I would like to thank …

The Ferris State University Board of Trustees, President Eisler and Provost Erickson for selecting me as a recipient of the University’s highest honor.

I am both humbled and proud to accept the honorary degree Doctorate of Public Service.

I would also like to thank the Ferris Administration, faculty, staff, families and friends for sharing in the excitement of this special day.

I am thrilled to participate in the graduation ceremonies alongside the 2,014 graduates of the College Health Professions.

All of us are continually making choices that send us in a particular direction. Each of you made a choice a few years ago to follow a path that would lead you here today.

I would like to share 2 experiences from my life. I believe there is a common thread winding through my experiences, which will be relevant to you as you decide which paths to follow in your life.

I’d like to begin by quoting Dr. Seuss, from his book ‘Oh the Places You’ll Go!’ His poem so easily captures the excitement and future expectations of all graduates.

“Congratulations!
Today is your day.

You’re off to Great Places!
You’re off and away!

You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself
any direction you choose.

You’re on your own. And you know what you know.
And YOU are the ‘one’ who’ll decide where to go.”
Just like you, at my own graduation years ago, I eagerly anticipated the future direction I would take. Well, after choosing one path and then after a few more twists and turns along the way. I found teaching was my direction of choice and mathematics was my chosen area.

In fact, for a short time when my children were very young, I had a wonderful experience teaching right here at Ferris State University as a part-time teacher in the mathematics department!

I truly enjoyed teaching. I’m not saying there weren’t bumps along the road but in general my career choice felt good and brought me joy.

Teaching made me smile. I enjoyed seeing my students succeed. I was continually looking for ideas that would help others in a more meaningful and helpful way.

I felt deep satisfaction and a connection to my purpose in life. I realized...I had a passion for helping others. The proof of my enjoyment was also realizing I was being paid to do something I loved. It was as if my paycheck was a bonus.

Our chosen directions and areas of study may be different, but I believe we share a common passion...that is...to help others.

In looking back, I’d like to share these insights with you.

First of all, believe in yourself.

Believe in your dreams.

Your life is now and always will be a reflection of the way you think and the way you feel.

Think, see, visualize...imagine

And as opportunities manifest, open your mind and your heart as you are guided and inspired to take a course of action.

Your possibilities are limitless.

Just like me, you’ll know you’re on the right path when the direction you’ve chosen feels right...and brings you joy.

That’s the test, you know. It’s always how you feel.

And as you fine-tune the direction that brings you joy, your PASSION to help others will IGNITE...yes ignite...attracting the wonderful, fulfilling life you desire.
Teaching was a direction I had planned. However in 2005 my joyful world turned upside down. That year I was pushed in a direction I hadn’t planned. But that’s life, isn’t it? You can plan, visualize, imagine...but sometimes that bump in the road forces you in a new direction.

In 2005 I received my first cancer diagnosis. Until then I must admit, the field of health care had been outside my area of concern. With my diagnosis I was thrown into your world, a world I didn’t understand.

I was frightened and confused. I didn’t know where to turn or what to do. Even fortified with the love of my family I felt lost and alone. As a patient I was no longer the professional with confidence and knowledge. Instead I was angry, panicked and felt betrayed by my own body.

I scrambled to educate myself and find the resources and support that I needed. It was a daunting experience. My small town of Big Rapids didn’t provide what I needed. All I knew was that no one should have to feel the way I did, when given a cancer diagnosis.

Ahhh...but there is a happy ending here! I found volunteers...just like myself...just as passionate about helping others to succeed on their cancer journey. Together we brought a cancer and wellness resource center to Big Rapids and then helped to establish a state-of-the-art regional cancer center 13 miles down the road in Reed City.

I say we, because I couldn’t have done this alone. I may have had a deep desire to correct an unjust situation but it took the collective desire of many to provide the action that would turn a dream into reality.

Some day an opportunity that resonates with your heart and core values will urge you to give back to your charity of choice, your community or schools. Give back what you can---as you are able! Whether it’s your time, talent or treasures---give back! Let others benefit from the knowledge and success that has blessed your life.

As for being in the field of health care, I’d like you to understand something. From my personal experience, you have a significant opportunity to affect the lives of others. You are the ambassador in someone’s health care. Whatever your area of expertise, your actions and interactions will affect patients in some way.

Small acts of kindness can make a big difference in someone’s life. Whether by eye contact, talking or even a friendly gesture, you can help push away ‘fear’ of the unknown.

Life’s experiences will make you stronger and more confident, but please, remember how frightened and vulnerable I was when I first entered your world.
How you deal with your life’s experiences will help to define you. Never lose sight of who YOU really are!

I’m talking about that wonderful, joyful, caring inner you!! For you truly are amazing---on so many levels!

And to conclude, I will return to the wisdom of Dr. Seuss:

“You’ll get mixed up, of course, as you already know. You’ll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go.

Step with care and great tact

and remember that Life’s a Great Balancing Act.

Just never forget to be dexterous and deft. And never mix up your right foot with your left.

And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and ¾ percent guaranteed.)

KID, YOU’LL MOVE MOUNTAINS! “

Graduates...

I personally believe in you! I believe in your future success!

Congratulations!!

And
May ‘joy’
ignite...
YOUR passion!!

-Thank you-