

THE 2010 WORLD FOOD PRIZE LAUREATE LECTURE: JO LUCK
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Jo Luck – President, Heifer International

Thank you. Well, David just gave my speech, so that’s why I was over there listening to him and jotting down something else that I might say.

You know, David and I feel very much alike about all those important issues. He goes about it mobilizing people, of course, in this country and in churches and elsewhere, to take action and be a part of it, which is so powerful. And that’s why Heifer is a member of Bread, not only out of respect [but] because they can be the voice for us in so many of these matters. And I’ve met additional people with Bread here; it’s been exciting. And I want to say, David, sharing this with you this year has made it twice as nice. It’s been a real privilege.

So what I’ve been thinking about, while I was making my notes, I’ve been reflecting on the whole week. The ambassador said, “Please reflect on the whole week.” He says, “Do whatever you want.” He may tell me tomorrow, “I didn’t mean that literally.” But what I did when I went to my room for a little break earlier was say, “Hmm, what brought me here?” This is just amazing. And before I begin that little fun reflection and then try to – I did tell the ambassador and, of course, our great leader and sponsor, and advisors and so forth, at our private breakfast that I plan to do something that I am certain no Laureate has ever done before. So that’s why Ambassador Quinn is not sleeping as well. He was working hard, but he said, “I’m curious about that,” but I promised him it would not be anything embarrassing – I really do want to do small a little different that you’ll remember.

Before that, I want you to know that I have a very, very special person here from our board of directors. I have not neglected her ever, but I have not given her the attention and recognition and respect (which she doesn’t expect and doesn’t want), of course, because it’s been such a wild week — so I want to take one moment to do that. Kathleen Campanella is a member of the Brethren Church, and our founder came from the Brethren [Church] and the farm in the central part of the United States, with a great vision to make things happen. And she represents that. She is on the executive committee of our board of directors; she is also on the search committee to find the new CEO. And as you know, that’s one of the most important jobs any board does. It’s just a very important job for transition and for the future. And she changed her plans to be here, and I just want – would you please just stand or raise your hand? I can’t see anyone, so Kathleen, I know you’re in this vicinity. Thank you. Let’s give her a hand.

I thought about what to say, and my good friend, David Lambert, and so many of the rest of you have said to me, “Just do what you’ve been doing, and speak from the heart. Let’s just hear that. We like that.” And so I’m going to do that, but I’m going to start out first to say, this is my very first triathlon. I have never done it before. I’ve started at the top. This one’s for experts only. I come in and first of all you go to academia, and you speak and you talk to students, and then you go over here to [USDA] and – “Me, tell those ag specialists about agriculture?” And then I go to the Kemin Industries worldwide scientists’ gathering. “What do I tell the scientists?”

And then we go over here – “Oh, here’s an interview; put on your earphones. NPR, one hour here; here’s an interview, take a photo.” And he tells me to keep moving side to side on those photos all the time. Oh, and you go in front of the state capitol, where you don’t know if your picture will be in perpetuity or what, and it was the only windy day with the sun in my eyes. And, of course, there’s David, nice looking, together — when his hair blew, it kind of looked like in the movies. Mine looked like Kramer, if you know [who that is] – and I apologize, cross-culture – I’ll just guarantee you; his hair is not attractive. It stands straight up.

I thought, “I’m supposed to be together and professional and maybe a little glamorous,” you know, being the third woman. But of course we’re a lot more than glamor — we’re serious, we have brains, we’re serious. But I wanted to look nice, you know, and be groomed. And my bag and the shoes I bought just to wear here, that looked so nice, they gave me the wrong sizes, and so I couldn’t wear them. You know, I think I’m being tested — every night my key to my room wouldn’t open and I’d have to go back downstairs and get another one. I think it’s a little trick and part of the training, so I’m going to ask a few of you Laureates if that ever happened to you when you got here, see if you can make the grade.

Oh, and I want to finish that. You come back and you make a photo here, you do an interview there. And then you have to go over here, be this, do this breakfast. And then you run over here: “Now, what’s this? Oh, my gosh, we’re doing that, the student institute, this over here.” And you know what all this is called? It is called, my triathlon, the “Ken Quinn ‘I bet you can’t do it again’ ” event. Catherine Bertini and others said, “It is the most glorious and fantastic week of your life but possibly the most grueling.” And I could never keep up with Ambassador Quinn, even if I had rested for a month before I came.

It has been such a great joy. You know, I love my sense of humor — that’s how we get through tough times, and if you can laugh with someone that’s struggling to make tough decisions, they start getting comfortable, and pretty soon you can talk to each other as brother and sister, or sister to sister.

Since I scribbled it down here, forgive me; I just want to not forget something funny.

How I got here — and I’m not going to talk about my training. I’m not going to talk about my background, because none of it’s appropriate to be in agriculture. It’s those lessons learned growing up. I’ve had a remarkable life and hadn’t really realized it — I knew I was blessed, I knew I was happy. But as I jotted down a couple of things — some of you will think I’m nuts, and sometimes I am — but, beginning in the 1940s, I think, my journey began, to come here.

My mother and I were on one of the very first ships — and if you were at the public forum, I think mentioned that — going to Japan after the war, to live in occupied Japan. And I won’t go into any of that, but it was just a great learning experience for a very young girl to think globally. We went over with 800 women and children on a ship, but for a family emergency we had to come back on another ship that was not for the dependents, but they worked us into it. There were three or four officers that also had urgent matters. But the rest of the occupants on the ship were prisoners, or they were those who were not mentally well — they were all coming out of the war. My mother was a little concerned about that, but I had no idea. We were in one of the biggest storms. They lost several ships; we had to tie ourselves to the bunk, you know, the luggage hitting every wall and things going, and I think I was the only one on the ship that wasn’t seasick. I felt so sorry for all those, because I was the only child on this one.

But then they had a mutiny in the kitchen. And so here’s my mother with this young child in a storm — mutiny, all this going on. I thought it was a very exciting trip, because we weren’t allowed to go in the dining room anymore, because of the mutiny, and they had the knives and forks in there, and so we had to eat Fritos or cookies. I thought it was a blast. You know, I was eating all those things that my mother would normally not let me eat. And we were tied in the bunk together, and I just thought that was so sweet, that we had that time together. I’m serious!

But what I want to tell you about that is, when I think back, you know, I was probably going this way when the first Heifer ships were going that way, delivering the first load of animals right after the war to those farmers. I’ve looked at the research; Amy Carter is my little research, brilliant assistant, and we’ve been looking at that, and we’re fascinated at what we’re seeing. I think we passed in the night. And who knew my future passed me in the night and that we were going to be touching each other? And I look back on that, and you know what, I think that was a very meaningful experience.

And when we got back, I'm sorry – my parents divorced and remarried and so forth. They remarried in the same city, almost the same week. Everyone went on the honeymoon, and no one took me. And I thought, we were all five, you know, getting married. I don't think my mother thought that idea was really very funny at the time. But what came from that for me is that I had – I lived with my father and stepmother in the summer and my mother and stepfather in the winter – I had 59 years of four of the finest parents that anyone could ever have. And each very different. And so the values they brought to me and the lessons had to make a big difference for me.

After the war you moved around, you tried to find your career. It was a time where things were happening and there was opportunity; finally, so well-deserved. And so my families, my father and stepfather, moved a lot to follow opportunities for careers. And I lived in 13 states. I went to seven schools my first six years. It wasn't easy moving around, but I was learning to be flexible, I was learning to make friends, I was learning to do this and that. And those had to be great lessons for me.

My mother is a little Southern belle lady — you would never think of that to hear me. And my stepfather was a man of the, salt of the earth. I've lost three of them in just the last few years, and my mother still lives but was not well enough to come. And then my daddy was just a crazy character and brilliant, an inventor and all kinds of things, and I miss him terribly. You know, it's funny; when they're gone, just to have them back one day would be great. But he taught a lot of things to me too. What is really special for me is, my stepmother was quite different. She was nervous, because she wanted to please my father; she had no children or anything, and so she bought ruffly little bedspreads for me when I came, and she wanted to make sure she was doing a good job, and she was doing this and that. And I called her “Merlie,” a nickname, and I said, “Merlie, you don't have to be my mother. I have a mother. But we could be best friends.” And on her dying bed, she said she always remembered that.

So you learn, as a child even, to help with conflict resolution. When one would pick me up, I'd say, let me get out the rules for this family. You know, it was all different in both families. But why I bring this up is, my favorite place I ever lived – and I was in Dallas and I was in Denver and I was in St. Louis, I was in San Diego, on and on; I went to high school in Joplin, Missouri, you know – my favorite place I ever lived was in Newtonsville, Ohio, a little farm, 67-acre farm, not a real big one, but that was my best experience ever. I got to learn to ride on cows first and then horses. I learned to frog gig and get the worms and put them on the hook. I learned to – you know, it was a fabulous experience.

And my stepmother, a strong Montana woman, she said, “I hope you never have to do this, but you're gonna know how, just in case.” She said, “You're gonna go out there and you're gonna catch the chicken, you're gonna boil it, you're gonna take the feathers out, you're gonna cut it apart, and you're gonna cook it.” And she meant it. I went to the barnyard, and I wasn't strong enough to do this. And I got that chicken and put it on the stump and put my foot over here, not to look at it, and chopped the neck, and I didn't look until they quit jumping around. But I really learned what you do sometimes to get your food if you have to manage. I learned how to wash, to hang it from the tree on the line. And that was a remarkable experience; it really was. And I think that I was preparing – not that, thank goodness, Heifer has me slaughtering all the chickens; but if I had to, I could – I was on my way, you know, to being a farm girl. And that's the best I could do was Ohio. I tried to figure out Nebraska or Iowa, because you all are so united, all these Nebraska people and Iowa people. But I got pretty close in Ohio with my farm experience.

While we were there on that farm – it was a gentleman's farm; my daddy worked in Cincinnati – we had special guests that liked to come out and hang out there. It was just beautiful and it was quiet. And I got to go fishing with them, and we became buddies, and, oh, it was fantastic. And I told someone about my friends. And they said, “Well, who, or what are you talking about.” I said, “Well, they were always adults.” You know, I didn't have children in the summertime; I had adults. And I said, “Well, one was named – he had a funny name; it was like Mickey Mouse, you know.” And they said, “Well, who?” Well, it was actually Mickey Mantle. He was great. We had fun together. He had knee trouble, and I'd fallen and hurt my knee, so we kidded about that. And he had a good friend with him – and I honestly meant to look this up; no I just wrote it down –

was it Frank White, or Whitey or something that started with that? The other one that he was such good friends with? Which? Whitey Ford! I knew there was a Whitey in there, because I thought it was funny that there was a Mickey and a Whitey. And they were so fun and so good to me; It's when he was just getting started. He was young, he wasn't famous yet. And anyway, I was 9-10, right in there. And I said, "And there was one that was so funny – because he was like the bear, in the forest, Yogi Berra." And they say, "What! Are you serious?" I said, "Ralph Houk is my cousin, and they'd bring them out there and they could just relax and have fun."

And you will just have a stroke, like I did, later, that they wrote me notes and signed things for me, and I think when they cleaned out my room one time, they disappeared, but I've got those memories, and it was so much fun to have that experience. But I realized I didn't know they were famous or getting ready to be famous; I knew they were just good people looking for relaxation. And that was a nice feeling for me later.

The next thing I'll mention, just a couple more. When I lived in New Orleans in the summer, I wanted to work, and that was the year I just turned 13. So I got all dressed up and put my little hand gloves on and all that, and my hat, and took the trolley and went downtown to Godchaux's, which is a department store. And I'd been looking around, and I just thought their window decorations were just mighty, you know, nice; really well done. So I went inside and asked to see the person responsible for decorating the windows. And they hardly knew what to say to this 13-year-old, and so they actually took me up there, and I met with the gentleman. And I said, "You know, I've looked all around, and your windows are just the finest, and I wondered if I could assist you this summer." And he hired me. You know, I had to do something, and I wanted to be assertive.

And it turned out that Crawford Ellis was his best friend, who was getting ready, it turned out, when I was a senior at 16, he was king of Mardi Gras, and in the restaurants – and I'm so sorry what's happened in New Orleans, but it's coming back – in the restaurants you may have had oysters ala Crawford Ellis, quite a wealthy, strong, well-to-do man, and we remained friends from then on and made opportunities for some – you just don't know; you've got to go in and try. You've got to ask. And I learned a great deal from him on what good business ethics are.

When Ronald Reagan was spokesman for GE Theatre — some of you, I know remember, because some of you are my age — that's how he started. And he traveled to visit all the electronics sponsors for their show. And my stepfather at that time lived in Joplin, Missouri, and had a four-state area, the largest distributor. So he said he was going to stay at our house. Well, my stepdaddy said it cost us \$10,000 for Mother to have the house look good enough for when he came, and she really never forgave him, because he didn't write her a bread-and-butter thank you note. But I said, "You know, Mother, he can't do all those things."

But when he came, we didn't have a spare bedroom, so he used mine, and I spent the night with a girlfriend. And he left some of his handwritten notes and things on my little desk. And to think he was going to be President of the United States later! And I took the bed when I married, and did certain things, and when I sold it, I put, "Ronald Reagan slept here." And fortunately – he was no longer President; I would never have done that – but you just never know what you're doing and where things are [going], and it's just so exciting to see what can happen in your life.

Peter Jennings called one day at the office at Heifer and asked to speak to me about Afghanistan, when all that was getting started, and he went back out to cover it. And they said I was out of town, that he could speak to so-and-so, and he said, "I'd really rather speak to her." And then he said, "Is she really out of town, or she just didn't want to talk to me?" Not want to talk to Peter Jennings – is he crazy? So, they said, "She is; she'll be back in two days." So I called. We talked about our work there, what we were doing, and we began emailing. I still have four of them I've saved; I'm just glad to have them. And so out of the blue, I said, "Why don't you be my guest for lunch at the Conrad Hilton in New York. I'd love for you to be there." He accepted and sat down and talked about Heifer. And, you know, he was a big donor; he gave gifts to his staff and so forth. And who knew I would ever meet and talk with Peter Jennings?

And the other person that amazed me – when I read Jeffrey Sachs’s book, *End of Poverty* – and Pedro’s here; I didn’t agree with everything, Pedro, but I thought it was very thought-provoking and I was really learning and I was quoting from it; and, Kathleen, do you remember I’d read it to the board and quote it? So I sent him an e-mail and I said, “I’m quoting your book. I think it’s fascinating. Would you come and speak at the dedication of our new world headquarters?” And what nerve! And I had an answer the next morning, and he said, “I love Heifer. I’ll get back home and look at my calendar, and I will come if it’s clear.” He said, “I’m out of town right now.” I learned he was in Africa with Angelina Jolie, filming the documentary. And he responded and he did come. You know, if you don’t ask, you’ll never know, and you can just be prepared to maybe be a little disappointed, but don’t mind asking.

Oh, and one quick thing and then I’m getting over to my real point.

What I’m saying is – and we have young people, and I’m going to be with them Saturday and all; and at Iowa State, they lined up for an hour asking questions: “What do I need to do to have your job, or be you when you grow up?” I said, “You don’t want to be me, but you want to have a fantastic job like I do and follow your passion.” But I want them to know, if you don’t know early – you’re being prepared in your life by doing your best at whatever you do, listening and learning. And it’s just preparing you in many ways you never thought of. And so, don’t be worried if everything’s not exactly the way it should have been on your résumé – that’s ideal, but it’s not always absolutely critical to having the position.

When I got married my second time – my children’s father is a federal judge, a wonderful man; we were married 20 years, still all very close; of course, he likes his wife and new children, but I mean we stay very friendly because we put the children first, and that’s the way it should be. And I had trouble picking my attorney, because he was president of the bar association. I was really gonna have a fair chance, you know. So I picked Hillary Rodham Clinton.

And when the FBI were investigating for his appointment to the bench, they came to me. You know, you’re always going to get the dirt. And he was going down the list, and he said, “Okay, now, who was your lawyer?” I said, “Who was my lawyer?!” “Yeah – there could be implications there.” I said, “Well, it was Hillary Rodham Clinton.” They said, “No! I’ve never heard – you’re not – no. The First Lady did not represent you against your husband in the divorce, who, her husband, the President, is now appointing to the bench.” I said, “I can tell you’re from the FBI.” And then as soon as he left, Bill called and he said, “Jo Luck, the FBI will be contacting you, and I know you’re going to be very honest.” I said, “Oh, they just left! I hope I did okay.”

Their father and I love our children. We respect each other. We almost grew up together, and I spent the first almost half of my life with him, and it was wonderful. But I did marry again shortly to a completely different kind of person, where I could scuba dive and refinish boats and do all those kinds of things – because a lawyer doesn’t have time to do that; they’ve got to work 24/7 and do their...

So the whole point about all that is that my minister had died. I didn’t know David then. I knew another wonderful man that I just thought was fabulous, working at Heifer, and was so good, but he was going to be in Honduras. So I went to the governor, and I said, “Would you perform a marriage for me?” And he’s done that six times in his life. And he said yes. And I said, “Okay, how about so-and-so.” We set the date — great, good, good. And, well, two days before, they called and said, “He’s been called to Washington, DC.” And I said, “I’ve got to get married. I’m planning on it. How about so-and-so?” “No. That’s busy.” I said, “What’s he doing tonight?” Between 6 and 8 he had an opening, so I left a message for my husband-to-be. They said “He’s in a meeting;” I said, “I think he’s gonna want this message.” I left a message for my son at college about an hour and a half away: “If you get my message in time, and you have a clean white shirt, you need to meet me at the governor’s mansion.” My daughter was in California; it was too far away.

It was one of the most charming weddings, and guess who my witness was? Hillary Rodham Clinton. And so I, and Larry, we have the only marriage certificate with both Clintons’ signature on it – and I understand that is very valuable. So maybe World Food Prize or somebody, someday, we can benefit from that, or Heifer. I hate to tell you, the other five couples didn’t make it either. I asked the governor, then-President about it, and

he said, “Jo Luck, you don’t want to know my track record.” But you never know, if you don’t ask, what could happen. And look at the opportunities I’ve had since then with so many of these fantastic, fantastic people.

The only other thing real quick – and if you see the ambassador coming with the hook, please give me a shout so I don’t get... – I was so blessed to go to the Earth Summit. In fact, the Heifer organization, probably 10 of you are going to tell me I’m wrong, but as far as our research has shown, we were registered officially both at the UN meeting and the PVO meeting. And I was so thrilled to have that opportunity. And so in the morning I get up and dress up, go to the UN meeting, and be very formal and observe. And then I race back, change clothes, got to get casual, hang out with Bella Abzug and Shirley MacLaine and Jacques Cousteau and all these wonderful NGO people. And all they were doing, it was just so exciting, and I was so proud.

Several of you probably were there. They assigned your housing – unless you were a dignitary, and I was not; you know, whatever came, came, you know – a walk-up flat, you share this, you do that, just whatever was available at the time you came in – you had an assignment and you took it, of course. I had to go a little late – and if you’ll remember the Senior George Bush left a little early, you know, before they got into some of the real action, because there was some discussion about that. So when I got to the airport and they gave me my assignment, I had the Presidential Suite in the Copacabana Hotel, which is overwhelming – because that was next, that was on the list. And I got to watch all those wonderful people in Portuguese tell their story. But that wasn’t just exactly great, because they wouldn’t let me go out after seven; it wasn’t safe unless you were in the complex. So just take it like it comes – you never know where you’re going to be going.

I’m sorry. I’m having a little eye trouble this week. I don’t always do this when I speak or I would never be invited back. Now, let’s get on to the real stuff. So that’s not even half my stories, but today – oh, one more!

Eric Hilton and I hit it off. He likes cows; and, boy, I can talk cows with him. And we got to talking, and we got the Conrad Hilton Prize, a great honor – like this one, just great; I can’t say which is better, because they would not be pleased – but we were in Geneva and they said to me, “Jo Luck, Heifer had been nominated three years in a row. Would you have gone through all that one more year if you hadn’t received it?” I said, “You’re right. I mean, Heifer deserves it. We weren’t going to give up, you know. However, if I’d know you were gonna give Paul Farmer with Partners in Health \$1.5 million, instead of \$1 million, I could have waited one more year.” And Paul and I have been kidding about that since.

Now I am among the superstars. This is the epitome. I’ve been fortunate, I’ve been blessed. But to be among you – I mean, I told someone once, my goal at Heifer was for it to outgrow me, and that they’d next need somebody like a Kofi Annan to head it. And then to sit at the table and have lunch with him, and to look at some of you all I so greatly admire, and to be with you at the table talking – it is overwhelming, and I’m so grateful. And we’re going to use that opportunity to do our work even better, whether it’s through Heifer or through others, as a World Food Prize Laureate – you know, the ambassador only spoils me one more day, and then he starts telling me what to do, so I know the Laureates really need to work, come together, and use skills and help; and I will do all I can. I’m deeply, deeply devoted.

One man said to me last night when we got back – he’s the country director from Rwanda; he’s been through so much – he said, “Jo Luck, if I die tomorrow, I die a happy man and in peace.” “Why are you saying that?” He said, “We’ve worked so hard so many years, and being here with these people, recognizing that we all are doing the same work, is a great dream and an achievement.”

And that’s what you are doing for people to hear all over the world. We are here together from whatever perspective to make a difference – and, you know, we can do it. And what David said about the leadership in line, all of you at the table, those that are coming for the 25th anniversary next year, and coming together, we are going to really do something in this next decade. The economy will change – if not, we’ll figure it out anyway. But it will change – we have to know that.

So I am very passionate. I'm very grateful. But what I want you to know: it's not just agriculture. It's not just animals. It's not just crops. All those things are a catalyst to end hunger and seek dignity. And I'm going to tell you one thing, and you will see the entire story of what your work is about.

What I would have done, that no Laureate has ever done, is read a children's book to you. I'm not going to do that, but I'm going to summarize it, because some of you haven't read it:

Beatrice, a little girl of nine, was dreaming about going to school in a rural village in Uganda, carrying firewood, helping her mother, wearing her little precious red dress. And I asked why it was cut open in the back, and they said, "Well, we cut it open so she could wear it another year while she grows."

Her dream was to go to school, but they couldn't afford the fees. And with her goat, they passed on the gift, the offspring, to another family; they fed their children, they sold it and with the money, she saved it to go to school. Got in school, finally, and was so committed and worked so hard, went right up through all the levels.

Ended up getting a full scholarship offer in the United States, at Connecticut College, and she went there. In the summer she interned for Senator Clinton, and they still email and are in touch, and it's wonderful, and then also for President Clinton's foundation one summer. She now has graduated last spring (I hope I have that right) with her master's degree, from the Clinton School of Public Service, on a full scholarship.

She spoke for the school at a luncheon, and they had so many people at the convention center they had to stand around and be in other rooms, just like the World Food Prize people, because they were so taken with her story — she raised enough money for others to have scholarships. And now she's working with Jeffrey Sachs on the Millennium Promise, in New York City, and she has traveled the country with her book, with Simon & Schuster. She's been on Oprah. She's done so many other things, because she's so wise and articulate.

And you're lucky because — you're very fortunate — that young woman has flown in from New York. And, Beatrice, will you come up here for a moment, please. I want them to meet you and what a goat — your hard work — but what a goat started.

Beatrice Biira

Thank you very much, Jo Luck, for your kind remarks, and congratulations once again to you and to David for this honor. Wow! And I knew I should have gone to all those impromptu speaking lessons at school. And speaking of opportunity, I will say this quickly. I remember last year at the dedication of the Heifer building in Little Rock, Arkansas, President Bill Clinton said something that still rings in my mind; and you can disagree with this if you would like. He said, "Intelligence is evenly distributed around the world. The poor people work just as hard as the rich or the wealthy people. It's just that opportunity is not equally distributed."

And speaking of opportunity, as a young child growing up in my very poor, but extremely beautiful, village in western Uganda, all I needed was the opportunity to go and sit in a classroom and learn and dream to be what I wanted to be. I can now proudly say that I'm an educated African woman whose possibilities are limitless, who can go back home and mobilize my community, and see the change that I want to see there. Heifer International probably didn't intend that their goat would send me to school; they probably thought it was only going to give us food. But I'm here to just tell you that those small gifts, in whatever form they may be, sometimes this as much as they go — they send us to school, they open our opportunities, and I'm forever grateful.

The least I can do is encourage all those who are in school — actually, not encourage, harass them — to stay in school and study as much as they can. The most I can do is go back to my community and change it. And while all of you farmers are feeding the world, I encourage all of you to also think of providing education opportunities to children around the world. Thank you.