

# KATHY WYATT

## SOUTHERN UTAH UNIVERSITY COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

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Before I begin, I just want to give a “shout out” to my daughter, Naomi, who is also graduating today. She took extra classes, even in the summer, so we could walk together. Scott and I are very proud of her!

Exactly 10 years ago, I decided to return to school and finish my bachelor’s degree. At various times, during those 10 years, several people mentioned how brave I was. I admit, it did take courage to walk into my classes at the start of each semester. During the first few weeks I would begin to doubt my abilities and would have second thoughts about being in a classroom full of young, brilliant minds. I still remember the first test I took. It was a written exam and my hand shook so much I’m sure my professor had a hard time grading it. I thought I was being courageous. Yet, during these last 10 years, I have learned what courage really is.

Courage is David, one of our basketball players. He is from Senegal, West Africa, which is located near the equator. David lived in an apartment on the north side of Cedar City by the hospital. He walked to school every morning, even in the middle of winter, and was never tardy for his 8:00 a.m. class!

Courage is Tayzha, who was in several of my classes. She juggled a job, a busy toddler, and a husband who traveled a lot for work. Early spring semester, her toddler became sick, which added extra stress to her life, yet she pushed through (surviving on very little sleep) and is graduating today.

Courage is my 19 professors who discovered at the beginning of the semester that the president's wife was in their class. They taught wonderfully and treated me like any other student, which I so appreciated.

Courage is Jose, the first person in his family to not only graduate from high school but to also graduate from college. He obtained a degree in Chemistry and has a good job as a Product Development Scientist. He recently started a scholarship fund for students from disadvantaged families like his.

Courage is Kate from mainland China. I sat next to her in Human Development class. She knew very little English yet was determined to get into the nursing program. Kate often read the chapters in her textbooks 3 or more times in order to be prepared for quizzes and exams. She wrote and re-wrote papers, until she got them right. Last December, she graduated from the nursing program and works at a hospital in Pennsylvania as an RN.

Courage is the young man I would see working out at the SUU Fitness Center in the morning. He is blind and navigates to his way to classes using a white cane.

Courage is Alayna, whose husband left her when she was 7 weeks pregnant with their fourth child. With a strong desire to give her children a better life, she enrolled in school and 3 years later, obtained a degree in accounting. She works at a local CPA firm and recently bought her first home. She has also been instrumental in helping raise funds for our new child care center.

Courage is Mary, a 92-year-old woman who is returning to school this fall in order to finish her degree in Theater. About this decision, Mary said, "One thing I have learned in life is that if your dreams don't scare you to death – they are not big enough!"

I've shared just a few stories of courage. Each one of you has your own story of courage you could tell. I wish I knew them.

I do know one we all experienced together. Our class, with one month left in spring semester, had to switch to online schooling. This caused significant stress for many as well as anxiety and even depression. It was tempting to quit. But we didn't. We kept pushing forward until we finished!

Thank you for your examples of courage! They have inspired and motivated me when I needed it most. I am honored to be part of the class of 2020!

Go T-Birds!!!