Griffith University public lecture  
by Rubin “Hurricane” Carter  
Brisbane on Friday, October 10, 2003.

Start

Thank you, thank you thank you. Thank you very, very much. Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.

I recognise the traditional owners of this land, and particularly the elders from Griffith University. Madam Chancellor Miss Leneen Ford, Mr Vice Chancellor Professor Glyn Davis.

[gesturing to Glyn in the audience] I don't know who you was talking about with all that noise before we got up here [laughs]. Lynne Weathered Executive Director of the Griffith Innocence Project and Jane Bullock who’s been our hostess and our chauffeur and who’s been travelling around with us and keeping us in line.

And you have a wonderful, wonderful Director of the Griffith Innocence Project. Lynne Weathered, who is a hard, hard worker. We first met in Chicago about three or four years ago on a wrongful conviction conference by North Western University; and then we met again at Harvard University a couple of years ago; and then we met again last year when AIDWYC of which I am the Executive Director, had their international conference in Toronto. Lynne Weathered you are a dynamo, stand up so everyone can look at you. [claps]

This is a great crowd here today. A great crowd. Members of the faculty, student governing bodies, student dignitaries, if any, honoured guests and friends, I bid you all welcome to this beautiful day.

It is indeed a great honour and an extraordinary pleasure for me to be here with you today in Brisbane, Australia. Just to be here, which is absolutely miraculous. And in fact given the nature of my history on this earth during the past 67 years, constantly struggling with mindless, knuckleheaded human beings, simply being human. When you really come to think about that, and after spending 20 excruciating years in prison for crimes that you not only did not commit, but would not and could not have committed, and just narrowly missing the electric chair as Professor Glyn Davis has told us, when you really come to think about that, ladies and gentlemen, it’s a great pleasure for me to be anywhere today.

I am a survivor. A survivor of the American, so-called criminal justice system. In the same as those who survived the awful holocaust of Nazi Germany. Surviving in the very same death camps. Of Trenton State prison, Huntsville, Texas; Dhaka, Rukenvale, Auschwitz; where millions of innocent people were being slaughtered every single day. I am a survivor in that very same way. Only in Germany, people were jailed and slaughtered because of their religion, while in the United States of America, it’s sad to say, but it’s because of the colour of our skin. I am a survivor, baring witness to history. Real history, true history, authentic history can only be written by those who survive that history. And I am a survivor.

On his honorary doctorate

Now I usually begin my talks by informing people that having only an eighth grade education myself, I am always pleased and very excited when I am asked to speak at institutions of so-called higher learning. Because having been born and raised in the United States of America, the only degrees I’ve
ever received were degrees from institutions of lower learning. And when I say lower, I mean lower. I got my Bachelor’s degree in the streets of oppression. My Master’s degree in man’s inhumanity to man. And my PhD in prison brutality.

But now I can’t say that anymore. I just can’t say that anymore. Because just last night in a very prestigious ceremony, this great institution of Griffith University conferred upon me an honour that no-one would have ever imagined possible. A doctorate of law degree [laughs] [applause].

Effectively turning the Hurricane into a gentle a breeze. Who could have dreamt that such a thing was even possible? Certainly I didn’t, and I can’t imagine anyone else who did. But it just goes to show that what we do today can have untold consequences further down the road, that the smallest action can produce the most enormous repercussions.

**On preparing for change**

Today is what it is, because yesterday is what it was. If we had a problem yesterday, or if we had some homework yesterday and we did not approach that problem and solve that problem, then we still have that problem today on top of today’s problem and yesterday’s problem, and yesterday and yesterday’s problem that we never did. And if today is what it is because yesterday was what it was, then it stands to reason that tomorrow will be exactly what we make of today. So we have to be careful, we have to be conscious of what we are doing or what we are not doing. Because if we continue to follow the old math way of simply putting in time, abnegating responsibility and nine to five simply equalling a pay cheque, ain’t no change gonna come.

**On the movie Hurricane**

Now, over the years many people have said that I was a victim of racism. Movies, songs and books. Let me just stop here for a moment to set the record straight. If anyone came here this afternoon with the expectation of seeing Denzel Washington standing up here rather than little old me, I apologise for that, I really do. Because Denzel Washington can make anybody look good. Since the release of the movie Hurricane, and it going into video, when I walk down the street today, people come up to me, shake their heads and say ‘you don’t look like Denzel Washington’. [laughs] But what they’re really saying is thank God Denzel Washington doesn’t look like you. [laughs] But I really can’t complain. I really can’t complain. Because until I saw with my own eyes, until I saw Denzel Washington portraying me up there on that big screen, man, I didn’t know how good looking I really was. Didn’t have a clue. I think every one of us should have that experience at least once in our lifetime. That is seeing one’s self being mirrored in the eyes of a consummate professional such as a Denzel Washington. What an absolute thrill that was.

**On his conviction**

Anyway, movies, songs and books have all chronicled the racist underpinning of my incarceration. Even the federal judge, the honourable H. Lee Sarokin who set me free, ruled, and his decision was upheld unanimously all the way to the United States supreme court, the William Rehnquist Supreme Court, if that means anything to you guys, ruled that my conviction was based not upon any credible or factual evidence, but that my conviction was based simply upon an appeal to racism rather than reason. And on concealment of evidence that would have clearly shown me not to be guilty, rather than disclosure of that evidence.
The AIDWYC and US justice system

So I have become, as Professor Glyn Davis told us in his opening, as the executive director of AIDWYC, the International Association in Defense of the Wrongly Convicted, based in Canada, Great Britain, the United States and elsewhere in the world, I have become in the eyes of some people, a symbol of a criminal justice system that to this very day is undeniably infected by racism. Now according to a United States Department of Justice study that was just released two weeks ago, the United States today has more people in prison than any other country on the face of this earth, 2.2 million and climbing. That’s horrible. And one out of every third black person in the United States is now under the control of the criminal justice system. One out of three. That’s outrageous. There are more young black men in US prisons then there are in its universities. And black women today are being incarcerated at the same rate as white men, 96,000 thus far. Can you imagine the destruction of the family system that is going on? And capital punishment ladies and gentlemen, because I understand Australia is thinking about reinstating capital punishment, and you young people must stop that, you must not let that happen. And capital punishment ladies and gentlemen, has turned that system into assembly lines of death.

On awakening

But you know what? On this level of life, it really doesn’t matter what happens to us at all. I know that’s hard to understand, because it really happens to everybody in one way or the other. On this level of life we live under the law of accident – everything just happens. This is the mechanical level of life. This is the level of machines. The level of sleeping people. Sleeping people fight one another. Sleeping people hate one another. Sleeping people go to war with one another. Sleeping people rob, rape and plunder one another. And on this level of life it can not be otherwise. So what happens to us in life is really unimportant. But what is important, however, is what we do with what happens to us in life. Because doing is magic. Doing means action. And action means understanding. And understanding means to be awake. That’s all I asked for in prison, was understanding. Thirty-seven years ago, 37 years ago, when I was accused, arrested and convicted of being a triple racist murderer. Just narrowly escaping the state sponsored execution, having now escaped the execution, what now then was I to do? That’s the $64,000 question.

What would you have done? What is anybody to do under those circumstances? You have just been processed through a very expensive machine, or system if you will. The criminal justice system. And came out on the other side of that system as a guilty person. What is one to do? So there I was an innocent man in prison. Innocent if only in my own mind, and trust me that’s the only place it was. Innocent only in my own mind. A black man convicted of killing three white people.

On attitude

And because of my attitude, and ladies and gentlemen, attitude is everything. Attitude is everything. These physical bodies, however they are, are our vehicles by which we traverse life. They are our BMWs, they are our SUVs, they are all that stuff. But it is our attitude that becomes our steering wheel. And because of my attitude, knowing the difference between right and wrong, and because of my absolute refusal to participate in any prison activity whatsoever, no-one, absolutely no-one gave me any chance of ever seeing the light of day again. Triple life, ladies and gentlemen, is forever. You see my attitude, and my belief in myself was then, just as it is now, that just because a jury of twelve
In fact, I spent off and on, almost 10 of my 22 years in prison, in solitary confinement. Six feet under the ground. In total darkness. No sanitary conditions. No toothbrush. No running water. No lights. Silence was the rule. Ripe was the air. It always smelt like death warmed over in the hole. All you were given to eat was five slices of stale bread and a cup of warm water to drink. Your bed was a concrete slab. Shadows within shadows. Silhouettes within silhouettes. Dark images of stale bread, filthy wastebuckets and shades of rotting humanity. But I can also tell you my friends that strange things happen to you when you're in a hole where there is no morning, noon or night. Just different shades of darkness. Lighter darkness, deeper darkness, but always dark. So dark in fact, that it was difficult even to see yourself. Where there is no schedule, there is no communication with outsiders. There are no televisions or radios or books. There is simply darkness and bitterness and hate and you. That hate that hate produces. But if you spend enough time in darkness, if you spend enough time in an environment where everything blends into one. If you are fortunate, you will begin to see things more vividly than you have ever seen them before. It may take days, weeks, months. Or it may take even years, as it did with me. But you will begin to see things, not just as they appear to be, in this thin film of false reality that we interact with every day, but you will begin to see things as they really are. And you will begin to see yourself as you have never seen yourself before. Because when you can’t see outside, you can only look inside. And thus began my own journey of peace and reconciliation, of understanding the illusion in everything and finding the spirit within myself. In that darkness of dark, buried six feet below the ground, where nothingness is the only constant, I came to understand that anger, bitterness and hatred only consumes the vessel that contains it. I was angry for a very long time in that hole. Day after day, week after week, I would sit in that filthy cell seething in nothing but destructive energy. Stinking and starving, hating everything. I was furious at everyone. At the two state witnesses who lied. At the police who put them up to it. At the prosecutor who sanctioned it. At the judge who allowed it. At the jury who accepted it. And at my own lawyer for not being able to defeat it. I wanted to destroy every person who had helped put me there. I sat in that cell feasting on hatred as if it were a succulent morsel of buttered steak. And then it happened. And then it happened.
in that mirror. I saw the face of hatred; and that monster was me. The thing that I saw in that mirror, that stared and glared back at me with raw defiance and unadulterated hatred, was something out of a horror movie. Its eyes were big and glassy and bulging out of his head. The skin on his face was drawn so tight that it was actually shiny. Like a bright light in a darkened room. Its lips were thin and drawn back revealing big teeth twisted in a perpetual grimace of pure sadistic delight. And I did not know that thing. The thing I saw in that mirror was not human. It was a monster. And it was at that precise moment that I began to actively understand, and I emphasise the word actively here, because understanding is not unlike action, when you understand anything you act immediately. There is no space, no time, no separation between understanding and action. They are one thing totally. Understanding and action. And when I saw that monster in the mirror, it was at that precise moment that I began to actively understand that if I was going to survive this prison and all of its nastiness, I had to change. Hatred and bitterness was eating me up. And change meant being different. I had to change the image of myself that I saw in the mirror. In that darkness of dark, buried six feet beneath the ground, I began to understand that one must seize every opportunity that presents itself, no matter where you are or what you are confronting.

Dare to dream, ladies and gentlemen, dare to dream. For as long as there’s life, there’s hope. And what is a dream, but hope. And hope, a dream. My dream was to find something above the law, something that would neutralize the law. For it was the law that put me in prison, and it was the law that was keeping me in prison. Even at the very bottom of the lowest level of human existence that a human being can exist on without being dead, the opportunity for me, the opportunity came for me to use these conditions to turn that prison and all of it’s deformities into an unnatural laboratory of the human spirit was there. Condemned by history as a triple, racist murderer. Repudiated by the courts. I was in the one environment that could help me to wake up.

**On religion and self**

To go inside and get to know thy self. Which is really the underlying foundation of every religion ever placed on this earth. Unto thine own self be true. Know thy self. Know thy self. Now, in order for me to tell you, or explain to you exactly what happened to me as I embarked upon this journey of self-discovery, we would have to talk for a long, long time. And we would have to talk a great deal. So I will simply say to you, that ‘it’, call ‘it’ what you will, but ‘it’ really exists. It really does. Whatesoever you can possibly conceive in your mind and believe, if we wake up, get up off our butts and attempt to achieve, can be done. In that darkness of dark I found out that there is nothing that we cannot do. And my being here today, and Sam’s being here today [gesturing to Sam in audience], is absolute proof of that. Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to meet my best friend in the whole wide world. He is the executive director of the Swainsboro Community Centre; The Way, in Swainsboro, Georgia, USA. I’ve known this person for forty years or more and I tell you that he’s indeed worthy to ride the river with. And if anything is said here today that you don’t understand or that you want to know more about, I suggest to you that you track this person down. I call him the Sphinx. And if you can get him to talk to you, he will tell you exactly what I said, and if you’re lucky he would tell you how you can say it too. Ladies and gentlemen I wish to introduce you to Ulysses Samuel Gordon Lesley Junior. Stand up Sam let the people see your beautiful face. Stand up, turn around, let them see you. Stand up, turn around, let them see you. [applauds] Okay, sit down, sit down. Can’t take him nowhere I’m telling you.

**On a higher mind**
But ladies and gentlemen, there is such a thing as a higher mind. A mind so brilliant and so different to our ordinary, logical minds, that it has been compared to a 747 supersonic jet airplane and a horse-drawn carriage. We can take control of our lives. We do have the power to change. We are all born with everything we need to produce the greatest miracle in the world; the return of our humanity, from the living dead. I disappeared from prison before anyone knew that I was even gone. That’s how magical this world really is, and that magic is in you. I simply disappeared from prison before anyone even knew that I was gone. That mean looking, bald-headed, ex-prize fighter, who was created and conditioned by society and therefore hated everybody including himself, was no longer there. Ladies and gentlemen, Rubin Hurricane Carter had left the building. Yeh. Did I escape? No. Did I get parole? No. A pardon? No. Did someone finally come forward and confess to the crime? No. Did I serve my time? But then, how does one serve forever? No. I simply disappeared. Beyond the law and all of its powers. Beyond the prison walls. Beyond the steel bars, iron cages and shackles. Beyond the gun towers, which spewed forth indiscriminate death and destruction. The guards and the politicians could no longer hold me. I no longer existed. I no longer existed.

A biblical parable

It was very much like the story of Moses that I once read that had a huge impact on me. This story of Moses is made to talk about Moses after he had freed his people from Egypt, and we are told after he had parted the Red Sea to vanquish his enemies, and we are told after he had gone up on the mountain, came down with the two tablets that contained the ten commandments and his people were wandering in the wilderness. Well they happened to make camp in the territory of this certain king. And this king heard that Moses, this man of God, was bib whacking in his territory. So the king wanted to see Moses. So the king sent his best portrait painter down to paint Moses’ portrait. And when the portrait painter brought the portrait back, the king gave the portrait to his physiologist, to his wise-man, someone who was learned in the skill of defining one’s character from the lines on his face. And the wise-man told the king, ‘sire, this is the portrait of a very mean man, a very angry man, a man full of hate, a man full of hedonistic desires, a man who serves for power.’ The king said ‘wait a minute, how could this be? This is Moses the man of God’. The king said ‘I’m going down to see Moses for myself, and if my portrait painter did not paint an exact replica of Moses I’m going to chop his head off.’ So the king goes down to see Moses. And immediately upon seeing Moses, the king realises that his portrait painter hadn’t painted an exact image of Moses I’m going to chop his head off.’ So the king went down to see Moses. And immediately upon seeing Moses, the king realises that his portrait painter hadn’t painted an exact image of Moses. So the king told Moses, ‘I’m going to chop off my wise-man’s head, because he obviously lied to me.’ And Moses said ‘no sire, please don’t do that. Because both your portrait painter and your wise-man are correct. In my lifetime I have been all of those things. I’ve been mean, I’ve been full of hate, I’ve been full of hedonistic desires, I’ve had a thirst for power. But my greatest task in life has been to resist those things, until that resistance had become second nature to me.’

On being reborn

Well, little did I know, but by resisting the prison system for so many, many years, what was I actually resisting? Prison is an abomination to the human spirit. Prison destroys everything that is valuable in a human being. Prison is everything the spirit is not. Prison is hate personified, it is cruel, it is debasing, it is abnormal, it is violent, it is humiliating, it is filthy, it is dangerous. And when I resisted all of that day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, that resistance became second nature to me, until there was no more of that left in me. [laughs] And that was my new day of birth. November the eighth, 1985, the day I disappeared from prison, makes me seventeen years old. Ladies and gentlemen, I am a sixty-seven year old teenager. I’ll be eighteen next month. [laughs] The point that I
I was trying to make here is, that even trapped at the very bottom of human existence, condemned by history as a triple, racist murderer, repudiated by the courts and sentenced to die amid the squalor and the despair and the humiliation of a maximum security prison, I came to understand the magic and miraculousness of everything. That this planet called earth is not just some cold dead thing simply hurling itself through space. But rather this planet is alive. This planet is a living, breathing, growing intelligent organism that’s growing more and more intelligent every second. And that every human being born on this earth is actually a flower from the sun. A seed. A unit of life planted in organic life on earth, with the capacity and the ability of growing stronger, wiser, more beautiful and more intelligent than you can possibly imagine.

**On racism**

In that darkness and despair I came to realise that there is no such thing as racism because there is no such thing as races. I mean even the word racism, think about it, presupposes and then interjects the idea that there is more than one race of people on this earth. There is not. There is only one race of people on this entire planet called earth. The human race. And we all belong to that. Yes. Yes. [Applause]

One race. One people. One family. One spirit; and we are all of that same spirit. One spirit, in dividing itself up gives birth to all the souls that are struggling in the universe. One spirit. One life. One love. And maybe I felt this way because I can no longer see my own skin. And if you can’t see your own skin, or your own skin’s colour, then you can no longer be black. And if I was no longer black, then others could no longer be white. And if there is no white or black or brown or yellow or red as races, then there are no races. There is only one race, the human race. I learned in that darkness of dark, that the things that divide us as individuals and nations race, religion, ethnicity, politics, class and gender, all of those things are very superficial. None of those things really belong to us. Race, religion, ethnicity, politics, class and gender have all been imposed upon us, just as this imposition of guilt was imposed upon me. This is so important. Race, religion, ethnicity, politics, class and gender, all of those things ladies and gentlemen are simply man-made illusions. Our identity, our individuality, our uniqueness is all that we truly possess. It is what makes us us, and makes us all different and yet all the same, and what truly makes us very, very special. We are all miracles. We are all made of the same synthetic material. We all do have the same blood coursing through our bodies. The same bones, the same tissues, the same tendons. But what unites us in this miraculous gift called life, is respect for one another, the need for compassion. The desire to help another soul. The simple gesture of human kindness. These acts of bravery are far more powerful than anything else. We can find reconciliation with our enemies, but you can only find peace within your self. And this is not an easy task, but I am living proof that it is possible. Nelson Mandela is living proof that it is possible. Hate, you see, put me in prison. And love busted me out of there, yes it did. In that darkness or dark I found out that love is actually the cure for all people. Both those who give it and those who receive it. If but that one virtue, love, could be made universal, the kings and queens, the presidents, the dictators and Osama Bin Ladens of the world would have no battle fields. The heads of families would attempt no usurps. Men would commit no robberies. Rulers and minsters would be gracious and loyal. Brothers would be harmonious and easily reconciled. Human kind in general loving one another, the strong would not prey upon the weak. The many would not plunder the few. The rich would not insult the poor. The noble would not be insolent to the mean, and the deceitful would not impose upon the self.

**Seize the opportunity, wake up**
Dare to dream ladies and gentlemen. Dare to dream. We live in a very magical universe and opportunity is always there. Seizing the opportunity, not letting it pass you by, is absolutely vital and necessary. Because if we allow an opportunity to pass us by at any given moment of time, we’ve not only missed our opportunity at that moment of time, seeing as a moment of time is also a moment in eternity. We’ve missed the opportunity forever. That opportunity will never return to us again. Even confined in prison as I was, for three separate lifetimes, an opportunity presented itself to me to go on an anthropological expedition excavating this world’s cultures and religions to find that certain something which was above the law. Which would neutralise the law. In my attempt to escape this physical prison of bricks, steel and mortar, hate, humiliation and degradation, pain and violence, I stumbled accidentally on the universal prison of sleep. The power of Kundalini. The power of hypnosis. In a very real sense, ladies and gentlemen, we are all in prison, but we just don’t know it. We were all born as conscious beings into a world of sleeping people. And then we ourselves are very quickly put to sleep. And that’s exactly why all biblical scriptures and particularly the new testament is made to say over and over and over again, sleep not. Wake up. Be aware, or the devil will come and sew tares among your wheat. Tares is the illusion that we live with in life, on this level of life. And the wheat is the unvarnished truth. The new testament explains that if people want to understand one another, that understanding is possible only among people who are awake. So seize the opportunity ladies and gentlemen, not let it pass you by. Because he who bemoans the lack of opportunity forgets that small doors often opens up into large rooms of unlimited possibility. But opportunities are everywhere. The law on this level of life is, if you want a lot then do a lot, and you’ll get a lot. If you don’t want much then don’t do much, and you won’t get much. And if you don’t want anything, don’t do anything, and you won’t get anything. And you can’t blame anyone but yourself.

Dare to dream ladies and gentlemen. Dare to dream.

**His first professional fight**

I remember the night when I had my first professional bout. I didn’t come prepared to fight. I was sitting in the audience as a spectator. I had a hotdog in one hand, a soda pop in my other hand and I was looking at a very beautiful lady sitting right in front of me. Man, I was enjoying myself. When suddenly my manager came running up to me and shouted ‘quick, I got a fight for you. You’re up next’. Now I may have had a full stomach, and that’s not exactly the way to go into a fight, but this was my opportunity to become a professional, and I was hungry. Running back to the dressing room I realised that I had no boxing gear and no equipment. So I hurried up and borrowed boxing trunks from this fighter, shoes from that fighter and other equipment from other fighters. And when I finally put it all on together I looked like a psychedelic accident. [Audience laughter]. Yes I did. I was wearing red shoes, purple trunks, green socks and baby blue robe, with a wad of toilet paper stuffed between my lips for a mouth piece. People in the audience started laughing. I mean they were actually falling out of their seats when I came bouncing down the aisle, carrying my own water bucket, and looking ridiculous. But I didn’t have time to ponder my looks. I climbed into the ring amidst the hoots and jeers, the laughter and ridicule. But it didn’t bother me a bit. This is what I had been dreaming of. This is what I had been working towards for years. This was my amazing grace. This my access to opportunity and I wasn’t about to let it pass me by. Now my opponent, and I still remember his name, Pike Reed, was sharp. He was colour coordinated and he was slick. And nobody was laughing at him. In fact he was laughing at me too. But I whooped his butt, yes I did. I won the fight. [laughs]

Now that was a triumph of substance over form. A subject that great philosophers have studied forever. And I learned it from boxing. Substance is always more powerful than form. Substance is always more powerful than form. Dare to dream, ladies and gentlemen. Dare to dream.
Conclusion

Young or old, dare to dream. Because even those lost dreams maybe are not always lost. Thirty seven years after my career as a prize fighter was over, thirty six years after everyone thought I would have spent the rest of my life in jail for a crime I did not commit, for the first time in pugilistic history, the World Boxing Council and the World Boxing Association awarded me with the middleweight championship belts of the world. Dare to dream ladies and gentlemen. Dare to dream. And you know the very best thing about receiving these belts now rather than when I was fighting; now I don’t have to defend them. [laughs] And I don’t have to give them back. Dare to dream ladies and gentlemen. And on September of 1994 I was inducted into the international boxing hall of fame, and last night, just last night, a doctorate of law degree. Dare to dream ladies and gentlemen. Dare to dream. These belts [holding up belts] ladies and gentlemen, These belts are symbols of that great victory. The victory of substance over form. It just goes to show that if you don’t give up, if you keep on fighting no matter what the odds are, no matter what the circumstances are, no matter what the obstacles may be, because obstacles are not placed in front of us to stop us, but simply to make us stronger for the next obstacle to come. Life itself is an obstacle course and you’ve got to run it. You’ve just got to run it. So dare to dream my friends. Dare to dream. Don’t give up, don’t ever give up on anything, because when you give up on anything you are not giving up on that thing you think you are giving up on, you are giving up on yourself. Don’t give up. Dare to dream. And always, always remember, do all things with love, love for yourself, love for all others and love for the creator. Thank you very much and God’s speed.

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