

Ten years ago this month I was biting my nails and agonizing over my son's high school graduation. Several weeks before, I had accompanied Cameron to school to meet with teachers and figure out what was needed to put a high school diploma in his hand.

As we moved from room to room, the list kept getting longer. I was starting to believe that even though my son had been going to school, it was for some other reason than to obtain knowledge.

List in hand we went home and the law was laid down: "You will do nothing but work on what has to be done to get a diploma."

In the six months leading up to his point, all heck had broken loose. The second Cameron turned 18 he packed his car and moved in with another senior friend and I began a morning ritual of going to their house and pounding on the door because school had called and Cameron was a no-show.

Needless to say, those few months were filled with frustration, anger and bewilderment that my child could make so many bad choices, some more than once.

He moved back home and then a different mantra began. It seemed all I kept saying was, "All you do is eat and sleep. Get up and do something — anything!" There was little we agreed on and more contention than ever.

Once "we" had diploma in hand, I had hoped for a miraculous transformation. I got it, just not the one I was looking for. My child now knew everything — I knew nothing. I wanted to snatch him up and ask him just how he thought he had gotten to this point if I was so stupid.

Following yet another discussion about jobs, not staying out all hours and not sleeping on the couch until noon, Cameron moved to Lima and continued on a path of self-destruction that ended with a 5 1/2-year prison sentence.

Fast forward 10 years and the dialogue has changed quite a bit. Now it's "You aren't getting enough sleep. Do you have enough to eat?"

Last weekend, I traveled with family members and friends to Owens Community College to watch Cameron walk across the stage and accept an associate's degree, the first of many on his list.

As my eyes filled with tears and my heart burst with pride, I knew that no matter what life threw Cameron, he was going to pick it up and throw it back in better shape than it had been received. It's a great feeling and one I can't thank him enough for giving me.

Once he started his official college career two years ago, he dove in head first and became the president of student government, formed groups that hadn't existed prior in the college's history and forged a new path for himself and other students.

His tenacity and dedication to better himself still amazes me. He plugged through classes that would make my eyes roll back in my head and boatloads of college activities he either organized or helped with and managed it all to graduate cum laud.

Last weekend we listened as a line of people formed to tell us how much Cameron meant to them, the school and their families. There had been a time I would have nearly traded my soul to hear such things and I finally got them with everything still intact.

Cameron is far from done with his college career and will start at the University of Toledo in the fall. He is concentrating on political science and wants to make a difference in the world. I know a lot kids say that but Cameron means it. His experience with adversity and living with his mistakes has shown him he can use his powers for good — not evil — and help others. This comes from a child who was very self-centered and "me" driven who has become inclusive for all and champion to many.

Right now, he's my hero, too!