

Embracing Success for Generations to Come

THE GREATER NORFOLK MEDICAL SOCIETY of SOUTH HAMPTON ROADS

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My life prior to med school was one of family dysfunction, discord, & emotional & physical chaos. Absentee fathers were the norm. Drugs, crime & teen pregnancy among my peers was a common means of escape. My escape was school & reading. I escaped into other people's lives & worlds through reading. School & my teachers were always a source of encouragement as was my hard-working single mom of 7. Through their efforts, I became the 1st in my family to attend college, a small HBCU & at my graduation, Coretta Scott King said "don't become so involved in making a living that you forget to make a life." This had an impact on me for the rest of my life. I wanted my life to be about service. My college science teachers encouraged me to apply to med school, through a post-bac program. This additional year helped me through the med school application process & MCATs & gave me the opportunity to take additional pre-med courses. Right after this year, I got married, entered med school & my daughter was born during my 2nd year of med school. I was in a city without family or close friends & in a difficult marriage, as we were both young students working part-time jobs, leading strenuous, stressful lives with a newborn baby, but dropping out of med school was not an option for me. My mother taught me, there is always something you can do. Eleanor Roosevelt said "what must be done, can be done." Vinnie Genovese said "on particularly rough days when I am sure I can't possibly endure, I like to remind myself that my track record for getting through bad days so far is 100% & that's pretty good.

If you find yourself in similar difficult predicaments, you should develop a plan to succeed, & place priorities on things in your life & not just a plan A, but have plans B, C & D ready too. If you know someone who has accomplished what you want to do, know if they did it you can too. I graduated from med school on time in 4 years, & moved back near my home for my internship & residency in internal medicine. Being around family gave me the courage & fortitude to end a difficult marriage. Developing a good, strong support network is important. My daughter is now an accomplished young woman & I have retired after practicing emergency medicine for 10 years & internal medicine for close to 30 years after that. This is just a piece of my story, & it's not the worst story in the world. I haven't had many failures in my life, at least I don't look at them that way. There were many obstacles, but as a race car driver once said to explain his many wins, "I don't notice the other cars in my way, I don't see the obstacles, I look for the openings & go through them." I meet people all the time who have goals but don't know how to look for the openings to be successful. There are many openings, but if we are so absorbed in seeing the obstacles & opportunities only for failure, we will crash & burn. Successful people rise to the occasion in any given moment. At the times when I felt I couldn't get worse off, I always knew I had a lot going for me; that I had the ability to rise to the occasion facing me, & draw on some reserve of inner strength. There are many times in medicine & in life when you should assess your situation quickly & thoroughly, formulate a plan, make a decision & then act. If you stand there paralyzed every time you are faced with a difficult situation or decision, you'll never get anywhere. You must see yourself beyond where you are.

I once had a patient tell me that I see them as higher than where they are; that I had great expectations for them & their level of health & I expect them to work with me to reach those heights. This was the greatest compliment a patient could give me. You must see things as you want them to be & take every opening toward that goal. No one gets anywhere alone. We all must rely on help. I had help from my courageous mother & teachers who took an interest in me. They were the catalyst that would drive me forward every step of the way. Let your teachers know what an inspiration & important resource they are to you. Another reason to make progress in our lives is to be an example for others to follow. Let others struggling to achieve their dreams know if you did it, they can too & show them how to go about it. Even though you have a goal & a plan, be flexible, look & see where you are being led. I loved reading & literature & initially wanted to be an English teacher, but I got a 'C' in English so that led me on a different path I had not even considered. So don't keep pushing against a closed door. Look for the open door. I still became a teacher to patients & med students who I have mentored. Release all people, places & things that have tried to stand in your way. Don't let anger toward your circumstances immobilize you. You can't maintain debilitating anger & reach a goal of success in life & peace of mind at the same time. Keep positive sayings, quotes, poems in mind to help you change course when you feel you are headed in the wrong direction emotionally. I wanted to tell some of my story because we all at one time or another had to face & relive past experiences & fears due to memories of difficult events. It's important to not keep our stories hidden in the recesses of our minds. We should tell them to each other. It may help to ease pain, give motivation, & relief & peace to another person. Let's not be ashamed of our memories & past but recapture them & put them to work for the good.

~Written by Dr. Adrienne Coqueran~