

# 2008 COLLEGE SURVIVAL CONFERENCE

## KAHUKU, O'AHU, HAWAII

### HOW I DEFINE SUCCESS

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As I pondered the idea of defining what constitutes success, I decided to find out whether my family's and best friend's ideas of success were close to mine. My 13-year-old grandson said, "Success is reaching your dreams." My daughter said, "Success is reaching your goals." Finally, my best friend said, "Success is when you are happy with where you are in life." I realized that the definition of success is extremely personal and it should be defined by each of us individually.

Success is defined in my life by a continuing journey of courage, courage to do things I and others doubt I can do. I lost both parents in childhood, so when my marriage ended, I became a single mother of four with no family support. It took courage to believe that I could raise my children alone, but I did it, and it took courage to let them go when it was time for them to start their own journeys in life.

After that, it was time for me to reassess my life. I have always wanted to be a nurse and enter the LPN program. Two months into the program, I was hit by a car as I crossed the street to enter my job. It took years to recover from a broken arm, leg and ribs. But with courage, I did it. My only physical reminder is an ache in my left arm when it's going to rain.

By this time, I was 52 years old and beginning to doubt whether I should return to school, but I remembered a passage from one of my favorite books, *A Return to Love*, by Marianne Williamson: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine as children do. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own lights shine, we unconsciously give others the permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others." I retrieved my courage and made the decision to return to school and not for a one-year LPN program, but for four years, to earn a bachelor's degree in nursing.

The area of nursing I will be working in will be geriatric mental health. Mental illness is the unseen disease that has a harmful affect on so many lives. This is especially true in geriatric patients, who are often expected by society to have their mental sharpness decline and to have less desire for a fulfilling life. I believe the exact opposite of this kind of thinking. Geriatric patients deserve high quality care and should enjoy life as much or more than at any time in their lives. There is a critical shortage of geriatric mental health nurses to cope, with the substantial growth in the number of geriatric mental health patients. I would very much like to be a part of the solution. Every day is an opportunity for me to be courageous. My success is in being a person who always has courage to try and make a difference. All of us on our journeys through life must exhibit courage to reach our dreams, goals and happiness.