

Madam President Dr. Warren, Board of Trustees, Honored Guests and members of the Lincoln Land Community College Family, Good Evening. It is my pleasure to be here with you to celebrate the graduating class of 2014.

When Joanie Rogers called me to tell me that I was the 2014 Honored Alumnae, I fell silent – wishing only that I could have had the opportunity to share this moment with the man who was my biggest supporter in every facet of my life, who pushed me to lengths I never thought possible and who never missed an opportunity to remind me that he was proud, or that the future was mine...IF that is what I chose. My father died only two weeks before I was notified of this award but before he died, he made me promise that I would cry for him no more than once a month. So while Joanie sat patiently waiting for me to finish crying, I realized that now, I was faced with the fact that I used up my one cry for the month! Who knew...My option was to renege on my promise or figure out what clothes to wear!!! Oh the struggle – a business suit or leather and boots? Clearly, you see which one won out...because my father would tell me...forge your path young lady – it is yours and yours alone....This dad, is for you.

28 years ago, I walked through the doors of LLCC for the first time. I had decided that a large university was not for me. I realized that I was lost in a sea of 18 years olds and I had no idea how to find my way. At that point I decided that my option was a community college. I was asked if I wanted to attend new student orientation or meet with a counselor. I politely declined because as every adolescent is aware...I didn't need help, I knew it all. But the truth was, on the first day, I was overwhelmed by the parking lot, by the students in the halls. I had no idea where to find Menard or Sangamon Hall and I certainly had no idea how to find the book store or cafeteria. I was lost...but yet, I knew it all. All of my friends were at major Universities and for the first time in my life, I was lost. I am not the kind of person who takes defeat too kindly, so I decided that my failure to plan was no one else's emergency. I asked for help and I received help. I found every class I had scheduled that day. When the day was done I searched for the classes I would have the rest of the week. I explored the campus and when I found the cafeteria, I sat down and made a list of the pros and cons of being me AND of being at a community college. On my way out the door I noticed another lost soul and rather than walk out, I helped her find her class. You see, that list, those pros and cons reminded me that life is about paying it forward. It is not about being lost in a sea of 18 year olds. Its about finding your way and helping those along the path...and we ALL have a path. By the end of the first week I felt at home. I was introduced to professors that would shape my future and impact my life forever. I met Bob Reddick, who taught me how to be a savvy businesswoman. I met Art Meyer who brightened my day with economics lectures and ad nauseam discussions of White Fence farms, I met Virgil Rhodes who instantly soothed my soul with jazz music and put me at ease when he introduced himself to my Business Law class and lastly, Mrs. Patricia Giacomini. Who instilled a passion for the field of psychology, behavioral health and teaching, so deeply that I dedicated the rest of my life to helping others...to pay it forward.

And each day I pay it forward. You see, people will forget the precise words you use with them but they will ALWAYS remember how you made them feel. The faculty, staff and students at LLCC made me feel welcome. I was no longer lost. While each of these professors taught me content specific material, the life lessons that they taught me were far more valuable. Bob Reddick taught me that life requires diplomacy...you must balance business and pleasure, Art

Meyers taught me to be inquisitive... not to simply accept all that you see as being factual. Virgil Rhodes taught me humility...no matter how good your intentions; things can go wrong...prepare for them. Patricia Giacomini taught me insight while teaching me to be empathetic, patient and understanding. Together, these individuals taught me to be humble, to be tenacious but most importantly they taught me a deep and profound respect for simply being a good human being. Consistently, they made me want to give back. I returned to LLCC as an adjunct instructor for many years. I drove to off campus locations to instill in others my enthusiasm for the field of Psychology. I vowed to instill in others, the same excitement and passion that my professors instilled in me. Along the way, I pushed the message of service to others. Not just a message of service learning but a call to service ACTION.

And service action is just what I did. Seeing many people being denied the opportunity for medical and mental health services, my partner and I decided that it was time for change...and we intended to be the agents of change. Together, Dr. Daniel Ivankovich and I co-founded a not-for-profit organization known as OnePatient Global Health Initiative. Our mission? To provide medical and mental health care in underserved populations, without discrimination and regardless of the ability to pay. We embarked on this journey, collaborating with community members and faith based initiatives, striving to improve health outcomes in some of the poorest communities of Chicago and internationally. Together, Dr. Daniel Ivankovich and I work diligently to give poverty a name and a face while encouraging individuals to walk with us on our journey, a journey not just about service learning, but service action. No matter how hard I try, I cannot change the world alone, but I can leave a footprint so that my children and your children and their children will have a path to follow and together, one patient, one student, one community... at a time...we WILL change the world.

As a graduate of the class of 2014, each of you has taken the first steps to be among the approximately 56% of those who graduate from college. You ARE the majority. LLCC has shaped your future but what you do with this degree, what you do with your future is YOUR choice. Be confident in your path. Live the life that is true to yourself and not just to meet the expectations of others and most importantly...Be steadfast in your beliefs and understand that you are a part of a generation who has more potential than ANY other generation before you to make long term, sustainable change. Do not accept challenge as your lot in life...but rather use it as inspiration to forge your own path.

As Ralph Waldo Emerson once stated, "Do not go where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Use the power for something larger than yourself. Forge YOUR path.