

'More than meets the eye'

Brock shares inspiring life story at foundation banquet

By David Lias
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To say that Joan Brock has faced and overcome diversity is a bit of an understatement.

In 1984, at the age of 32, while employed as a teacher at the Iowa School for the Blind, she ironically went blind herself.

Five years later, she lost her husband, Joe Beringer of Vermillion, to cancer, leaving her on her own to raise their daughter, Joy, who was 8 years old at the time.

"I am an ordinary person to whom some extraordinary things have happened," she told the audience at the Dakota Hospital Foundation Community Leadership Dinner, held in the Muenster University Center on the University of South Dakota campus in Vermillion.

She shared her life story with the banquet crowd. "My hope is that you will

take your life story and plug it into mine," she said.

Brock grew up in California, and at age 19, moved to Vermillion to attend USD. After graduating, she was employed at the South Dakota Human Services Center in Yankton.

"It was while working at the hospital I would learn how frail our minds can be," she said, "and how the choices we make in our lives can take us on a journey we never would have expected."

While in Yankton, she began dating Beringer of Vermillion. He was employed at the school for blind children in Iowa. The couple eventually married, and it was while she was employed as a teacher at the Iowa school that she became blind herself.

"Think how fortunate I truly was," Brock said. "All of my friends were specialists in the field of teaching the visually impaired - they would

know what to do with me. Joe had been teaching there for seven years - he knew what to do with me. I had been there for five years ... and every piece of technology for the blind was available for me."

The University of South Dakota graduate's life story has become familiar to people around the world, thanks to her book entitled, "More Than Meets the Eye," and a made-for-television movie of the same name.

Upon learning that her condition was irreversible, Brock said she realized that she simply couldn't choose to "crawl into a corner and do nothing."

"I had been teaching blind kids for five years ... I could not make that choice," she said. "Each and every person in this room tonight have had many, many opportunities through their lives to make decisions, choices, on which directions to go as things happen in our lives. You have to figure it out,

and I think I understood at that point in my life of what kind of example I would have set if I had just quit. There was no 'if' ... going on was the only decision I could make."

She found herself dealing with great loss four years later when her husband died of cancer.

"What makes me so sad and so angry is the number people who are here tonight who have to either sit by somebody's side or had to deal with their own personal experience with this ugly, ugly disease," Brock said.

As she witnessed her husband's valiant battle with the disease, Brock said she realized that "going blind was nothing. I had to put everything in perspective, and there was a lot to understand."

Her blindness, and her husband's death, she said, was no one's fault. "It was simply what life was presenting us. I had to put things in that perspective, and respect

what happened."

She decided to make sure that their daughter, Joy, would come to realize that one can live a positive, productive life if one chooses to find it.

She said it's obvious that the Dakota Hospital Foundation and the Vermillion community are choosing to do the best they can under somewhat difficult circumstances, too.

"I'm proud to have attended the University of South Dakota, and today, to hear of the many positive things that are happening with the foundation and in the community itself," Brock said. "It's a choice you're making. These are tough times and each and every step you make - it all comes back to making good choices in the midst of very difficult times. It's important to do that so you can go forward positively and productively."



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