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For Jennifer C. Thomas, AKA remains 'Faithful to the task at hand'



Jennifer C. Thomas, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. - Alpha Chapter, Howard University
Updated 11:04 a.m. Friday, Feb. 5, 2016 Filed in [Atlanta Education News](#)

This is an occasional AJC Sepia series that looks at black Greek letter organizations



VIEW CAPTION

WASHINGTON, D.C. — *“If you tell me what you do with your leisure time, I shall tell you what you are. College ought to be the place for the setting of examples... In your leisure, I hope that some provision has been made for the expanding of your mind, your body and your spirit by spending more time in the open. In our social life on campus, we should set the example for other people.”*

These insightful and eloquent words were spoken to the 1925 freshman class of Howard University by the Dean of Women - none other than one of the founders and first president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Lucy Diggs Slowe.

Her remarks were detailed in the book about her life “Faithful to the Task At Hand,” co-written by Anne S. Pruitt-Logan, who was initiated at Alpha Chapter (Howard University) in 1948, and who is as beautiful and spry as ever.

I recently shared these comments with young ladies who were interested in the sorority which I joined nearly 30 years ago on the campus of where our great sisterhood was founded, Howard University.

Now, nearly 30 years later, I have returned to my alma mater as a professor in the same department from which I graduated. Founder Slowe’s words were prophetic —“college ought to be the place for the setting of examples.”

The ladies who founded our sorority did just that. "Faithful to the Task At Hand" said this: "The group of college girls was eager to make a contribution that would live forever... they searched for elements that would best convey a group of women with shared values committed to pooling their strengths and talents to improve their lots and make a difference for themselves and their people."

To say Alpha Kappa Alpha has been a blessing, would be an understatement. Yet, it's the best word to aptly describe the friendships fostered, sacrifices made, and community cultivated.

Now at 108 years, our sorority continues a legacy which began by those excited, eager and curious young ladies who were our founders.

As a little girl in Omaha, Neb., I had extended family members who were AKAs. As a teenager in Huntsville, Ala., I was a debutante of the sorority and had the opportunity to meet many of the ladies who were leaders in my church and community.

When I arrived at Howard, I was attracted to everything the sorority represented. My junior year I joined hundreds of stomach-churning- nervous "prospectives" in Rankin Chapel during the culmination of Rush festivities, hoping to be selected as Ivies into Alpha Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Many weeks later I would have 32 other sisters who became just that.

The friendships that were formed then still remain strong today. We have celebrated births, marriages, milestones, and a few years ago - we celebrated the life of our first "Ivy Beyond the Wall (a member who has passed away) - Traci Louise Diggs.

Traci was one of the friendliest people on our line and was always comforting, loving, and caring. We all last celebrated together at the Boule in San Francisco when we marked our 25th anniversary as "Silver Stars" (or as we said, Silver Foxes).

Traci planned a beautiful dinner at an area restaurant in honor of our milestone. It was our last time with her collectively, but she remains our giddy, guardian angel. My co-initiates and I are in the early stages of creating a scholarship fund in her honor. I can think of no greater friend than Traci and her affable spirit.

Sisterhood is indeed the foundation of our sorority.

Proverbs 27:17 reminds us that "as iron sharpens iron so a friend sharpens a friend."

The friendships I've been blessed with are the most beautiful of treasures. Those who have come before us, have set the ultimate example and have reminded us that "you are your best thing," which is a quote from the novel, "Beloved" written by Pulitzer Prize winner and Alpha Chapter 1950 initiate Toni Morrison.

Ladies of Alpha Kappa Alpha are collectively our best thing when we work together, whether we joined as undergraduates or graduates, whether we live in a small town or on the other side of the world in Dubai.

As sorors around the world celebrated Founders' Day, Beverly German, a former senior editor at CNN and dear friend, shared a quote she learned while a 1971 initiate at Howard: "There is a destiny which makes us sisters. None goes her way alone. All that we put into the lives of others comes back into our own."

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So what advice did I give to those interested undergrads who, as I was 29 years ago, were listening with hope in their hearts?

Stay humble, keep the faith, always show and share your unique attributes, grace and fortitude, and they will lead you to a continued legacy of service and sisterhood that grows as the IVY vine into an unbreakable, unshakable, unforgettable and unbelievable bond which is Alpha Kappa Alpha!



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