection by Peat but I did not give up. Don't you give up either!

Rejections are a part of life. As the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, "That which does not kill us makes us stronger."

Or as put by another great figure of history, Winston Churchill, “Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never—in nothing great or small, large or petty—never give in, except to convictions of honor and good sense.”

I guess I had that in mind in earning my CPA license. I had to take the exam four times before I finally passed all parts. I flunked all five parts of an examination that was spread over two and a half days not once but twice. I did finally achieve my goal and what you remember afterwards is not the misery of your failure but the joy of your success.

That takes me to my final point—lead a purposeful life.

Ambition is a necessary prerequisite to accomplishment. But remember that achievement and happiness are not necessarily synonymous.

The essence of life is making the daily experience of your existence worthwhile for others as well as for yourself. The real value of your life is best measured not by the size of your bank account, but by the number of family and friends who treasure YOUR PART in their lives.

Just a few weeks ago, the Guam Women’s Club honored 18 women, who have gone above and beyond in their efforts in the community. The women worked in such fields as education, social work, communications, health and public office. They covered not only a wide range of professions but also a long span in years, young and seniors.

These women of movement demonstrate that you can be important to your community at any and every stage of your life. Emulate them, give to your family, your friends, your community, your God.

Another person who contributed tremendously to our community is John Gerber, whose untimely passing Monday makes us realize how suddenly life can end. Knowing that, do good now and every day.

As you move forward in life keep in mind the needs of others. There’s a saying: “If there is any kindness, or any good thing I can do for my fellow beings, let me do it now. I shall pass this way but once.”

You ARE the connected generation. Stay in touch! In touch with your parents, your family, your friends and your faith and not just through modern electronic tools and social networking of FaceBook ... MySpace ... twitter ... texting ... Stay in touch literally by the things you do for others.

Thank you. Good luck and God bless you!

