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Commencement, it has a lovely ring to it doesn't it?

It suggests a new and exciting start. I was in Massachusetts over the weekend to watch my niece Kaela graduate from high school. For the life of me, I can't figure out why her school didn't ask me to deliver the Commencement Address. Now Kaela hardly needs advice from me but I'm sure I would have done a bang up job.

Here is a little bit of the message I could share ...

Smart is good. Smart and focused is better. Smart, focused and open to change is even better.

Smart is good but it doesn't take a genius to succeed in school and beyond. Willing yourself to stay focused on the task at hand will serve you well. Everyone loves to multitask. Or at least everyone loves to brag about how great they are at it. However, doing two or three or more things at once almost always takes longer than concentrating on one thing, getting it done (and done well) and then moving on to the next.

Unfortunately staying focused means hunkering down in the library instead of a coffee shop to study. And just as unfortunately, you need to turn off your phone and ignore your favorite social networking sites. Don't worry, the earth will continue to spin when you are off-line and it only takes a few minutes to catch up.

The danger of focus is not missing a minute of a friend's latest mini-melodrama. The danger of focus is losing sight of other possibilities. It could be other theories or answers to a problem you are trying to solve. It could be barreling full speed ahead in a major that bores you instead of taking a minute to stop and think about what you want and what you love. Stay open to new ideas and possibilities.

Do what you love. Life is a lot more fun and interesting when you love what you do. Don't expect to love every course, every project and every minute of every day. Life is not a Disney cartoon. Be prepared to take a little bad or boring with the good. Just make sure the love-to-do column outweighs the do-I-have-to column. If you hate math, don't major in it. If you don't like to write, don't study journalism. And by all means if you can't stand the heat, forget culinary school.

Finding what you love requires some experimentation and exploration. You should definitely count on some stumbling and fumbling. Finding what you love can be confusing and a little scary. Overcoming scary is part of the adventure. What's more, it builds courage and character.

Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity. You never know when, where or how a new opportunity will pop up. My minimum wage job as a graduate assistant led me to Switzerland and a more than interesting career and life.

Most grad assistants got stuck in the library with tedious fact checking. Because I could write, I received the plum assignments; interesting research, writing and editing. What's that got to do with Switzerland? When one of my professors took a sabbatical there, my grad assistant experience made me a natural choice to join him as a research associate. (And it wasn't minimum wage!)

How I managed to turn a twelve month assignment into seventeen years is another story. One loaded with countless examples of preparation meeting opportunity.

Happy Graduation and Bon Appétit!



Asian Noodle Salad

This salad will be a welcomed addition to a graduation party buffet table at or your next picnic on the beach. Enjoy!

Serves 6-8

Asian Vinaigrette (recipe follows)

8 ounces thin (vermicelli) rice noodles

4 ounces Chinese pea pods, trimmed

6 ounces asparagus, trimmed

1 cup bean sprouts

1 carrot, cut into curls (use a peeler)

1/2 European cucumber, peeled, seeded and cut in julienne

1/2 red or yellow bell pepper, seeded and cut in julienne

2-3 scallions, thinly sliced

1/4 cup roughly chopped fresh mint leaves

1/4 cup roughly chopped fresh cilantro leaves

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Garnish: sesame seeds



Make the Asian Vinaigrette and let it sit for at least 30 minutes to combine the flavors.

In a medium bowl, cover the noodles with hot water and soak for 10 minutes. Drain, rinse under cold water and drain well. Return to the bowl, drizzle with a little Asian Vinaigrette, sprinkle with about 2/3rd of the herbs and scallions and toss. Let the noodles sit for about 30 minutes in the refrigerator.

Bring a pot of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the asparagus and cook for 1 minute. Add the pea pods and cook 30 seconds more. Drain and immediately plunge the vegetables into a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking, drain the vegetables and pat dry. Slice the asparagus on the diagonal in 1/2-inch pieces and the pea pods in julienne. Put all of the vegetables in a bowl, drizzle with a little Asian Vinaigrette, sprinkle with remaining herbs and scallions and toss to combine.

Transfer the noodles to a large platter, top with the vegetables, sprinkle with the remaining herbs and sesame seeds and serve.

Asian Vinaigrette

1/4 cup canola or peanut oil

1/4 cup sesame oil

Juice of 2 limes or 1/4 cup rice vinegar

2 cloves garlic, minced

1-inch piece ginger, minced

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 tablespoon fish sauce

1 tablespoon hoisin sauce

Dash honey

1 tablespoon or to taste Thai or other chili sauce (optional)

Sea salt and freshly black pepper to taste



Put the ingredients in a small bowl and whisk to combine. Store any leftover vinaigrette in the refrigerator.

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Susan Nye – Around the Table at www.susannye.wordpress.com

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