

## **Class speaker: 'I reached a goal 20 years in the making'**

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<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/269/commencement-class-speaker-i-reached-a-goal-20-years-in-the-making/>

Graduating class speaker Carla Roberts evoked laughter and tears with her address at UW Oshkosh's 43rd Midyear Commencement Ceremony. The transcript follows:

“Chancellor, Provost, faculty, staff, alumni and fellow graduates, welcome to our midyear commencement ceremony.

“I'd also like to extend a special welcome to all of our friends and family members who are showing us your support in one more way, one more time, on one more important day.

“For many of you, your graduate is the first in your family to have reached this goal, and the pride you're feeling is magnifying an already pride-filled arena. Without you, many of us would not be here today with the honor of wearing this cap and gown. Many of us would never have had the courage to make it, and many of us would have had no one to reach down and pull us up when we have stumbled along the way.

“Those of you beaming in the bleachers, cameras flashing, please accept our gratitude.

“And graduates, while we're feeling proud of ourselves today, let's remember those people who contributed to our success, regardless of how great or small their contribution. It could have been anything from financial support to a simple phrase like 'I believe in you.'

“And professors, you were also contributors to this moment. More than one professor here proved to me that the phrase 'caring intellectual' is not only a term plastered all over the College of Ed., but a way of life — the only way I can thank you for that is by standing here today and passing on that philosophy...one I've always believed in, that no matter how small the pebble tossed in water, it still creates a ripple effect.

“I'm honored to be here today to toss my first pebble and to challenge you, my fellow graduates, to do the same.

“When I came to UWO two years ago as a nontraditional student, life for me was at its most turbulent, terrifying and tense. I found myself suddenly a single mother who left behind a secure and comfortable living to follow my dreams of happiness. I was not prepared for the stress and poverty that my choices created, and I needed to graduate and enter the work force as quickly as possible.

“Of course it hasn't been easy and my heart broke every time my two little boys said to me, 'Mommy, you're no fun anymore. You always pick your school work instead of us.'

“Darien and Adrian, I hope you'll understand that I never picked school instead of you — I picked it

because of you. Thank you for being patient with Mommy.

“Graduates and guests, I know many of you have also made these kinds of sacrifices and sacrifices of money have been necessary for many of us as well. For me, applying for every scholarship I could was necessary and this led me to be seated across the table from a pebble tosser — a man who has made it his life’s work to use his financial success to assist those he feels will use his generosity to attain their academic goals and somehow better our world...tossing his pebbles over and over again...never knowing if the ripples created by his generosity would ever go anywhere.

“All he asked of me and the others he helped was to get the highest grades I could and to never quit. He simply believed in me and I vowed not to let him down. But his generosity isn’t the most significant way he affected me — it was something else he had that I wanted. I wanted the glow he had on his face every time we met — that glow that comes from being able to do something for someone else.

“I made a promise to him and myself that I would be on his side of the table as soon as possible, that I would be the one tossing my pebble and offering my financial support to someone just like me, someone dreaming of a graduation day like this one.

“Yes, I reached a goal 20 years in the making, and I will accept my diploma today, but I didn’t want to wait another 20 years to fulfill that promise to be on the giving side of the table. I am announcing today that The Carla Roberts Special Education Scholarship will be available for application in this fall’s scholarship catalog.

“For the rest of my life as a UWO alumnus, I will be offering a single parent with financial need \$500 of my own money. And I am doing this right now without even having a job yet — which reminds me, my friends in the College of Ed. need to work those connections and hook me up with a J.O.B. I need \$500.00 bucks, and I need it fast!

“As I make this commitment, I am challenging all of us graduates to give back, to toss your pebbles of kindness. Any pebble you reach down and grab from your path in life and toss to someone else will make a difference. They all did it when they helped us and it’s our time to make the ripples that impact others. Nothing is too small and often even just a kind word can create the greatest effects.

“Congratulations to all of us today — graduates and pebble tossers, teachers and learners, celebrators all! Take the time today to savor these moments. We’ve earned it!

“But it doesn’t end here, and it isn’t all about us. My graduation wish for us all is that at the end of life’s journey, we turn and look back at that pebbled path we walked and see all the bare patches where we reached down, picked up our pebbles and tossed them. Make your difference any way you can.

“And again, thank you to all of you who supported all of us on our journey, for I know that even though my path to college graduation was unstable, uncertain and seemingly unending, it wouldn’t even exist without you. Thank you.”