

AN EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

for the Rest of My Life

BY LINDSEY SPJUT

Taking your studies seriously can bring great benefits to your life both now and in the future.

As a young woman, I had all sorts of impressions of what university life would entail. Some of my friends who were a year or two older told me that it was going to be the best period of my life—full of friends, parties, and good times. Others told me that it was the place I would meet my spouse; after all, that's how it had worked for my parents, some of my Young Women leaders, and many other adults I knew. Still other people told me that it was going to be hard, that the academic leap from high school to college was overwhelming, and that I should prepare to spend four years locked in a library.

Upon arriving as a college freshman, I discovered that there were *lots* of attitudes about university life. Some of my peers were, in fact, there just to have fun. Others were there only to find a spouse and were using school as a way to kill time until that happened. I, too, wanted to take advantage of great social opportunities, but I also felt that there had to be more to the university experience. At that crossroad, I made a conscious decision that I was going to make

ILLUSTRATED BY CARY HENRIE

the time, resources, and efforts I would spend during my university years really count. Now, a few years after graduation and into my teaching career, I realize that crucial goals and decisions I made *then* have helped make my life fulfilling *now*.

Have a Plan

As a senior in high school, I took a class geared for students who thought they might want to be teachers someday. I used that class as an exploration tool. Along with my part-time job at a child-care center, that class helped me recognize my love for and talents in this field. When I started college, I was able to determine fairly quickly that I wanted to pursue elementary education as my major.

Classes like the one offered at my high school may not be available to everyone, but most people can, if they spend some time, identify areas of interest and talent. What you love and what you're good at make excellent starting points for determining an area of study and a career path. Prayer was also a crucial part of this process for me. Because I had researched what I wanted to do, I felt confident in going to Heavenly Father and asking Him to confirm my thoughts and decisions. I felt His guiding hand then and at multiple times throughout the rest of my university experience.



TAKE ADVANTAGE OF YOUR OPPORTUNITIES

"Take full advantage of the opportunities that you have. They pass quickly. The time for preparation, though it seems long now,

is really brief. I think back on my grandfather, who was an immigrant from Sweden. When I [was] a freshman, he and my grandmother helped me move my things into the dorm. He . . . mused somewhat, saying, 'Oh, if only I had had this kind of opportunity for education, I would have amounted to something.' He was a great man in many, many ways, but it made me appreciate the unique blessing I had of education, of preparation, of learning, of experiences and associations. . . . Don't let them pass. Be serious enough that you take full advantage of that."

Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, press conference, April 6, 2008; available at newsroom.lds.org.

Look for Balance

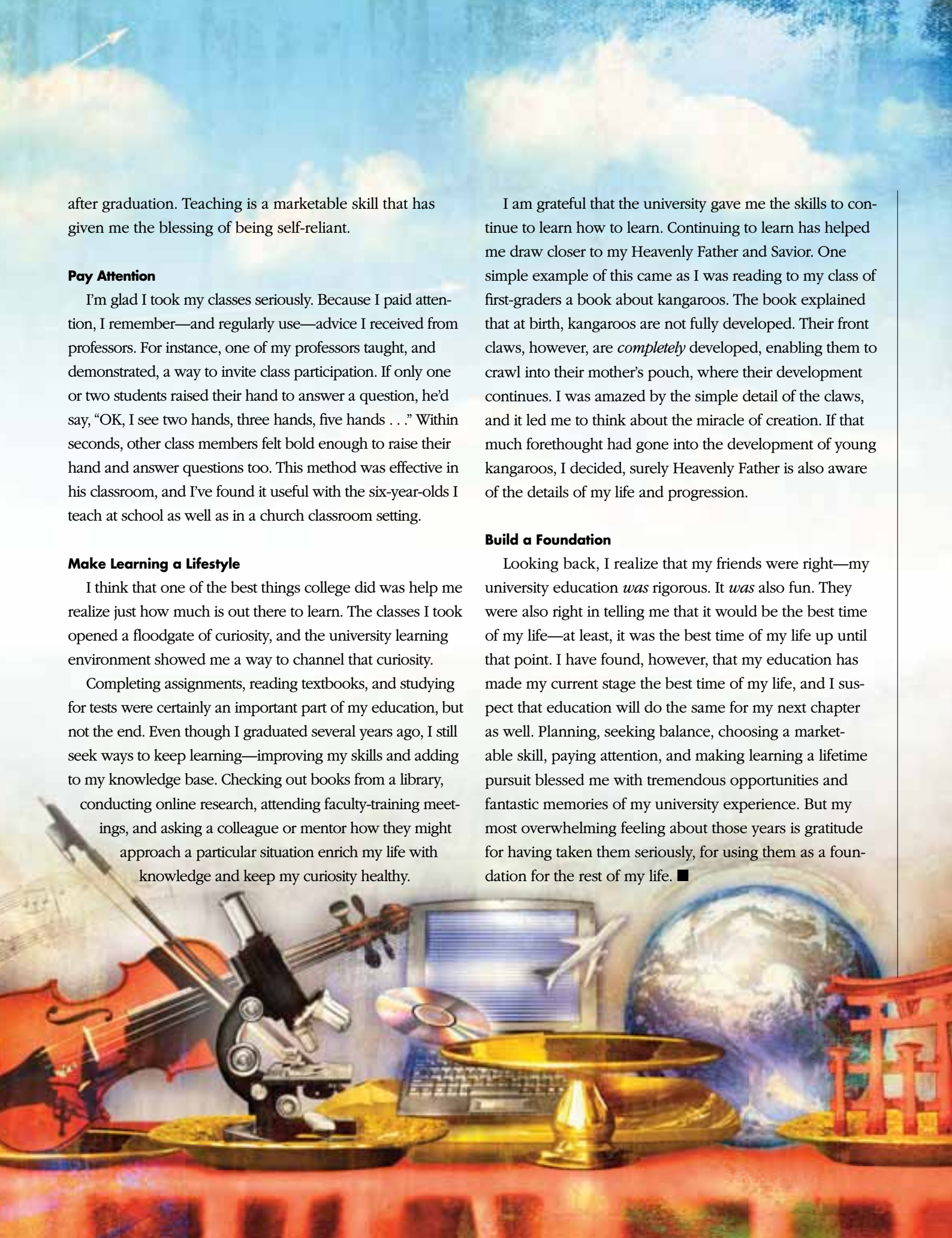
Choosing a major can initially be difficult, but doing so near the beginning of my studies allowed me not only to graduate in a timely way but also to augment my major courses with electives in art and sports. In addition, I took institute classes. These courses didn't always fulfill requirements for graduation, but they played a valuable and important part of my university experience. For instance, throughout my childhood and youth, I had enjoyed drawing, but I had never ventured into painting. During one semester, I took an oil paint-

ing class and discovered that I loved it too! Another semester, I fulfilled a longtime desire to learn the stories of the Saints by signing up for a Church history institute class. Augmenting my elementary education courses with these other areas of study helped me take full advantage of my university years.

Choose a Marketable Skill

My major in education didn't impress my peers, but I enjoyed it. Besides, it was practical. One of the goals related to a college degree should be getting a good job





after graduation. Teaching is a marketable skill that has given me the blessing of being self-reliant.

Pay Attention

I'm glad I took my classes seriously. Because I paid attention, I remember—and regularly use—advice I received from professors. For instance, one of my professors taught, and demonstrated, a way to invite class participation. If only one or two students raised their hand to answer a question, he'd say, "OK, I see two hands, three hands, five hands . . ." Within seconds, other class members felt bold enough to raise their hand and answer questions too. This method was effective in his classroom, and I've found it useful with the six-year-olds I teach at school as well as in a church classroom setting.

Make Learning a Lifestyle

I think that one of the best things college did was help me realize just how much is out there to learn. The classes I took opened a floodgate of curiosity, and the university learning environment showed me a way to channel that curiosity.

Completing assignments, reading textbooks, and studying for tests were certainly an important part of my education, but not the end. Even though I graduated several years ago, I still seek ways to keep learning—improving my skills and adding to my knowledge base. Checking out books from a library, conducting online research, attending faculty-training meetings, and asking a colleague or mentor how they might approach a particular situation enrich my life with knowledge and keep my curiosity healthy.

I am grateful that the university gave me the skills to continue to learn how to learn. Continuing to learn has helped me draw closer to my Heavenly Father and Savior. One simple example of this came as I was reading to my class of first-graders a book about kangaroos. The book explained that at birth, kangaroos are not fully developed. Their front claws, however, are *completely* developed, enabling them to crawl into their mother's pouch, where their development continues. I was amazed by the simple detail of the claws, and it led me to think about the miracle of creation. If that much forethought had gone into the development of young kangaroos, I decided, surely Heavenly Father is also aware of the details of my life and progression.

Build a Foundation

Looking back, I realize that my friends were right—my university education *was* rigorous. It *was* also fun. They were also right in telling me that it would be the best time of my life—at least, it was the best time of my life up until that point. I have found, however, that my education has made my current stage the best time of my life, and I suspect that education will do the same for my next chapter as well. Planning, seeking balance, choosing a marketable skill, paying attention, and making learning a lifetime pursuit blessed me with tremendous opportunities and fantastic memories of my university experience. But my most overwhelming feeling about those years is gratitude for having taken them seriously, for using them as a foundation for the rest of my life. ■