Address at the Albert E. Dotson Sr. Funeral Services and Homegoing Celebration

Given by Mark B. Rosenberg on June 10, 2021
Al Dotson: A Giant on Whose Shoulders We Stand

When Maya Angelou made the statement that people may never remember what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel…. she must have been thinking in part about Al Dotson Sr.

Al never failed to make you feel good, to make you feel important, to make you feel like you could climb any mountain,

Al Dotson did this religiously. He did it with his family. He did it when he was on our foundation board. He did it as a founding member of our Board of Trustees; he did it as the Chair of our Board, and he did this in all the breathing moments that remained after he left our board and continued to serve—working with athletics and our medical school.

Al Dotson had a knack for empowering, enabling.

When he saw you at the store, he would lift you up.

When he saw you at the university, he would lift you up.

When he saw you at the football game, he would lift you up.

When he talked with you on the phone, he would find a way to elevate you!

Always a smile. Always a hug. Always a question about the family.

There he was in front of you. Never looking over your shoulder—always eyeball to eyeball.

And he made you feel that you were the only person in the world at that moment.

Al Dotson would always pick us up. He never failed in this—not once. Not with me…and I am sure not with you. That in part is why you are here.

You know how exemplary as a human being Al Dotson was.

Who will fill this gap? Who will tread with us on our next path?

He embraced us as we were, but never accepted that we could not do better.
He was a visionary. Not so much because he could see into the future, which he could, but because he believed in people. He identified with people. He understood struggle.

He understood what it was to be an underdog although he never celebrated nor catered to that role. And was there a bigger underdog in the public university world in 1983 than FIU, when he joined us to propel us forward.

As a professional and a caring human being, the mensch that he was, Al found a way to ascend, to achieve, to teach success! And to make a difference. And that is what he expected from others.

Al really never accepted the underdog role for us. Al fought for us to get to the next level. And showed us how to get to the next level.

There was Al—always a smile, always an encouraging word, picking us up! Pushing us forward. Pulling us forward.

It was Al who trained us to never lighten the load but rather to broaden our shoulders.

How many of us are courageous enough to provide that training? Simply put, Al’s presence and his belief in us made us stronger, as we dreamed big dreams and as we turned the impossible into the inevitable, day after day, year after year, decade after decade.

And there was Al with us for every moment. What a blessing!

So, Al Dotson fostered in us the mindset to get things done, to move forward, to have impact, and to never give up. He made us better through his authentic respect for us and others around us.

Did Al ever have a conversation with you that didn’t leave you better and more confident in yourself?

But there is more and that is where Maya Angelou was not completely on it—at least regarding our Al Dotson Sr.

Here he was—I can see him now—at an energized FIU commencement, resplendent in graduation cap and flowing blue and gold graduation gown.

Upright and squared at the podium—an ear-to-ear smile on his face—he seemed ten feet tall—he radiated pride. Bursting with fearless confidence. Reflecting Success.

A man who had scaled mountain after mountain.
A man who shredded barriers to ascend to the top of his field.

A man who had invested his best years as a volunteer—nearly four decades worth—to make sure that we would scale our own mountains and shred the non-stop barriers that found us incessantly.

And he picked us up just through the momentum of accomplishment and unlimited grace!

But there was more, and we knew it!

He buoyantly congratulated the giddy soon to be graduates for their accomplishments.

Then he reminded the new alums about FIU: that FIU stood for “the finest institution in the universe.”

We heard him say this countless times over the years to thousands of people. Right here! Thousands. This is what he said. Right here in this very spot. True to his adopted alma mater, FIU.

We remember it. We remember it. It is ringing in our minds forevermore thanks to Al.

“The finest institution in the universe.”

But you know what? He was not just speaking to the audience. He was speaking to the platform party and our university’s leaders. It was his way of saying “believe in yourselves...” and “make a difference...”

So, our coach, mentor, and friend Al Dotson through deed and word lifted us up. He summoned our better angels. He enabled us to be our better selves. He did it with style, conviction, humility, and love.

Every day when I near the Gold parking garage on 16th Street, there is Al and Earlene’s name forever on the Earlene and Albert Dotson Pavilion.

I get to see it every day. Every day.

Seeing their names permanently on one of our centrally visible buildings at the university motivates me to try harder to be a better, more authentic person—and to make a difference like Al Dotson.
Ladies and gentlemen, Al and his wife Earlene set a very high bar for us all. For four decades, they have played a key role in leading us into light. For many of us they personify the rising sun of “Lift Every Voice and Sing.” That is why we are gathered here this day.

So it is that our deep sadness today is offset by the energizing and enabling inspiration we have of Al… for me, and I hope for you—we are better for this.

For me and I hope for you—that we too can lift people up as a lasting epitaph to Al’s example.

Al, you often reminded us that we stood on the shoulders of giants.

Now Al, you are the giant on whose shoulders we stand for the ages.

Thank you for leaving us so much better than you found us!

Rest in peace loyal friend and partner Albert E. Dotson Sr.

Thank you for making a difference for all of us—forever….