

“Making the Point” Speech given by Dr. Jill Hamilton-Bunch at Point Loma Nazarene University’s Graduate Convocation, May 16, 2009.

Good Morning, Graduates!

You are a vivid example of how hard work pays off.

And today you learn a final lesson, one that we on stage have seen exemplified year after year from the graduates who have occupied the very same seats in which you, the Class of 2009, now sit.

That lesson is this: **You can beat any odds with hard work.**

I speak from a lifetime of experience. You see, I was never the “best or the brightest”. I was never the smartest in my class. In fact, when I was placed in the gifted class in junior high, I was pretty sure it was because my mom played the piano for the choir and they were rewarding her for her service.

Who knows? That might have been true.

But those of us with average intellect but strong drive have one thing in common. First, we are willing to put in the time and the effort. We’re willing to stay long hours until we *get it*. And, better yet, until *we get it right*. ...

Willing to help every last student, patient, church member or client.
... Willing to travel to every conference, seminar or retreat.

And we are willing to listen to every person who can teach us — even when they don’t know they are teaching us.

Today, we have another thing in common as well.

A long time ago, as an undergraduate of Point Loma Nazarene University, I was welcomed as a small piece of this wonderful, wide-reaching family — a network that extends further than you’ll ever know ... until one day someone taps you on the shoulder or calls you on the phone or even sends you a friend request on Facebook and says, “Hey, you graduated from Point Loma, right?”

Yes you did. You went to Point Loma. You worked hard. You survived.

You learned something about yourself.

And you learned how to never stop learning — perhaps the most magical of all lessons.

You took classes with such titles as *Schools and Communities in a Pluralistic Society*; *Advanced Assessment and Health Promotion Across the Lifespan*; and *Research Methods and Bibliography*. And not only do you know what all those words mean, but you got a passing grade in them.

Yes, you graduated from Point Loma.

And today you have the diploma to prove it.

We know your path to this moment wasn’t always easy.

I often share a story with our teaching-credential candidates to remind them of the unbelievable circumstances that many schoolchildren must overcome just to make it to class each day. During my days as a middle-school teacher in the little Central California town of Delano, I taught on a campus where 99% of the students lived below the poverty line. I had a student who owned one set of clothes that she wore to school each day. She was rarely able to bathe and though the students were not unkind to her, they were quick to avoid her if they could. One day, two students were working in my room during break when one said to the other: “You know, I don’t like to sit near that girl — she doesn’t smell very good.”

But before I could interject with my teacher admonition, the other student replied: “I can’t believe you said that! You don’t know why she smells that way! Maybe she can’t take a bath because her bathtub is full of magazines.”

A bathtub full of magazines?

That’s right, a bathtub full of magazines.

It’s a funny, quirky phrase, and I still don’t know exactly why that image was hiding in her mind. But it paints a mental picture that symbolizes the clutter and chaos we all sometimes feel when our school life and our home life are in conflict.

You all have worries and concerns and responsibilities that may be unimaginable. But you got to school each day. You buckled down. You persevered. You attended classes, you wrote papers, you worked on projects late into the night or early in the morning or late nights that turned into early mornings before you knew it. And you succeeded. Even though there were days when your bathtub was full of magazines.

And we know you were not alone on this journey.

It was traveled by parents, spouses and friends who lent an ear as you told them you couldn’t keep going and reassured you that indeed you could —the same people who tended to the small things (and the big ones) while you were studying or completing projects, meeting with your presentation group or just freaking out.

For those of you with children — they walked the path alongside you without even knowing it. And your commitment to education and completion of this degree provide a powerful example of the expectations you have for their education ... no matter what road they choose to travel.

And we know that the most important things you learned here weren’t necessarily contained in the textbooks you read, the projects you completed, the exams you passed, or the lectures on which you frantically took notes.

During my days as a middle school teacher, one of my former students, then in his junior year at a prestigious university, was speaking to my eighth-graders during a return visit, when he caught me off-guard a bit: “Do you know what I remember the most about this class?” he asked the students. Obviously, I expected him to share the fact that he had been successful in college because I had taught him grammar, critical thinking and the ability to read any piece of text for theme and deeper meaning.

“What I remember most from this class,” he said, “was that every Friday — because I was in sixth period — Mrs. Hamilton-Bunch made us clean our desks with 409 so they would be clean for first period on Monday.”

And my teacher world was shattered. But then he went on: “Every time we asked her why we had to do that, even though they would not be clean by the time sixth period rolled around on Monday, she said, “We are doing it because doing things for others makes us better even if we don’t get to see the result.” “So here are the two most important things I learned in this class,” he said. “Do the stuff you don’t want to do, even when you don’t feel like it. Study when you don’t feel like it. Go to class when you don’t feel like it.” “And I learned that doing something for somebody else actually does feel good,” he said. “I still think about how happy that kid in first period must have felt every Monday. And these days I try to do good things for other people because I know how happy it will make them — even if I never see it.”

My eyes filled with tears as I realized a simple truth: What he had learned was far more important than what I had taught him. And that’s what Point Loma does for all of us. It teaches us lessons that oftentimes we don’t even know we’re learning until years later.

And that’s how it continues to teach me today, whether I’m in a meeting with faculty and administration or I’m in a classroom with a group of students who are working toward the same achievement we are celebrating right now.

Yes, today, you are graduating from Point Loma Nazarene University. And you receive your Master’s Degree having completed a course of study set forth not only by the university, but by the State of California and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

But this ceremony, your graduation, your diploma — this is more than just a day to celebrate and hang a framed sheet of paper on the wall. It’s more than a day to breathe a sigh of relief — although you certainly have earned it.

Today we announce — *you announce* — to school districts, corporations, hospitals and churches that you are prepared to take the next steps in life. **This diploma not only proves that you have worked hard. It also proves you are ready to work harder.**

And that you will never — ever — stop learning.