

FINAL Fall Convocation 2021
Presentation By
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Berea College Class of 1981

I must say “Ditto” in reference to all of the presenters before me. They could have written my presentation for me.

I must begin by saying it is a humbling experience to stand here before you today to tell you of my Berea Experience. As you have heard, Berea College has changed the lives of so many as it will you.

I grew up in NC however my family roots lie in Garrard and Madison County KY. I grew up knowing about Berea and in fact my older sister attended school here for 2 years. Growing up I never entertained the idea of attending Berea, instead I applied to and was accepted to the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and NC State. My college choices were made as all of my closest friends in high school were attending one of these schools.

All of that changed in the fall of 1976 when I was encouraged by a family friend to accompany him to Berea. He told me “you are Berea material.” which at the time I had no clue as to what he was describing. Nope I thought “I’m going to Carolina or State.”

From the minute I drove onto this campus my life changed. The beauty and history took my breath away. It’s weird and something I have spent years trying to describe in words but “I felt home.” I had found “my place.

So much, I could tell you about the college but you already know its history and accomplishments which is why you are here today. Many of you are beginning a new adventure and many returning in order to be prepared to enter a new chapter in your life. Either way Berea will impact you for the rest of your life, both professionally and personally.

If I had to choose only one word to describe Berea, that word would be “Caring.” When meeting the Dean of Admissions who would also later be my supervisor of 3 years John Cook, he took time to get to know me. Asked about my interests and future career goals. I was taken on a tour of the campus by a student who shared his experiences at Berea with me. He shared with me how Berea had changed his life and how it would change mine.

During my time at Berea, I saw unconditional “Caring” in many forums to include: words of encouragement, emotional support, tutoring on weekends by faculty who could have chosen to stay home, faculty and staff who traveled icy roads during the blizzard of 1978 when the school was without power for a week. Everything in the area was shut down but faculty and staff made it campus to assure we were all warm and had plenty to eat. At that time the telephone lines were down so many faculty and staff, if they had telephone access, contacted parents to assure them their children were safe and being cared for. My parents were the recipient of one of those calls.

Berea through its work throughout Appalachia changed my whole perspective on life. I was raised in a very sheltered cocoon. Berea taught me to never take for granted one moment in my life.

It was here I learned of discrimination and life outside the US both the good and the bad. I sat with friends as did faculty when Iran called all of its citizens back to the country in the late 1970s. Iran had always been just a country to me and I had 2 acquaintances here at the college from Iran. Overnight people we called friends were gone. Poof disappeared, most of us not knowing where they had gone. College faculty and staff provided perspective on what was happening in our world at the time. They also reached out and listened, handed out tissues and allowed us to be upset. As they found answers to the many questions we all had they provided us with what they knew. The Iran event for many changed our narrow view of the world.

Berea helped me to understand ALL PERSONS are important and it is my responsibility as a person to help others however best I can. As a nurse I entered practice with this philosophy. Years I had people thank me for my kindness and caring. Berea prepared me with skills to care for others. Berea opened my heart to unconditionally see and help others. I say Berea taught me unconditional acceptance.

Berea college is “that village” that is needed to help you succeed. This village includes those you will interact with on a daily basis but includes alumni. You have the support of past alumni who want to see you succeed now and as the alumni you will become.

All of my professional successes in life have been a result of my interaction with Alumni. Just 6 years after graduating, I had a nursing college professor ask me if I had ever considered teaching. I Replied “no” and she asked “where did you go to school?” When I told her I learned she had graduated from Berea in 1968. I explained “I have no experience in teaching” to which she replied “you are a Berea graduate so you are more than qualified and the rest I can help you with.”

As freshman, you may be unaware Berea Alumni are here to help throughout your college journey. Alumni are available to assist with field training, mentoring and providing you encouragement. All you need to do is ask. In my case, I come to campus to provide presentations on various topics related to nursing. I tell each presentation I give I am available to assist them in any way possible. During covid I often just listened...listened to the frustration of being unable to go home, or fearing they “are not going to make it. I've written letters of reference for students I've mentored. This is not exclusive to nursing but in all areas of study. We alumni are your forever “Village”.

I would like to close with a personal story of how my village Berea saw me through a very rough time in my college life. At 21 and just 6 weeks before graduation my father passed away unexpectedly. Overnight my life forever

changed. On the day of my dad's funeral in Garrard County, the nursing faculty and several other professors walked in through the door of the funeral home. Behind them were fellow students and friends, Afterward they stayed to provide me words of encouragement and hugs. The last thing I wanted to do at that time in my life was to study, write papers and take exams. But with her help and the help of others at Berea I graduated.

We are all in this together. That is, the Village I call Berea is here for you in any way we can help. Never hesitate to call on us.

So as I wrap up I want to assure you “You Have a Village. This village will make sure you have all of the skills you need to go out in life and be successful. You are Berea Material meaning you have what it takes to change the world.

To me this photo says it all: “Measuring Up.” Measure up means to be equal in ability; to have the necessary fittings and abilities.” You have the village behind you



EXPLANATION OF THE PHOTO

This photo was taken in November of 1980. The photo was picked by the associated press and was published in the Courier Journal. This was taken at a pediatric health fair our nursing class developed and implemented. The little girl on the scale is named Natalie. It may appear we are weighing her when in fact we were measuring her height. The little boy on the floor was actually pushing down on the scale to make her taller. The little girl in the background is crying because she is not as tall as Natalie. If you look to the left you will see a nursing student in our class named "Gwen." Gwen is reassuring her she will measure up" and will continue to grow taller.

Everytime in my career when I have made a change and wasn't sure if I could "meet the challenge" this photo pops. I can't explain why but I can

say it has provided me guidance. To me this symbolizes Berea! Berea is always here to support you, press you forward and provide you caring and guidance even after you have graduated.