



Alumni Remarks

By Michelle Davis

“Good evening! It is an honor for me to be here with all of you. Collin College holds a special place in my heart. I am a proud alumna of this College and it is refreshing to return to a place that helped shape me into the person I am today. I am especially appreciative to have the opportunity to express my gratitude to all you for your continuous support of this college and to share with you the impact that each of you have had in my life through your contributions to the Collin College Foundation.



Born in the United States as the daughter of two Brazilian immigrants, I was 18 months old when my parents returned to Brazil to be closer to family. When I was four years old my parents divorced, leaving my mother to raise my two-year-old sister and me with little financial help. By age ten, I worked on the sales floor at the small retail shop she owned. After excelling in elementary and middle school, I received a full scholarship to study at a prestigious private high school. I sold homemade cookies during recess to help financially at home and studied at the library because books were expensive. In my spare time, I tutored classmates. The struggle to make ends meet fostered entrepreneurship and a strong work ethic that still carries me through today.

Pursuing a degree in Business Administration seemed like a perfect fit for me. But sadly, due to high tuition costs, I was forced to drop out of college after attending classes for just one year, and my hopes for higher education seemed unattainable. I returned to the United States as a young adult in search of a better life. For 18 years the United States has been my home, where I am raising my family, and where I want to make a difference.

One of my most rewarding roles in life is to be a wife and a mother. My husband and I decided the financial sacrifice of leaving my full-time job to care for our two small children was the right choice because, without a degree, my salary was just enough to cover our childcare expenses. Our decision enabled me to eventually return to college and pursue my dreams of higher education. I prepared my documents and headed to Collin College in the summer of 2011. My goal could be reachable and attainable in a community college located close to my home. Collin College offers quality higher education with outstanding faculty, state-of-the art facilities with the latest technology, courses at an affordable price, and the perfect environment that would help me succeed. I quickly became involved in student organizations and was determined to excel in my classes.

During my second semester in school, my husband and I learned I was pregnant. Four months into the pregnancy, during a routine sonogram visit, we found out our baby was deceased. Dealing with the incredible loss and despite not having medical insurance, I underwent emergency surgery in December 2011. Two years later, my husband was unexpectedly diagnosed with cancer, casting fear and uncertainty about our future. Undergoing treatment and surgery, our family's sole

income provider, who previously worked two physically demanding jobs, was unable to work. Diminishing income coupled with the extraordinary medical expenses incurred caused tremendous financial burden on our family.

Difficulties we endure serve as opportunities to mold character, build strength, and give us a deep appreciation for our accomplishments. It is not a matter of *if* hardships will come, it is a matter of *when* they will come; and it is not a matter of how severe the hardships are, but rather how we face them.

Hardships changed my focus. Instead of dwelling on present problems, I focused on end results. Sleepless nights did not keep me from going to school the following mornings, and I still studied for exams while tears rolled down my face. I made a conscious decision to have a positive attitude despite my circumstances. My actions simply followed my attitude. I continued to diligently pursue my education, serve in student organizations, and volunteer, daily relying on my faith and my support system. Maintaining my GPA came at a high cost, making the 4.0 that much more valuable to me.

Still, facing these crises brought waves of financial turmoil. Scholarships were the life boat that led me safely to shore and enabled me to accomplish my educational goals despite our financial challenges. Thanks to the generosity of donors like you, I received three scholarships that covered 100% of my tuition and books during the three years I attended Collin College.

Three months after my husband's cancer diagnosis, I was nominated by Collin College and was recognized as a 2014 All-Texas Academic Team Scholar based on my involvement on campus and in the community. This program recognized the top two students from each community college campus in the country. In 2014, there were close to 1,700 scholars representing about 850 colleges. I was also recognized as a Coca Cola New Century Scholar for Texas (the highest scoring scholar among the Academic Team recipients for the State). To my surprise, I was also recognized as a member of the 2014 All-USA Academic Team. This is widely recognized as the most prestigious academic honor for students attending community colleges, and only 20 students were chosen among those 1,700 top students in the country. Finally, that year I was selected as the Inaugural David R. Pierce Scholar, a recognition I received for being the highest scoring member among the 20 All-USA Academic Team members. As the representative for the team, I was invited to speak to an audience of 2,000 College Presidents and administrators at the closing ceremony of the American Association of Community Colleges Annual Convention in Washington D.C., and I was featured in articles in *USA Today*, *USA Today College*, and the *Golden Brief Newsletter* by Phi Theta Kappa International. That same year, I graduated from Collin and received a full, merit-based scholarship to attend Southern Methodist University.

The faculty and administrators of this college were my backbone during my difficult, yet most rewarding year. But I also could not have accomplished half of what I did without the generosity of donors like you. Contributor to the Collin College Foundation played a crucial part in my success. I was able to focus on my classes and the well-being of my family without worrying about tuition costs. History was no longer going to repeat itself; this time I would not have to drop out of college due to lack of resources. Even though you did not know me, you believed in me and in the outstanding work of this college community. Please accept my deepest appreciation and gratitude.

I graduated Summa Cum Laude with a BBA in accounting from SMU's Cox School of Business in December 2016, and in May of this year I will receive my Master of Science in Accounting degree from SMU. Upon graduation, I will begin my career as a forensic accountant at PricewaterhouseCoopers, a global accounting firm. My husband made a full recovery and is now

cancer-free. I also continue my involvement in the community by volunteering with Junior Achievement USA every year, teaching work-readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy skills to elementary school students in the Dallas ISD.

Through your continuous support, you invest in the lives of so many deserving students of this college; you are helping make goals achievable. I aspire to give a high return on your Investment by continuing to work hard, to be an ethical professional who will make a positive impact on society, to never give up when I face challenges, and to pay forward the goodness and generosity I received from each of you.

Thank you!”

Michelle Davis is a 2014 graduate of Collin College. Michelle shared her story at the Collin College Foundation's Stetson & Stiletto Standoff on February 17, 2018.