Live Your Dream

Good morning,

It is an honor to speak with you today because I have been to many of Trinity's Diversity Chapels and the speakers have been amazing. So, to stand with them is a real honor. It is also a great pleasure because when I usually speak, I don't know the audience. They are strangers to me, but I know all of you, and it is nice to see familiar faces looking at me.

Many of you know me as the Aftercare Teacher, the Pink House Recess Teacher, or, most importantly, Skylar's Mom. And some of you also know that I am a writer and have published a number of articles and children's books.

But what most people don't know is that writing has always been my dream. I loved to write from the moment I learned how in First Grade. In fact, it was my First Grade teacher, Mrs. Butler, who helped me to make my first book. It was a book of poems.

Many years later, when my cousin was in her First Grade class, she asked him how I was doing. He told her that I was graduating from college in Texas and moving to New York to write books.

She asked for my address, and a few weeks later, I received a package from her. It was my first book, with a note that said, "I always knew you would." She kept it safe for over 15 years, and here it is today!

This book was the beginning of living my dream of being a writer, and I have been living it ever since.

So I want to encourage you to live your dream.

You can discover your dream at any age, but once you know it, live it.

You can keep your dream for yourself or share it with the world.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream was to have all people treated as equals and for children to play together regardless of the color of their skin. He truly lived his dream, and today, many of us live it, too.

Don't measure your dreams by whether you make money doing it or not.

Living my dream has taken me on great adventures all over the world and given me many other kinds of success. I won a scholarship to study in England and lived there for three years. I won another contest, and the prize was make-up for a year. Even though I don't wear make-up every day, my family and friends who do, loved getting it.

The best contest I have ever won was one right here in New Orleans. It was one that asked you to write about "A Teacher That Changed Your Life." Of course, I immediately thought of Mrs. Butler and my Book of Poems from First Grade. The prize was $500 for the winner and $500 for the teacher. So I entered, and I won. They found Mrs. Butler,

who was now living in Houston, and she was able to come to the ceremony in person. It was wonderful to see her, and give her a copy of all of my books – although the one she and I made is still my favorite.

I do get paid for some of my writing, but that's not why I do it. I write because I love it and it is my dream.

Living your dream can help you in ways that you don't always see right away.
Your dreams can be therapeutic for you, and writing about hurtful experiences has helped me to feel better about them.

One of those experiences was losing my mother when I was just 10 years old. She died two days before Christmas. When I talked with her that morning, she explained that she had looked all over for a game I asked her to get for me, but she couldn't find it anywhere.

The game was called "Payday," and I had forgotten to ask Santa for it, so my Mom promised to get it for me. When she couldn't find it, she asked if she could get something else, but I said, "No, all I wanted was that Payday game."

Later that day, she died unexpectedly. I was out with my aunt all day, and when we got home and were told that my Mom had died, it was awful. The next day, when we went to my Mom's apartment, and opened the door, and laying on a chair, all by itself was a Payday game.

For months, I wouldn't play with it, and for years, I didn't enjoy Christmas.

Then, one day, my writing professor in college asked us to write about something that had an ending that was completely unexpected.

I thought about it, and I wrote about my Mom and the Payday game. I didn't know it then, but writing about my Mom's death really helped me. I started to enjoy Christmas again, and now I look forward to it every year.

So I say to you, live your dream. If you want to sing, sing all the time, even if no one else hears it.

Dance, if that's your dream. Think about it. Even if you never perform for anyone, you will always be in great shape! Bake, draw, invent, laugh at your own jokes – make your dream a constant part of your life.

I would write stories, even if none were ever published. And believe me, some of them don't. My stories get rejected for all kinds of reasons. "The story is not what we are looking for." "The subject is not relevant." "Are you really black?" The answer to that is always – Yes."

But that doesn't stop me from writing my stories. I write them for myself because I love doing it.

Don't let anyone tell you that your dream is not good. It's yours, and it's great because you have it.

Writing has made me feel more happiness and fulfillment than I can explain.
And I promise you that if you live your dream, you will experience that, too.
Thank you!

-Juwanda Ford