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Keep the Spirit of Hope Alive

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Alumna tells graduates

Keep the spirit of hope alive

When Ruth (Musunu) Titi Manyaka '69 began writing a young woman on the opposite side of the world, she could not imagine how her life would change.

Manyaka was reunited with her friends and mentors Allen and Margaret (Cook) Anderson, both '47, and friend and former college roommate Carol (Smith) Hosler '68 of Kearny, Ariz., when she traveled from Africa to give the commencement address to the class of 2007. Calling Anderson her "spiritual father," Manyaka said he was instrumental in bringing her to Linfield College.

Manyaka, the daughter of an American Baptist pastor and a teacher, was raised at a mission station in the Congo. She began writing to Hosler, who encouraged her to attend Linfield. Anderson, the head of the Baptist Youth Fellowship in Washington state, galvanized young people who held car washes, mowed lawns and organized garage sales and other fund raising events to help Manyaka attend Linfield.

"The generosity of your hearts has continued to spread and we have touched generation after generation since we left Linfield," Manyaka said.

After completing a biology degree at Linfield, Manyaka received a master's degree in public health from Loma Linda University. She later met and married Raphael Titi Manyaka, a graduate student in engineering from Cameroon. Eventually they returned to Cameroon, where Manyaka taught biology at a secondary school in Douala, the country's capital, and raised four children. Following her retirement from teaching in 1999, she founded Women, Environment and Health (WEH), a non-governmental organization devoted to serving the needs of the most vulnerable populations in Littoral Province. This past January, she hosted a group of Linfield students and faculty who worked with WEH in the local villages. (See related story on page 12.)

The goal of WEH is to address the basic problems facing rural communities in Cameroon.

"Women are the core of every society, and that cannot be overstated in the context of the Cameroon," Manyaka told the more than 5,000 people who attended graduation. "Someone has said, when you educate a woman you educate a nation."

Cameroon, located in the Congo basin of Central Africa, is rich in biodiversity and endowed with numerous natural resources.

However, the people are poor and don't benefit from the natural wealth around them. Many live on \$1 a day or less. WEH is trying to help communities organize to improve their lives, she said.

"Poverty, ignorance and disease are the biggest ene-



Ruth (Musunu) Titi Manyaka '69, left, was reunited at commencement exercises with Allen Anderson '47 and her former roommate Carol (Smith) Hosler '68, who were instrumental in bringing Manyaka to Linfield from the Congo. Manyaka presented the commencement address and then visited with a number of friends from her Linfield years.

mies of Africa today," she added. "We believe if we can combat poverty, we empower people to fight ignorance and disease."

WEH has organized an agricultural project for women, growing food crops and livestock and helping find markets for the produce as well as improving the diet of local families. They have identified 800 orphans and provide school materials for nearly 400. They are training local villagers to address common diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. The biggest challenge they face is HIV/AIDS, Manyaka said, with many believing that it is due to misfortune or evil spells.

She praised Linfield Professor Sherry Archer, Portland Campus Director David Groff and the 14 students who spent last January Term working with her and others, calling them Linfield's ambassadors to Africa.

"I believe these young people had an experience that cannot be matched elsewhere," she said. "Your coming to Africa opened your eyes to a world different from the one you are familiar with. I challenge each of you this day to set a goal to serve mankind. No action is too small to go unnoticed.

"Say no to prejudice, no to war, no to indifference," she urged the graduates. "Make it your aim to touch at least one life at a time. Keep the spirit of hope and compassion as you go on life's journey and never give up."

— Mardi Mileham