

“Unexpected Blessings”

Bonnie L. Oscarson

Former Young Women General President

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

I am honored to have this opportunity to take part in a BYU-Pathway Worldwide devotional and pray the Spirit will attend us as we all participate.

The subject of online education is very dear to my heart because a few short years ago, I was doing what so many of you are doing. More than 30 years after I had left school to take care of our growing family, I made the decision to go back to college at the age of 52. My husband and children were very supportive, but it was a hard decision and a very challenging process. There were many times when I wondered why I was taking on so much work and expending so much effort, but I have since realized that there were two important but unexpected reasons for me to complete that degree: The Lord was preparing me for what He had in store and I was setting an example for my family.

When I restarted my degree in 2003, I was able to fulfill the majority of my educational requirements through online classes in addition to some in a classroom. I felt impressed to study English literature. With that particular major, I had to take several writing classes and wrote what seemed like endless analytical and expository essays. I remember thinking, “Why did I choose a major that requires so much writing?” It didn’t come easily to me! As I progressed through my degree, I found that I was getting better and better at writing papers—at capturing my thoughts and expressing them clearly. Writing that much and that often expanded my ability to think, analyze, and effectively articulate my thoughts and feelings.

What I wasn’t aware of at the time, but I am certain the Lord knew, was that four years after I finally graduated with a bachelor’s degree, I was called to be the Young Women General President for the Church. Suddenly, I was expected to write a lot—including talks for general conference, Church magazine articles, and opinions on proposals and programs.

I could never have foreseen how the skills I was learning as I worked on my degree would be needed and used daily and be such an unexpected but tremendous blessing to me a few short years down the road. Though I was not sure of all the reasons for going back to school, the Lord knew I would need the skills I learned in earning that degree to make me of greater service in the kingdom.

I told you there were two reasons why it was important for me to keep working on finishing my degree even though it was a long and hard process. One summer while I was still pursuing my degree, I was taking two classes simultaneously—advanced Swedish and Shakespeare. Both classes were very demanding and were stretching me to the limit. One day I happened to say to my Shakespeare teacher, “I’m not sure why I am doing this! I don’t know why I am choosing to take on so much work!” He said to me, “Do you have daughters and granddaughters?” I told him that we had five daughters and at the time we had 11 granddaughters. He said something that went right to my heart: “What message do you think you are sending your daughters and granddaughters about importance of an education by completing your degree at this point in your life? Think about the impact that your example will

continue to have in their lives as they see what you are doing to see this through to the end!” That became a big motivator for me. We now have 16 granddaughters, and I want each of them to understand that, as Joseph Smith said, “In knowledge there is power. God has more power than all other beings, because He has greater knowledge.”¹ I want my daughters and granddaughters to be strong, confident, and, yes, even powerful women, who know they have abilities that will contribute to building strong families and communities and strengthening Zion. Come to think of it, I want that for my grandsons, as well!

In April of 2009, six years after I started my education again, I finally graduated with my bachelor’s degree in General Studies with an emphasis in British and American Literature. All of my children were present when I walked across that stage at graduation and received my diploma. It was a joyous occasion and worth every bit of effort, hard work, and stress I had experienced. My life has been blessed in ways I could not have imagined. I am grateful that the Lord, who knows all things from the beginning to the end, provided a way for me to learn the skills I would need in the future.

The Lord admonishes each of us, “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.”² By participating in the programs of BYU-Pathway Worldwide, you are seeking learning. It is hard work—that is the study part. The faith comes in when you don’t give up but keep moving forward with the knowledge that the Lord will be there to help you.

I testify that He will bless you in unexpected ways to be able to juggle all of the other demands in your life and help you find the time it takes to study and complete assignments. He has the ability to help you manage your time and resources in miraculous ways. Trust in Him. You are not only setting a righteous example for those around you—you are preparing yourself to be of service in ways you may not now even imagine.

May the Lord bless you in this righteous endeavor, is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

¹ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith [1976], 265

² Doctrine and Covenants 88:118