

Overcoming Barriers

by Donna Bass

I have come a long way in life. There was a time when I was quite a bit different than I am now. I have overcome homelessness, doubt, low self-esteem, and depression. I have transitioned to some measure of self-confidence, found a secure place to live, and have a much better outlook on life. I am now able to dream and feel confident that I can accomplish anything.

A pattern of failure started in high school. On career day all of the seniors were herded to the guidance office to have private meetings with the counselors about our futures. I wanted to be a doctor. My grades weren't good but I still had the feeling that anything was possible, that we would figure it out somehow. The guidance counselor didn't quite see it that way. I still remember her tirade like it was yesterday. I was told that I would be lucky to pass a flower arranging class, and I should hope to marry well because I would "never amount to anything." Having grown up in an abusive home, this was just the last straw. I didn't tell my parents or anyone else about it until much later in life. Her words stayed with me and just seemed to take on a life of their own.

I did give college a try after graduating from high school. I took half a class at the University of Vermont. I quit because it was too hard to work and go to school. Why would I want to anyway if I'm just gonna fail? I came home and went to work as a waitress. I moved out of my family's home and into a friend's attic. I got fired from my waitress job. My boyfriend dumped me. I took a test to get a job at the Navy Yard and I got a score of only 12 out of a possible 100.

Then I met my future husband. He was the most amazing person I had ever encountered. He quickly became my best friend and favorite confidant. We got married six months after we first



Photo courtesy of the author.

met. I felt that I had truly succeeded in doing something really important. I had. Twenty-three years later we are still married and he is still my best friend and favorite confidant. Ah, success!

We have two great children who are now 19 and 21. They are relatively well-adjusted and hard workers. We home schooled them through high school. I guess I just couldn't bear that they might have the same experience that I had. They have their GEDs and are now considering college. Another success!

During the twenty-three years that I have been married I have given a lot of thought to going back to school and becoming a doctor. I actually returned to college for two semesters back in the early 1990s. I carried a 3.75 grade point average and was on the Dean's List. The day I got that notification in the mail I thought, "See, I can do this," and other non-printable thoughts about that guidance counselor from so long ago.

But alas, my pattern of scholastic failure seemed to follow me still. I didn't finish my degree. I used the excuse of the kids, the money, the blah, blah, blah. The truth is that I was afraid SHE was right. I might be able to do it for a

while but, truth be told, I would show myself to be a failure.

The day came that my husband said to me, "Now that the kids are gone, what are you going to use as an excuse?" That certainly got my attention. I started thinking about his statement a lot (right after I wanted to punch him in the forehead). I wondered what excuse I could use that would satisfy him and myself. There weren't any that I could think of, though I tried and tried. So there I was, no excuses, no reasons, but what to do? I considered midwifery because I wanted to help babies and mommies have healthy birth experiences and I had become proficient as an **herbalist** and **aromatherapist**. I thought of being a nurse but I didn't want to work in the usual medical settings or get yelled at by a doctor. I thought of being a physician's assistant, a really famous metalsmith artist—everything except a doctor.

One day a friend asked me why I didn't just become an **osteopath**. I declare I heard an angelic

choir! My friend was a life coach who is trained to help people decide what they'd really like to do both personally and professionally. We decided to barter the jewelry I make for her time as my coach and she

helped me come up with a plan to make my dream come true. It was an amazing process.

I called the local school of osteopathy and found out that an osteopath has the same training as a physician as well as an education in skeletal adjustment and other complementary forms of healing. It requires that I go to four years of college as a Medical Biology major, then four years of medical school.

I was told by the University that in order to

be admitted, I'd have to take high school courses in biology, chemistry, physics, and calculus. I realized I'd need help if I were going to make it through such a rigorous course of study. I was determined that my vision of myself—not the guidance counselor's—would be in the driver's seat. I saw a flyer from our local high school that was advertising a transitions course. I called, was accepted, and started within two weeks.

I am hoping to start at the University next fall. As an osteopath I will operate out of a holistic vision of healing that considers not only the body but also the mind, emotions, and spirit as well. This feels so right to me!

The transition from not believing in my own abilities to fully accepting myself and my talents is by no means complete. I don't believe it ever will be because I think life is a lot of small transitions. But I am well on my way to overcoming barriers that have stopped me for much too long.

Donna Bass is 46 years old. She has been married for 24 years and has two sons, 19 and 21. She makes fine silver jewelry. She has also been an herbalist and aromatherapist for about 20 years, and always wanted to be a doctor.

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herbalist - a person who grows or sells herbs for use as medicine

aromatherapist - a therapist who stimulates the senses through fragrance by using natural botanical essential oils from plants, leaves, bark, roots, seeds, resins and flowers

osteopath - a therapist who manipulates the skeleton and muscles in order to encourage healing