

Aloha Kauai Community College Faculty, Family, Friends, and Fellow Graduates,

My name is Joana Rodriguez, and it is an honor to be a part of the Kaua'i Community Colleges Graduating class of 2022. Today we are all gathered here to celebrate the hard work and dedication each and every one of you has put into your college degrees. It is an honor to share a few words with everyone. Growing up, I witnessed my single mother work hard to provide for her five children by working two or three jobs while at the same time trying to seek knowledge by getting a college education; unfortunately, because of all her responsibilities, she was not able to get her degree.

After witnessing how hard my mom worked to provide for her children and the struggles that come with being an adult and a parent, I was determined to work hard. I wanted to be financially secure and provide for my family, including my mother. At that time, I did not see education as a part of that plan. But at a very young age, my life took a detour. I started experimenting with drugs, which progressively led me to make the wrong decisions that resulted in me becoming a teen mom, having three child protective service cases opened, being incarcerated, and eventually being hospitalized for two months with a staph infection, endocarditis, and pneumonia due to my drug addiction.

Shortly after being released from the hospital, I reconnected with an old friend who was a mentor for the Wai'ale'ale project. The Wai'ale'ale project is a program that provides scholarships and academic support to students who never thought college was a possibility. After hearing her story about her recovery and success in college, I wanted that too! So I asked her to help me become a part of Wai'ale'ale. To my surprise, I, a recovering drug addict, got the scholarship. After being accepted into Wai'ale'ale, I put in all my hard work and dedication into seeking knowledge and getting my college degree. During my first semester at KCC, I closed my CPS case and gained full custody of my children back; I got a 4.0 GPA and was offered to be a peer mentor for the Wai'ale'ale project. After seeing my success, I saw the importance of a

college education, and I gained a sense of purpose in my life. This realization gave me the courage to rewrite my story in life. My success in college has helped me see my worth and gave me the confidence to work even harder and achieve my goals through seeking knowledge in all that I do.

I am a true believer that everything happens for a reason. Getting through all these obstacles has helped me to find my direction and purpose. I know that I wouldn't be who I am and where I am today without overcoming these intense challenges in my life. Today, I am a thirty-year-old recovering addict of six years, graduating with my AAS in Liberal Arts and working on my BS in Psychology. I am able to be a role model and show my children the importance of being steadfast in seeking knowledge and working hard to achieve your goals. Because of my life's obstacles, I am able to share my experiences, strengths, and successes to help others and show them that anything is possible.

So as we walk past this stage and receive our diplomas tonight, remember all those times you felt discouraged and remember your determination and hard work that got you here today! –and apply it to your everyday life. It is my experience and my belief that knowledge is the key to success.



Seeking knowledge is like opening doors. And I know the doors are everywhere.

— *Georges St-Pierre* —

AZ QUOTES

— Laozi —



Those who seek knowledge, collect something every day. Those who seek the Way, let go of something every day.

AZ QUOTES

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Knowledge
is only given to those
who are willing to seek it.

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Seek knowledge and teach it to
people. Learn dignity and
tranquillity, and be humble
towards those from whom you
learn knowledge and be humble
towards those to whom you teach
it, and do not be tyrannical
scholar otherwise your knowledge
cannot be established because of
your tyranny.

Umar

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