

By Jan Mares

I last attended Doane's Baccalaureate service in 2008. My daughter was graduating and I was so proud. I was moved and inspired that day by life's possibilities. And especially by the 80-year-old gentleman who graduated with her - he had originally attended Doane over 50 years ago with my mother-in-law, Elva Mares. His story and his commitment motivated me that day.

I had dreamed for many years of going back to school. It wasn't an impossible dream, but at times it did seem like an unreachable goal. I came face-to-face with some of life's challenges. I left college in 1981 and married my best friend and then our children, Natalie and Nathan, came along. After many happy years, my best friend became ill and I soon became his care giver. And then I became a widow, a single mom of two college students. It was difficult. I had always felt it was our positive attitude that kept us going through unthinkable obstacles. The word "Quit" was not part of our families' vocabulary. We knew the lord was our refuge and our strength. It was our faith that saw us through.

All of us have encountered obstacles while reaching toward our goals. When those life-changing events occur, one is faced with what I call "reinventing yourself" - setting new goals, charting a new course, and taking the profound steps of moving on. Reinventing ourselves is what brought many of us to this day.

We have all arrived at this point in our journey with a new appreciation and understanding of what Benjamin Franklin meant when he said that if a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

This wonderful investment that each of us has made has also required sacrifices. We have all missed occasions with family and friends and have put many things on hold to get to this point.

And, as of today, our focus and direction will again be changing, just as it had when we made the decision to make this great investment. We will again reinvent ourselves, setting new and different goals, forging new paths. For some of us the new path simply means the satisfaction of completing this goal; for some it may be an opportunity for professional advancement; and for others it means starting out on a new career path.

Whatever this academic accomplishment means to you, it is the perfect time to remember that someone once wisely said that success is a journey and not a destination. And what a journey this has been. This path of study has given us much. We have gained knowledge and confidence beyond all measure. We have changed who we are and have acquired new and promising ideas of who we want to be!

This - this is the day we have all dreamed of, the day we have all been striving toward. It is a day of celebration. Our paths and challenges to this point may be different, but we all stand here today ready to create new paths, reach new goals, and realize new dreams.

Dreams have many definitions. There's an adage that says that a goal is a dream with a deadline! Disney tells us that a dream is a wish your heart makes. But my favorite definition is that of Harriett Tubman's. She said "Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience and the passion to reach for the stars and change the world."

I would like to close with a blessing from Numbers, Chapter 6 – “The Lord bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” Congratulations and Happy Graduation to my fellow dreamers.