

6-1-2004

Be the change

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Recommended Citation

Forsh, Jamie '04 (2004) "Be the change," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 2 , Article 34.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol47/iss2/34>

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Be the change

We are members of a fortunate group that has been given the chance to better ourselves through higher education. It is our opportunity and our responsibility to use our knowledge and experience to better our world.

I know that it's difficult for us to imagine that a single one of us could possibly change the world. However, let us not forget how many great individuals before us have done so. As students here, we have changed this institution . . . We have left tangible legacies, and we have touched people. We have changed lives. We have left our impression on faculty and staff — and on each other.

Some of you may be unconvinced of the power each of us possesses. You may be asking yourselves, “How can one person out of billions on the planet change the course of history?” Though it seems improbable, history provides us with innumerable examples to show that the unlikely happens more than we think.

In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., combined big dreams and a small group of determined civil rights leaders to rally a quarter of a million people to march on Washington and lobby for justice. Charles Townes, a Furman graduate, used his talents to develop the laser, which has become an integral part of our everyday lives. The film “Erin Brockovich” tells the story of a woman who is just an unemployed single mother — until she stumbles upon a major company that was knowingly poisoning innocent people. In a few short months, she went from unknown single mom to leader of one of the largest class action suits in U.S. history.

People such as these have been blazing trails throughout the ages in all corners of the world. Just think, sometime before we were old enough to think about applying to Furman, some bold student sacrificed a day of educational enrichment to go to the beach, thus changing Furman forever by beginning the wonderful tradition we call Beach Weekend.

There is no doubt that one person can make a significant impact on society. The only things

separating the historical innovators that I mentioned and any person in this class are passion and desire. Gandhi once said, “You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” I ask you: Are you willing to be the change?

Is there a health and exercise science major who is willing to be the change? One who will meet with principals, school boards and congressmen and help them to understand that physical education in our schools is invaluable? Is there a sociology major who is willing to be the change? Someone who will write letters, make phone calls and knock on door after door until improvements are made in our nation's foster care system?

Or is there a business major who is willing to be the change, who will go out on a limb, actually look past dollar signs and assess the needs of every employee, from the CEO to the building custodian? I stand here daring each and every one of you to be the change you wish to see in our world!

We leave this place unaware of how many or what kind of changes are in our future, or what challenges they will bring. In a few simple words Maya Angelou expresses an idea which exemplifies the philosophy we should adopt as we prepare to face the world: “If you don't like something, change it. If you cannot change it, change your attitude. Don't complain.”

Fellow graduates, understand and know that from this moment forward it is truly our opportunity and more importantly our responsibility to make a change!

An excerpt from the 2004 Commencement address by Jamie Forsh, a health and exercise science major from Douglasville, Ga. She was chosen to give the speech by the John H. Crabtree Student Commencement Speaker Selection Committee. A dean's list student, she was elected to Senior Order and Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges. She is pursuing a master's degree in physical therapy at the Medical University of Georgia.

