

Graduation 2012
Honorary Graduate - Oration

Oration for Honorary Graduate Rosie Stancer
Orator: Professor Martin Sellens

Chancellor, the Senate has resolved that the degree of Doctor of the University be conferred upon Rosie Stancer.

Those of you who have just graduated know from personal experience how much hard work and effort it takes to earn a University of Essex degree. Writing essays and reports, burning the midnight oil to meet deadlines and get in that last few minutes of revision, sitting in an examination room for interminable hours, engaging in intellectual discussion with fellow students over a hard earned tonic water.....You may, therefore, understandably, be feeling a little put out that the University is prepared to hand out a degree to Rosie Stancer without her having to submit so much as a single essay or sweat through a single MCQ. However, I hope to be able to reassure you that she has, indeed, met the Rules of Assessment for the award of an honorary doctorate. These Rules aren't quite as complex as those for getting a 'regular' degree in the School of Biological Sciences, but Rosie meets them in the categories **Distinction in Sport** (in its broadest sense) and **Public Service**, and she also meets the criterion of an association with the County of Essex by virtue of the fact that she lives in Tollesbury, just a few miles from the University. Let me first list her achievements in the rather extreme Sport of 'polar expeditioning'.

In 1997, Rosie was one of 20 members of the first all women's expedition to the **North Pole**, The 'McVities Penguin Polar Relay' in which a relay of five teams hauled sleds of up to 70 kg across 500 miles of shifting pack ice in temperatures down to minus 40°C and reached the Pole in 73 days.

In 1999, Rosie and four others from the first expedition organised and managed their own trip to the **South Pole**. Without guides, and with only one re-supply, they completed the 700 mile journey from the edge of Antarctica in 61 days.

In the Southern Hemisphere summer of 2003/4, Rosie walked alone and without re-supply to the South Pole on the 'Snickers South Pole Solo 2004' expedition. Hauling a sledge more than twice her body weight for over 700 miles, Rosie reached the Pole in 43 days, almost 20 days faster than the previous team effort and only a few hours outside the solo women's record, set by fellow Brit Fiona Thornehill in the same event.

In 2007, sponsored by Mars, and fuelled by their eponymous bars, Rosie attempted to become the first woman to trek solo to the Geographic North Pole. She walked alone for 326 nautical miles in 84 days over the surface of the frozen Arctic Ocean but was thwarted by deteriorating ice conditions and was reluctantly airlifted out just 89 nautical miles short of the Pole.

I think I might have spotted a common factor in these expeditions (other than ice and discomfort). The Penguin Polar Relay? The Snickers South Pole Solo? The Mars North Pole Solo? Clearly

Rosie is a chocoholic fuelling her habit. Can I suggest, Rosie, that, if you feel a chocolate craving coming on again, you just call in at Tesco's?

Rosie will make a second attempt to trek solo to the North Pole in February 2013 and to become the first woman ever to trek solo to both poles. Insanity isn't a prerequisite for an Essex degree, but sometimes it helps

Back to the 'Rules of Assessment': Rosie is also distinguished in public service. She is an honorary director of the charity Special Olympics UK that runs 135 clubs in England, Scotland and Wales to provide training and competition programmes in 26 sports for over 8000 adults and children with learning difficulties. Formed in 1978 at least it didn't have any problems with LOCOG about the scurrilous misappropriation of the word 'olympics' in its title. Most of her expeditions have raised money for this charity and she is a great champion of its aims and activities and a source of inspiration for its beneficiaries.

In a variety of ways it is particularly appropriate that Rosie is receiving this award in the School of Biological Sciences congregation. Graduates of Genetics might like to consider the interesting possibility of a 'polar explorer allele'. Rosie's grandfather, the Earl Granville, was selected for Captain Scott's ill-fated 1912 expedition to the South Pole. At the last minute he was rejected because, at 6'4" he was too tall for the expedition tents and would have consumed too much food. They say every cloud has a silver lining, and I think that might have been a good one to miss.

Spookily, Rosie's husband's grandfather, Sir James Wordie, was a member of the 1914-1917 TransAntarctic Expedition led by Sir Ernest Shackleton. It's a while since I did genetics, but it looks like Rosie's son, Jock, stands a pretty good chance of having inherited a double dose of the arctic exploration allele. Wrap up warm, Jock.

Ecologists and Biologists might like to reflect upon Rosie's abortive 2007 North Pole solo attempt that foundered in the melting, crumbling, unstable ice of an increasingly liquid Pole. Global climate change might mean that soon it will become impossible to get to the pole from dry land without swimming.

Biomedical Scientists might like to request a sample of frostbitten toe for microscopic analysis. I think she's lost 3 to date.

Sports and Exercise Scientists might like to contemplate the training regime necessary to develop the endurance and strength to haul twice body weight over 15 m high pressure ridges of ice for almost 2 months with minimal sleep. In fact, you might all like to watch the U-tube footage of her dragging tyres through High Woods and being put through her paces at Colchester's Military Corrective Training Centre.

And when you've watched this awesome demonstration of power and determination, you will understand why one journalist described Rosie Stancer as a cross between Tinkerbell and the Terminator. As she said when being hauled from the ice in 2007 just 89 nautical miles from the North Pole.

"I'll be back"

Chancellor, I present to you Rosie Stancer.