

“LESSONS LEARNED”

PHI ALPHA EPSILON INDUCTION
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It is an honor for me to stand before this audience today—before you who have earned the invitation to be inducted into this honor society after your first year of college, before your parents who have given you the support and guidance for some 18 years that has led you here, and finally, before your professors and my colleagues

of this University who have dedicated their lives to students in higher education and to your success. Congratulations to all of you for your part in this special honor.

A couple years ago I was invited to return to my undergraduate alma mater to speak in my field of music education, but it became also an occasion for me to reflect on my experience at that school. I was amazed at the lessons learned both in and beyond the classroom that returned so vividly to my mind. I would like to share four of my lessons learned with you today.

To begin—I came from a rural area in Eastern North Carolina to attend a liberal arts college and music conservatory in the Midwest. My first roommate was from Washington, D.C. I found out that people raised in the city have had very different experiences from those raised in a small town. We found commonalities, however, in our music experiences and our church background, and remain friends yet today. My next best friend was from Minneapolis, Minn. She laughed at my southern accent, and she really laughed when I tried to learn German. It hurt a little, but she did help me to hear and

imitate sounds that were definitely foreign to my ears. I remember Myrtle Thornton—a tall, beautiful girl who had one of the most stunning soprano voices I had ever heard. We got to know each other in the college choir. I had never before had a friend my age that was black. It seemed that everyone at college had come from a background different from mine. People came from different family units, different parts of the country, different religious ideology, different races, etc. I had incredible lessons in diversity. These lessons served to give me a curiosity about people and cultures and a valuing of differences that led my husband to teach in a black university for two years after we were married, and later for me to study traditional music in the Middle East (in Muscat, Oman), and in the Far East (in China and Taiwan). These experiences not only informed my teaching, but also led to wonderful friendships that continue to enrich my life.

Secondly, I had never worked harder in my life to that point than I did during my undergraduate study. I had learned discipline early in my life from practicing the piano for many years, but college seemed to take much more time for studying than I had needed in high school. I recall the panic sitting in front of a Jackson Pollack painting literally for hours trying to figure out what to write about it for my Modern Painting class. Finally, I had an idea, and was able, after several revisions, to write a respectable paper. I would listen to my music history professor read an essay exam written by a particularly brilliant student and wonder how I would ever pass. I discovered, however, that if I worked diligently—always striving for excellence and certainly my best—then everything turned out OK.



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Third lesson. I was raised in a Christian home, and was taught “right from wrong.” However, when I was a high school senior, I found myself looking briefly at an English test that someone passed to me in another class. Before I knew what had happened, I was accused with several of my classmates of cheating on an English test. I was an honest person caught in the wrong place at the wrong time, but my National Honor Society membership and pin were taken away from me. I remember my geometry teacher saying, “Jo Ann, I know that over time you will prove to others that you are an honest person.” I’ve never forgotten those words. At Oberlin College, we had an honor system. At the end of every “Bluebook”—those blue test booklets that were used for essay exams—we were required to write “I did not give or receive help on this exam.” I am grateful that honesty and integrity were not treated casually in my education.

Finally, I became acutely aware that education was a window to unbelievable opportunities through the awakening of the mind to new subjects and new ideas. The first day of the Modern Painting class I referred to above, the instructor asked the students to write down the names of the art museums that we had visited. As I looked around, it seemed that everyone was furiously writing, except me. I had never visited an art museum. That class (which was not in my major, of course) opened my eyes to a world that would bring incredible joy to me for a lifetime. Now when visiting a new city (be it Anchorage, Chicago, Paris, or Taipei) art galleries and museums are always standard fare. I couldn’t begin to tell you the pleasure I have received from the original art my husband and I have chosen to purchase—including a Navaho Indian headdress, a hand loomed rug, a brass rubbing, original prints, and jewelry designed and created by my niece. I’ll give just one last example of the opportunities that grew out of my education. Majoring in music, I was required to take numerous courses in music history. I was fascinated by the

descriptions of the locations for the creation of so much glorious music—polychoral music in Venice, Gregorian Chants in the great Gothic cathedrals of France, England, and Germany, and the huge Wagnerian operas produced in a building created especially for these music dramas in Bayreuth. The desire to experience music in these places has led to a lifetime of travel—with students, with retired teachers, with friends—and always resulting in new knowledge and new friends.

So I pass on to you my lessons learned that have stood me in good stead throughout my life: 1) valuing diversity—valuing people and ideas different from my own and the importance of treating all individuals with dignity and respect; 2) valuing the practice of honesty and integrity in myself and in others; 3) understanding the value of hard work and determination to complete a task to the best of my ability; and 4) recognizing that education and lifelong learning are keys to an open mind, and, therefore, to unlimited possibilities.

Eleanor Roosevelt wrote, “It requires effort to use your potentialities to the best of your ability, to stretch your horizon, to grasp every opportunity as it comes, but it is certainly more interesting than holding off timidly, afraid to take a chance, afraid to fail.” Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the foremost leaders of the 20th century. You who are being inducted into this honor society today have the potential to be the leaders of tomorrow—be it in the community, in the classroom, in the family, in business, or in the church. You have succeeded in this first step in college. The road will get much tougher. You, however, have chosen a university for your undergraduate education that is founded on Christian ideals. It is a caring and supportive environment. I employ you to seek the values that will help you overcome the difficult times, and to persist with a passion toward the things in which you believe.

Thank you.

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Jo Ann Domb

- A (p. 104) Photograph on file with the Publications office at the University of Indianapolis.
- B (p. 105) Photograph of Jo Ann Domb with student at commencement (ca. 2004).