



UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA GERONTOLOGY

Do You Have The Cour**AGE** to Care?



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A lot of my childhood memories are of those spent with older adults. My Great Aunt & Uncle spent a lot of time at our house. I learned to play the card game pitch with them, my Great Uncle Bill would always bid 7, no matter what type of hand he had.

My work in the field of Gerontology began from my love of wellness. When I started my working career, I thought I wanted to be an accountant. I worked in an accounting department of a real estate company for 9 ½ years. During that time I also fell in love with the wellness field. That love started when I joined a gym and eventually became an aerobics instructor.

When the American Heart Association (AHA) began their annual Heart Walk they contacted companies around town encouraging them to develop a team for the

walk. Since I was the aerobics instructor, I was nominated to be our team captain at the real estate company. Our team was the number one fundraising team the first three years of the Heart Walk. When attending an AHA board meeting to receive our team award, I was introduced to a wellness program the heart association had developed called the “Heart at Work” program. I realized how important wellness was and wrote a proposal to the president of our company to start a worksite wellness program. Our president also realized the benefits of a wellness program and let me start one utilizing the Heart at Work kit (but this was in addition to my current full-time accounting job). He also asked me to research what other companies were doing in worksite wellness.

In the quest to see what other companies were doing I was introduced to a one year, undergraduate, certificate in worksite health promotion program that was offered at Nebraska Methodist College. This program started my educational journey, although at the time I thought that it WAS my educational journey. When I enrolled in the program, I had no intentions to go any further educationally, I just wanted the education to help me run a quality wellness program at my worksite. While in this program and implementing a wellness program at my worksite, I realized that wellness was the career path that I wanted to take. At the time of my graduation from the certificate program, Kay Ryan, Chairperson of Health Promotions, was getting ready to launch a Master of Science in Health Promotion with an emphasis in Human Resources Management at Nebraska Methodist College. I realized I would probably have a hard time finding a full-time wellness job with only a certificate in health promotion if there would be people who had a master’s degree in the field. A certificate classmate and I decided our goal was to enroll in the master of health promotion program together, but we first had to get a bachelor’s degree. We found a great accelerated bachelor of science in management of human resources program at Bellevue University which would be a good stepping stone for the master of

science in health promotion with an emphasis in human resources management. We graduated in December 1996 with our certificate in health promotion and began our accelerated one-year bachelor's degree in June 1997. We graduated with our bachelors in June 1998 and began the 22 month accelerated masters program in August 1998.

Upon nearing graduation of my accelerated bachelor's degree program (Dec. 1997), I was hired at Nebraska Methodist College as the Coordinator of Health Promotions. I now had a full-time job promoting wellness for students, faculty and staff on campus! I will never forget the day my boss and mentor, Kay Ryan, told me that she saw me eventually teaching the certificate in health promotion program (the program I took in 1997) and presenting at the National Wellness Conference. At that time, those goals felt way beyond my reach. However, after graduating with my Masters degree in August of 2000, I started coordinating the certificate in health promotion program and taught 14 of the 22 credit hours. In addition, I began presenting at regional conferences and the National Wellness conference.

Once again, I thought I was done with my educational journey after obtaining my masters degree. However, since I was now faculty at a College, it was important to continue towards my PhD in order to move up in faculty rank. Dr. Jim Thorson was the Chair of Gerontology when I enrolled in the Human Sciences PhD in 2003. He was a great mentor and allowed me to focus on Gerontology and Distance Education. Although at the time, my passion was not Gerontology, it was a good fit with health promotion and distance education was a good fit with my teaching.

When I started the PhD program, my career and educational journey were moving along well until July 5, 2006 when I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 39. I took a break from my PhD program to go through surgery and treatment. I tried going back to my coursework in the Spring of 2007, but just didn't have the energy. When Dr. Thorson was nearing retirement he called to ask me if I was coming back, I had decided that I wasn't because I had made a job change and the degree was not needed for my job as an instructional designer and learning management system administrator. At the time, the cost and effort seemed way more than the benefit of having the degree.

However, in 2010 I really missed being in the wellness field and was lucky to be hired as the Wellness Manager for UNMC's EngAge Wellness, a medical-fitness/whole-person wellness program which opened in February 2011. Shortly after starting at UNMC I decided it was time to complete my PhD. At that time, Dr. Karl Kosloski was the doctoral student advisor. He was a wonderful mentor, helped me complete my independent studies, comps, and begin my dissertation prior to needing to retire. After his retirement, Dr. Julie Masters became the chairman of my doctoral committee. In December 2013, ten years after enrolling in the Ph.D. program, I finally graduated as Dr. Jeannie Hannan! Although it was a long journey with many bumps in the road, it was well worth it!

I love working with the older adult population and helping them improve their health & wellness. It is very rewarding when someone tells us they were able to go off of a medication, or recover faster from a surgery because of the programs we offer. Exercise truly is medicine!

The U.S. population is aging and we do not have enough professionals in the field. I encourage you to have The CourAGE to Care and pursue a degree in Gerontology!