

Student Lasallian Commencement Address  
December 2013  
Presented by: JoEllen Steinberg

Good afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees, Brother James, honored guests, faculty, staff, fellow graduates, parents, family and friends.

Christmas is right around the corner, and since I did graduate from the Culinary Institute of America in 1995, I believe it is appropriate for me to share a recipe with you. Let's say we are going to bake a gingerbread house from scratch instead of buying one of those pre-made kits. Think about this. This gingerbread house needs a strong foundation, and the walls and roof need a strong support so that the house does not topple over. If the walls and the roof are too weak, they might crack. And if the frosting that binds everything is too thin, it will not hold the pieces together. Now to make this gingerbread house look professional we need to be careful how we decorate it, not too simple, not too gaudy. You see, the careful preparation and thought that we put into building this gingerbread house is similar to the work that we each undertook to strengthen our characters, develop ourselves, and hone our skills in college.

When I was 36 years old, living a life in California that I couldn't afford, and feeling lost, broken and in a workplace that was unrewarding, I made the life altering decision to rebuild my gingerbread house, so to speak. I moved back to Illinois to my childhood home to live with my parents, who are my strong support system, to earn an additional college degree. Like many of you, I chose Lewis University, because of the small student to teacher ratio, and because it was so evident that the University's Lasallian and Catholic mission would provide a stronger foundation for the beginning of my new life.

Since I joined the Lewis community of traditional-age college students, I was worried about my acceptance here as an older student. Prior to that, my experience in life was challenging to say the least. I had to dig deep inside myself and find the person I wanted to be. My personal hero, the late Nelson Mandela, said in his Long Walk to Freedom speech in 1995, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." I had to conquer my fears, dig deep and triumph.

As a new member of the University community, one of my goals was to get involved. I not only wanted to succeed but to be engaged. I accomplished this through volunteering, participating in activities, and maintaining a strong, positive attitude. I discovered that people at Lewis genuinely cared about me, such as students like fellow graduate Shelby Ray, a Lewis Navigator in the Admission Office, who opened her

heart and provided valuable advice and assistance to help me make my transition as an adult student. Thanks to faculty like Br. Armand, Bob Bergman, Dr. Frank Rose, Dr. Christie Billups, Dr. Dave Anderson and Lisa O'Toole, I stayed inspired, motivated, and on track to graduate.

In one of my first classes, "Introduction to Radio Broadcasting," our instructor, John Carey, threw out the challenge to break the current standing record on our radio shows to stay on air for longer than 72 consecutive hours. A crazy idea, but for a good - cause to raise money in collaboration with the Student Nursing Association for the Advocate Children's Hospital's Family Assistance Fund. This fund helps families with very ill children who, through no fault of their own, are having financial hardships. Ironically, the fundraiser is called "To Kill a DJ". A tradition since 1999, many students, staff and faculty are well aware of this important fundraiser. In fact, 3 years ago one of the students who participated in the on-air marathon ended up in the very hospital for which we were raising money. So, here, I was given this challenge to not only have a story for my future grandchildren, but to raise money for a cause that hit home with me on many personal levels. Armed with a major support system, many donations that turned into several thousand dollars, and a raw diet for sustainability, I went for it. If you ask my mentors, John Carey or John Kilpatrick, they will tell you at 76 hours they thought they really did kill a DJ, but the truth was I just fell asleep. But, I did it! I broke the record of people who were half my age! The "Introduction to Broadcast Radio" students still hear this story every semester 3 years later! You see anyone can break a record, but it takes hard work, dedication and spirit to make a difference. This experience was a Lasallian character builder and gave me the confidence to become even more engaged in the Lewis community.

Like my story about building the gingerbread house, each of us, as students at Lewis, gave careful thought to all the details of our education and built a strong foundation for our lives while here. Now, as we leave Lewis, it's up to us to stay engaged in the world, to continuously improve, and to continue that hard work. So, as we graduate today, I challenge you to see today not as the end of an experience, but as the start of a series of new experiences – all of which will be opportunities to put our Lewis education into action and to make a difference in the lives of others. My best wishes to you all.