

Graduating from Weight Watchers, Launching B9 School

No education process in any institution can be complete without a graduation ceremony. One cannot fully measure the success of any learning experience unless it is applied in the world of day-to-day life. Just as a child prepares for the day he/she is financially and emotionally independent from his/her parents, students long for the day when they, too, are able to make their way with their teachers standing out of their way.

If a teacher is to expect thoughtful, inventive learning from her students, she must be willing to learn thoughtfully and with a spirit of courageous inventiveness, too. Daily. With that in mind, it is time that I declare myself a graduate of Weight Watchers. I joined Weight Watchers for my father on a gray February 3rd in 1988. Unlike most members, I only joined once and have attended weekly meetings free of charge and at my goal weight, since December of that same year. My first leader of distinction, Gloria Fitzpatrick said something that seared my memory that night I decided to let others help me tackle a weight issue that had tortured me for decades, "*The only thing more difficult than walking in this door the first time is walking in again. If you never leave, you never have to come back.*" I was so impressed I have never left. Michelle Seymour, my final Weight Watchers leader of distinction has taught me, "*True learning is what we can never forget..*"

I have been readying myself to put Michelle's teachings to the test since I retired from public school teaching in June 2012 and launched [B9 School](#) three months later. Such a simple, seemingly unimportant act such as closing the WW door holds great importance as my school grows. We are motivated to change by two forces: fear or faith. We can only open one of the "f" windows at a time. I've come to realize that **fear** of trusting my appetites and longings would be the only reason to continue to be a part of a corporation I have outgrown.

Any teacher, institution, or relationship can deteriorate from supportive anchor to crippling ball and chain if not gently released in timely fashion. If we do not test our swimming skills, if we do not drive in traffic, if we do not "graduate" from our teacher's tutelage and use our tools of resourcefulness and resilience, we do not test our autonomy in the most important school of all: our world. I am not "quitting" Weight Watchers. I am not "defecting" from a cult. I am graduating from a wonderful program, in order that I not stay childishly dependent on the very leaders and greeters who have been my beacon for almost a quarter of a century. It is time to rely on myself to do what I know is right for my body, my soul, my school, my family, my life.

Now, the test begins. There is no turning back. As March closes, I gently shut the door of a place I have depended on for half of my adult life. I will miss the group; I will miss the guidance and support. I will miss the clapping and the laughter of those who "understand". But, in order to feel the fresh breezes of independence, I must. Such is the exhilaration of personal and professional autonomy. I welcome being a part of spring's burgeoning buds, of birds' nests being created anew, and the chirping outside my window after months of silence. If you are already studying with me, I assure you, first we let go of yesterday's learning and learn anew as a team...and then, just as I release the helm of my ship of fear today, so will you when ready. Thank you, leaders

and greeters, for making me feel welcome for 24 years. I am ready to grasp the helm myself now, and I set out with map in hand.

“I am running into a new year and the old years blow back like a wind that I catch in my hair like strong fingers like all my old promises and it will be hard to let go of what I said to myself about myself when I was sixteen and twentysix and even thirtysix but I am running into a new year and I beg what I love and I leave to forgive me”

---Lucille Clifton *Good Women: Poems and a Memoir*