

“A Holy Endeavor and a Treasured Opportunity”

Julie B. Beck
Former Relief Society General President

Congratulations to each of you who are BYU-Pathway Worldwide students. There are few pursuits in life that hold more value than seeking learning by study and by faith.

On the day I graduated from Brigham Young University in Provo, I had the unusual opportunity to have a picture taken with then Apostle Thomas S. Monson. By chance, Sister Barbara Smith, Relief Society General President, and Elder Jeffrey Holland who was president of BYU at the time, were also captured in that picture. Little did I know that, a few years later, I would be working with President Monson and Elder Holland as a General Officer of the Church and serve on the Church Board of Education as Relief Society General President. As a member of that Board, I joined with other Church leaders in voting to begin this historic BYU-Pathway program you enjoy today.

As each of you decided to enroll in BYU-Pathway, you began a personal journey of faith. My own higher education experience began before I was born when my parents, while on their honeymoon, set a goal for all their children to graduate from a university. They didn't imagine then that they would have 10 children, but that did not change their dream. We all worked hard to accomplish that family goal and, eventually, all 10 of us graduated from a university.

Many people do not have an easy path to obtain an education. My own path to receive an education was inconsistent because our family moved a number of times and we attended various schools in the United States and abroad. I often had poor health, which meant I missed school frequently and it seemed I was habitually behind in my work. As a result, I didn't score well on my college entrance exams, and my high school counselor told me I would not do well in higher education. But, because of our family goal, I was determined to begin.

I decided to attend a two-year college, where I flourished as I engaged in activities I had not been courageous enough or skilled enough to take part in during high school. After completing an associate degree, I was married, and I enrolled with my husband at BYU.

In a short time, we did not have enough money for both of us to continue in school, so we concentrated on helping my husband graduate. Like many of you, our lives became more complicated as we added children to our family and accepted responsibilities in our community and callings in our ward. As I cared for our family and worked part time as a piano teacher, my husband completed additional studies, worked full time at a bank and served part time in the Army National Guard. But, after a few years away from school, I felt prompted to complete the goal my parents had instilled in me. My sister offered to help care for our children and thus resumed the long journey to earn a bachelor's degree.

I enjoyed going back to school as an older student. For the first time in my life, I was effective in my school work. In the years I had been away from university studies, I had acquired better skills in memorizing and absorbing information. I had learned how to discipline myself. I had respect for the learning process and, because it was a sacrifice for our family, it became a holy endeavor and a treasured opportunity.

Along with the triumphs, we also had some discouraging times when we thought we could not continue. For example, at midterm of my final semester, our son became very ill and I missed an entire week of class to care for him. Exhausted and daunted, I contemplated quitting, but my husband said, “Go back to school! We have worked too hard for this!”

I hope that you have discovered how you are being personally tutored and blessed by the Lord along your path. As my husband and I began to see the hand of the Lord in our labors, we learned that we were engaged in a faith-based effort. Our journey of faith taught us that beginning is often more difficult than continuing, and that the quickest way to the finish line is to keep going. We learned that large projects could be accomplished by breaking them into smaller segments and that by taking a few small steps, we could take more and bigger steps. We learned that with the companionship of the Holy Ghost, our minds were quickened, and we were more than the sum of our own intelligence.

Most importantly, we had learned much more about the Atonement of Jesus Christ as His power enhanced our strength and capacity. We understood that because we had made covenants with Him and were doing our best to keep those covenants, we could pray for miracles and expect them. I did not know on my graduation day what specific path our Heavenly Father had in mind for me, but I had prepared and enriched myself to be an improved instrument for Him to use.

As you travel your path, you may wish to record the priceless memorable moments when you feel the Lord's approval of your efforts. As I walked alone across the BYU campus after taking my last exam, I breathed a prayer of gratitude for the opportunity and blessings we had enjoyed. I looked up. There was a light rain falling, slightly obscuring the large "Y" on the mountain above. I thought, "We did it! The heavens are weeping for joy with me." It was a wonderful moment.

In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.