

**Words of Warren Sutton, honorary degree recipient, resonate with Alfred University graduate**  
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From left, Greg Connors,  
Warren Sutton, Robert Meltzer  
and Gary Ostrower

As she walked across the stage in the Galanis Family Arena to receive her Alfred University degree Saturday morning, a young woman handed President Mark Zupan a note that had been folded, and folded, and folded.

When he opened it, he found a heartfelt message that echoed the remarks Warren Sutton had delivered earlier in the ceremony after receiving an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from Alfred University at the beginning of the 181st Commencement ceremony in the Galanis Family Arena at McLane Center.

Sutton, an African-American, dropped out of Alfred in the fall of his junior year after his relationship with a blonde-haired, blue-eyed first-year nursing student came to light. While students and most faculty did not object, the young woman's father, who was the University treasurer at the time, did. At his urging, other University administrators put pressure on Sutton to end the relationship. Instead, he dropped out in spite of a very promising collegiate basketball career, and ended his opportunity to earn an Alfred University degree.

"Warren was one of the greatest basketball players in Alfred University history," said Gary Ostrower, a professor of History who has taught at the University for 48 of his 50 years in the classroom, and who presented Sutton for the honorary degree.

Even though the young woman also dropped out, she and Sutton continued a long-distance relationship and agreed to meet in New York City in February 1960. The woman was on her way to Florida with her parents for a vacation to help her forget Sutton, but she snuck out of her hotel room and met Sutton. Her parents filed charges, and a warrant was issued for her arrest as a "wayward child," even though she was over 18 at the time. The story hit the national newspapers.

It was Ostrower, who had been a classmate of Sutton's at Alfred University, who brought Sutton's story to Zupan's attention about a year ago, just before Zupan took office as the 14th president of Alfred University in July 2016. "Alfred University didn't always live up to its reputation" for open-mindedness and tolerance, Ostrower said.

After Sutton's story came to the attention of the Alfred University Board of Trustees, the chair of the Board, Les Gelber, recommended that Warren be awarded an honorary degree and the members of the Board unanimously

approved the recommendation.

“I never thought that I would see this day,” said Sutton.

“I was the first in my family to graduate from high school, the first in my family to attend college,” Sutton said. “I saw myself on the road to success,” until he was forced to leave.

Through it all “I never saw myself as a victim,” he said. “I made a conscious decision to leave, and I have never felt any animosity toward the University.”

He believes he fared better than the other players in the drama. The young woman received nasty letters from people following her arrest as wayward child, and Pete Smith, Sutton&s basketball coach, was under pressure from members of the administration for his failure to “control” Sutton.

But it is what has happened to Sutton since Zupan reached out to him that resonated so strongly with the young woman graduate Saturday.

“I have always wondered ‘Who am I?& I have never known,” said Sutton Saturday. “I have had no role models,” leaving him at times feeling as though he has been “swimming upstream” his whole life.

Only recently has he realized how much Alfred University has shaped his life. He&s remained friends with some of those he knew at Alfred, but more and more former classmates and teammates some of whom were in attendance Saturday have reached out to him, expressing their support decades later.

Reflecting on his Alfred University experience, “I found out who I am,” said Sutton.

The note from the young woman said she is “So much more” now than what she was when she started. “I know who I am now,” she wrote. “Thank you, Alfred University.”