Never Too Late
University of Dayton, Ohio (url: http://www.udayton.edu/index.php)

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05.07.2008 | Students  Vera Crowl has plenty of reasons to feel proud.

After 30 years of drug and alcohol addiction, the 55-year-old student heard her name called May 4 at the University of Dayton graduation ceremony.

But it's not pride she feels when she reflects on her life and educational accomplishment.

"I haven't allowed myself to feel proud, because I'm so full of gratitude," Crowl said. "Gratitude to God for calling me to his service and for his purpose. Gratitude to the recovery programs that have supported me, UD, my family, friends and the Richmond Catholic community."

After enrolling at Southeast Missouri State University in 1971, Crowl became hooked on drugs and alcohol and dropped out four years later with no degree. She spent 30 years in active addiction, five of them homeless.

In 2001, she began her road to recovery and redemption. After three years of sobriety, while serving at her church in Richmond, Ind., she said she received a call from God to become a substance abuse counselor.

Within two weeks, her father received a letter from UD informing him of a scholarship available to his family for his service as an ordained Catholic deacon.

"Mama thought of all her children and grandchildren, and called me, even though I had not yet told her about the calling to God's service," Crowl said. "That letter is what brought all of this about."

She enrolled in January 2006 to pursue a degree in psychology and has never looked back. She has taken a full schedule of classes every semester — including summers — commuting 50 miles each way sometimes three or four times a week. In addition, she works part time as a hostess at Bob Evans in Richmond.

Crowl is also the winner of the UD Nora Duffy award, presented each year to an adult learner who has overcome significant obstacles to achieve a baccalaureate degree and reflects the spirit of the Marianist tradition.

"It's difficult to return to school after 30 years on the outside," she said. "It was a culture shock. But I've learned to accept success, I've learned to accept failure, and I've learned a lot about humility."

Crowl is enrolled in a final course this summer needed to complete her degree requirements. She was included in May graduation because UD does not have a summer commencement ceremony. She plans to return to UD in the fall to pursue a master's degree in clinical counseling.

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