

Between Mother's Day and upcoming weekends full of June brides, there will be a grand exodus of high school and college graduates in ceremonies all over the country. I am inundated with graduations this year translating into the potential of being financially destitute by the end of June.



I have a niece graduating from middle school, two goddaughters and another niece graduating from high school, a friend's daughter graduating from Tennessee and my eldest niece recently graduated from Florida State University. Whew! Look out world! There is an avalanche of female brain power being unleashed by my family alone!

I do not have any children, although my husband may now classify Toby the Beagle as our first-born. As a result, Lauren is the first in our family from the generation that follows to make the significant baccalaureate march. And it is still significant – graduating from college. In my mind, ALL successful completion of ANY academic endeavor is invaluable – graduate school, college, high school, trade school, and grade school; even the launch from pre-K into the harrowing halls of kindergarten.

I had the honor and unexpected treat of riding with Lauren from her Tallahassee home to the graduation ceremony. It was my favorite part of the evening. I sat beside her in the passenger seat of a compact car that looked like it substituted for her second residence. Clad in her black graduation robe, with me holding her mortarboard and gold FSU tassel, we had a few precious minutes of aunt-niece conversation.

With her permission, I fiddled with the radio until I found something I liked. Lauren commented that I had selected the “oldies” station. I will not repeat my exact words to her but it was something of an “un-auntly” directive to go jump off of a bridge. We laughed, and I snapped a picture of her driving as we talked about men, adventures, and the rough edges around the university town we drove through; Lauren at the precipice of life, me, her fifty-year old aunt, wondering what fork in the road I would take if I could do it all over again.

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, the Nancy Smith Fichter Professor of Dance at FSU, and the Artistic Director of Urban Bush Women, gave the FSU commencement address. She was a tiny, animated speaker and I strained to see her and hear her wise words from the very back row in Section Z at the Tallahassee-Leon County Civic Center. She advised the thousands of graduates to get up early, work late, and bust their butts. More importantly, she counseled them to listen for “the sweet whisper of inspiration,” and to “change the world through what calls them.” Zollar endeavors to inspire and make a difference through dance.

Earlier this month, Margaret Evans, Lowcountry Weekly Editor, posted P.J. O'Rourke's commencement advice published in the May 4 edition of the Los Angeles Times. O'Rourke's column is more tongue in cheek. His key piece of advice is “Go out and make a bunch of money!” And you know, he's got a point. You can do more to change the world paying your income taxes and using your wealth for the good of others than you can “chained to a redwood tree” – his words not mine. So change the world through dance but buy a ticket to the performance too and everyone is better off.

I went back to school for an MFA and I have one year of a two-year program under my belt. I am not sure what I will ultimately do with another sheepskin, but this past week a marketing consultant told me that an MFA is the new MBA, and she cited the book *A Whole New Mind* as her proof source. It seems that everything old is new, but I do not totally buy into the idea that a

poetry craft seminar is today's new macroeconomics. However, I do believe that the combination of creativity with business enterprise is imperative to the development of a better planet. For me, education always opens doors to the exploration of new passages.

Lauren has earned her B.S. in political science and will soon be off on an Alaskan adventure. Lea, Danielle and Sophia will begin their respective journeys to Ithaca, Central Florida and Princeton, while Stephanie studies nursing at Baker. Natalie blasts off from St. Mary's to Eastside Senior High School, and Darci will be spending a couple of hours a day in pre-K learning to share, as her sister Janie crosses the threshold of a Dallas kindergarten.

The young women in my life are full of promise, beauty, and torrential enthusiasm, and I take encouragement from their pursuits as I continue striving to learn who I am. I know we will enrich the world around us. We already are. And, if we can make a bunch of money along the way, better yet!

This column is dedicated to Julie Marie Nordyke, a former Lowcountry Weekly columnist who encouraged me to submit a personal essay to Margaret Evans four years ago. Julie recently married Noble Anderson and they have embarked on their adventure in love. Without Julie, my dreams would have been just a bit less starlit.