

## **Retirement Celebration – May 22, 2016**

Thank you all for being here.

The first thing I'd like to do is introduce you to Royce Hardin, my partner of 26 years and husband of 3. I want to thank him for his support, patience, and willingness to spend a lot of time by himself over these last 17 years. You know the saying, "Behind every great man... is another great man."

The next thing I'd like to do is read you a favorite poem of mine, "To Be of Use" by Marge Piercy. It speaks to the value I place on work and the people who do it, and it explains why I admire so many of my colleagues.

### **To Be of Use**

The people I love the best  
jump into work head first  
without dallying in the shallows  
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.  
They seem to become natives of that element,  
the black sleek heads of seals  
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,  
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,  
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,  
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge  
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest  
and work in a row and pass the bags along,  
who are not parlor generals and field deserters  
but move in a common rhythm  
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.  
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.  
But the thing worth doing well done  
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.  
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,  
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums  
but you know they were made to be used.  
The pitcher cries for water to carry  
and a person for work that is real.

Marge Piercy

Preparing for today has given me the opportunity to reflect on a lot of things I've thought about off and on in my time here at NCCU. One of them is why and how I ended up here. It's a little complicated, and I don't completely understand it myself, but it has something to do with the inner city high school I went to in Bridgeport, Connecticut, a gritty manufacturing city not unlike Durham, but colder and with the odor of the fat-rendering plant replacing the sweet smell of cured tobacco. There were lots of African American and Puerto Rican kids at my school, and one of my closest friends was a Black girl named Leslie Graham, whose smile could illuminate Cleveland for a month. Leslie went to

Shaw University and later became head of the English Department at a Newark, New Jersey high school. In some way getting to NCCU felt a bit like coming home. Coming here also has to do with a comparison of NCCU and Duke, where I'd also applied for a job. I remember thinking that I could be another cog in the pricey and well-oiled machine that is Duke or I could come here where there'd be a better chance that I could be of use. And coming here has a lot to do with the fact that NCCU is in my back yard and that Ted Parrish offered me a job. I'm not exactly sure why he did that, though in terms of departmental diversity I was a prize, a three-for-the-price-of-one: white, male, and gay.

Something else I've reflected on is why I stayed 17 years – a record for me, since before NCCU the longest I'd ever worked in one place was four and a half years. So why 17 years? Age was likely a factor. At 50 it was probably time to settle some place! Another reason is that it was comfortable here; our faculty made me welcome in this department, and I appreciated their warmth and their groundedness. One example of that groundedness: Early on in my time here, Mildred Page took me aside and said in no uncertain terms, "David, don't take any guff from these students. Why, just the other day a student came to me and said, 'Mrs. Page, I can't afford the textbook in your class.' Then I saw the new Nikes on his feet so I looked him straight in the eye, and said, 'Sell your sneakers.'" I liked that. Another reason I stayed was the

commitment of faculty to doing right by students, exemplified by the hours and hours we have spent talking about how and where to strike the balance between, on the one hand, the need to be understanding and supportive and to accommodate students' individual circumstances and, on the other hand, the need to hold them to high standards and prepare them for a world that expects performance, regardless of those circumstances. And then, of course, there were the students themselves. More about you later. Finally, there was that feeling, "I am of use here."

I've been blessed to have three great careers: elementary school teacher, public health educator, and university faculty. And at several points in those careers, I've had the privilege of getting in on the ground floor of something important:

In 1975, I joined the Learning Project, an alternative elementary school in a church basement in Boston. It was the school's third year, and there were three teachers (including me) and 21 kids.

In 1982, three friends and I founded the Lesbian and Gay Health Project here in Durham to improve the quality of health care available to gay men and lesbians in the area. We were soon swamped by the demands of the AIDS epidemic and morphed into the first AIDS service organization in North Carolina.

In 1986, I was the first health educator hired by the State Division of Health Services to do AIDS education in North Carolina. The state's AIDS program consisted of me and a secretary for a while, but as CDC provided states with more money for AIDS work, we grew, and when I left four and a half years later, there were 28 of us.

Although I arrived here long after the pioneers and luminaries of health education at NCCU (among whom I count James B. Shepard, Lucy Morgan, B.J. McMillan, Howard Fitts, Mary Hawkins, Mildred Paige, and Ted Parrish), I still felt I was getting in on something important – not in its infancy, but perhaps still in its adolescence, with plenty of growth in its future. And grow we did. I don't remember how large the department was when I arrived in 1999, but I remember graduating classes of 12 to 15 students. I know that in the fall of 2008, the department had 78 majors and four years later in fall 2012 we had 185, an increase of nearly 140% - with no additional faculty. Last Saturday, 40 majors graduated, with another ten slated to march in December.

But we've not just grown in numbers; we've also grown in opportunities for students to apply what they learn in the classroom. Of course, we've continued programs like Dr. Fitts and Dr. Parrish's Eagle Pride Blood Drive, now under Dr. Robinson's direction, the Society of Future Health Educators advised by Dr. Fortune, and Eta

Sigma Gamma, another group guided by Dr. Robinson. But we've also created new opportunities:

- Project SAFE, NCCU's HIV/STD peer education program, established in collaboration with alumna Carlotta McNeil, then at the Durham County Health Department. Over the years adjunct faculty Tanya Bass, Selena Judon-Monk, and Kevin Harrell and health education alumni Shannon Dupree and Osaffo James have all co-advised SAFE.
- Status Matters, another HIV prevention effort, this one focused on young women on campus, directed by Dr. Fortune.
- A chapter of Globe Med, established by Dr. Romocki, which involves students in international public health efforts.
- Summer externships to Ghana led by Dr. Romocki, Dr. Reid, and Dr. Robinson
- Men In Action, led by rising senior James Yarbough and advised by Dr. Reid, a group that provides support to the growing number of male public health education majors and gives them opportunities for service, leadership, and professional development.
- The new PrEP campaign that recent graduates Quanisha Whitfield and Davina Neal and rising juniors Joshua Alexander and Kendall Love helped launch this spring to raise awareness on campus

about this incredibly important biologically-based HIV prevention strategy.

- And numerous research projects, including the Partners Program. Funded by the National Cancer Institute, this NCCU-UNC collaboration provides students two-year assistantships on cancer prevention research projects here and at Chapel Hill. Drs. Romocki, Wordlaw, Robinson, and I have all been involved, as have recent alumni Theresa Curington, Alonza Pamplin, Jamie Steed, Salima Taylor, and Xian Brooks.

I know that I am leaving at an exciting time for our department; besides the ventures just I just mentioned, there is the addition of our first new faculty position in over 10 years (thank you, Dean Parker) and the exploration of a new public health studies track to better meet the interests and needs of our students. But I also know that I am leaving at a time of unprecedented challenges to our department and the university:

- The General Assembly is considering policies and programs (the Guaranteed Admission Program and the Access to Affordable College Education Act) that could undermine the financial viability and traditional mission of HBCUs in North Carolina.

- There are the seemingly incessant legislative budget cuts and consequent pressure to do more with less and
- The related pressure to graduate more students more quickly. (Both these pressures threaten to compromise NCCU's ability to fulfill our historic mission of providing students with kind of personal attention and support in relatively small classes that students in larger predominantly majority universities are less likely to get.)
- And then there's HB2. Despite the governor's efforts to back pedal a bit on HB2 and put lipstick on this pig, HB2 has sent a message of exclusion and "you are less than" to LGBT students in our university and LGBT people across the state. I attended NCCU's last Senate Faculty meeting and was heartened by how many colleagues connected HB2 to Jim Crow policies that conferred second-class status on Blacks in the last century, and I was proud to be an Eagle when the Senate voted unanimously to condemn HB2 and call for its repeal.

At this point I have to mention the work done to make NCCU a more welcoming and supportive campus for our LGBT students. I remember a time in the early 2000's when a gay student came to me – a very bright student, a Chancellor's Scholar on a full four-year scholarship. It was the end of his freshman year, and he said, "Dr. Jolly, I'm



transferring to the University of Maryland. It's just too hard to be gay at NCCU." Since then a lot of progress has been made. Early on, quite frankly, the progress was not because of faculty and administration, but because of the students themselves, LGBT students and their allies, who refused to deny who they were or hide or be silent. Then seven or eight years ago along came Ms. Tia Doxey, the most amazing ally the LGBT community could hope for. She agreed to help me advise COLORS, our LGBT student organization, and she brought new energy, insight, and creativity to that work, and she had lofty ambitions for the community. She is the reason why NCCU was the second HBCU in the nation to establish an LGBT Center and the first to have a Lavender Graduation ceremony. These will always be her legacies, but this past year our LGBT Center Coordinator Trinice McNally, with great support from Assistant Vice Chancellor Anita Walton, took services and support for LGBT students to a new level. And today we've got a solid core of faculty and staff to continue this work: Ferelli McGilvary, Rae Lundy, Collie Fulford, Lydia Lavelle, Angela Gilmore, and Chad Hughes.

So now (and we're getting close to the end, I promise) I want to thank three groups of people for the great run I've had here:

1. First, there are the administrative staff who have made my life so much easier and who do so much to keep the trains running

around here: our past and present department administrative assistants, Lois Pettiford, Roz Richardson, and Monica Tsotetsi, and our Partners Program admin people, Eva Marmon-Halm and Shandra Robertson.

2. Second I want to thank my colleagues in the department, across campus, and off-campus (at UNC, FHI 360, the Durham County Health Department, and community-based organizations like CAARE, Senior PharmAssist, the Coalition for Health Care of North Carolina, the NC AIDS Action Network, and the Triangle Empowerment Center). These are people who day after day “go into the fields to harvest and work in a row and pass the bags along” to end health disparities, to build social justice.
3. Finally, I want to thank our students who humble me, move me, and inspire me with your determination in spite of adversity (you know who you are), your resilience in the face of setbacks (you know who you are here, too), and your commitment to making good and giving back to your communities.

So bear with me as I end this meandering reflection in a somewhat clichéd and flippant format: lists (I love lists). Let’s start with the top 5 things I will **not** miss about NCCU:

5. The nightmare of online travel authorization and reimbursement forms.
4. The temperature in the deep freeze of my office.
3. On the flip side, four-hour graduation ceremonies in black robes under a blazing sun.
2. For this Scotsman who has refused to buy an NCCU parking decal since they tripled the price 10 years ago to pay for the parking deck, the constant threat of parking tickets.
1. GRADING! Students, all that feedback you got from me on your work (I know, sometimes there was more feedback than there was work – and for that I have to give a shout-out to my teacher and chair of my dissertation committee JoAnne Earp), all that feedback, it may have been a labor of love, but it was labor – and because of it, over the years I missed a lot of good TV.

And now the seven things I will miss - dearly:

7. Belinda Jones's ever-present and infectious laugh and Tanya Bass's irrepressible spirit.
6. LaVerne Reid's amazing wardrobe; in 17 years I don't think I've ever seen her wear the same outfit twice (and a gay man notices these things)

5. My tetes-a-tetes with Seronda Robinson – one chair to another - sharing frustrations, occasional rewards, and lessons learned about being chair and finding the humor inherent in the most challenging position in the university.
4. My political confabs and commiserations with Dr. and someday Senator LaHoma Romocki. I do not know how I'm going to get through the strangest election cycle ever without them and without her.
3. The sweet satisfaction of a class that's gone well.
2. The sense of teamwork and accomplishment when collaborating with colleagues – to solve a student's problem, develop a course, revise our curriculum, devise and implement a research study.
1. The privilege of witnessing small miracles on a regular basis. Students, those are your miracles, you making huge and often unexpected leaps in personal and professional development - when you are inspired, when you find your passion, when you embrace who you are, when you tap into strengths and gifts that you might know you have but that will serve you and the communities you work with very well, from here on.

Okay that's it. Thank you. I love you. Y'all come see us in Maine!