Christiane Amanpour – Become a Citizen of the World
By Paula Levis Suita

Widely regarded as the leading war reporter of her generation, CNN’s Christiane Amanpour addressed attendees at the 2007 Simmons Leadership Conference with a message to “do good when doing well.”

Born into what she calls a “comfortable environment,” Amanpour spent her formative years living in Tehran, with an Iranian father and an English mother. In 1979 her world changed forever when Ayatollah Khomeini overthrew the Shah of Iran and her family subsequently made the decision to leave their homeland. “If I chose to wear the all-enveloping cloak [as a journalist], I could not have had the kinds of opportunities that I had.”

Educated at the University of Rhode Island and now living in London, Amanpour was one of the early reporters for CNN and has covered stories in such dangerous hotspots as Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, Somalia, and Rwanda.

“Women, children and civilian men pay a disproportionate price in today’s wars,” she said, noting that “my generation of war correspondents report on human drama where civilians are the main protagonists. There are women out there facing the odds every day and defining their traditions,” she added, relaying stories of personal triumphs of a woman in Iran who is fighting for women’s custody rights in divorces, efforts to defeat paralyzing infant mortality in Afghanistan, and microfinance projects for women in Bangladesh and Jordan.

These women represent what Amanpour calls “accidental leaders” – who assume pivotal and often dangerous roles where leadership was thrust upon them. “These are not people who have been preparing for this,” she said. “They know what it means to have an opportunity and are leaders most often because they have no choice.”

Amanpour urged the crowd to think beyond their own narrow and personal dreams and use their talents in ways to make the world a better place. “Those of us who have privileged lives need to do good as well as doing well,” she said. “Take a gap year and go around the world. Go somewhere in Africa for a year. See what is going on out there.”

“It’s actually cool to be a citizen of the world,” she said. “We have the money and the education. There is no reason why half of our population should not have food or other necessities.”

When asked when she was most challenged or frightened, Amanpour responded that “fear is with me all the time, but I have another sort of fear – and that is the fear of standing silent and not talking the truth.”
Amanpour concluded, “It’s hard to speak up and go against the flow. I have no agenda other than the truth. I hope I report without fear or favor.”

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