This is a copy of the speech given by Priya Khalsa, who was asked to accept the nominations on behalf of all nominees at the LCAE Adult Learner Awards, May 14, 2015

I would like to begin by acknowledging all of today’s presenters – the thoughtful individuals who took the time out of their busy schedules in order to support and celebrate the accomplishments of today’s recipients---Thank you all so very much.

Winning this award has made me reflect upon my academic journey in a way I had not done previously. The time I spent in University was unforgettable. I loved my experiences even the struggles for they helped me appreciate the outcome all the more. I am immensely grateful for all the academic, experiential learning and leadership opportunities that came my way. I know my journey has fundamentally altered the way that I view myself as a student, a mother, and a server of my community.

For five years, I juggled being a full-time student in Health Studies with my other equally important role as a single parent of a young child. Although dealing with oftentimes conflicting priorities was exceptionally demanding, it provided me with necessary tools to equip me for future success. Now my son and I are preparing to move to a new city where I will continue my academic journey as a Law student at the University of Toronto.

Before today, I have never really stopped to contemplate the journey that has brought me here. In other words, what is today all about? It has made me think of the challenges and the uncertainty. The many instances over the years where I questioned my ability to be a good parent and a good student simultaneously; the times where promises had to be broken in order to study for an upcoming exam, and the doubt-filled moments during which I worried about the future.

As much as I loved my undergraduate experience, the truth is a lot of the time I felt rather isolated. I found it difficult to connect with other students due to the age and life stage difference. I didn’t feel like I fit in among other parents either because they weren’t balancing a rigorous course load along with typical parenting and adult responsibilities. I am certain that other adult students have had similar experiences. Ultimately, we have to keep moving forward and believe that all our sacrifices will not be in vain.

Returning to school as an adult learner is not for everyone. The sacrifices to be paid are vast and the journey is long. It requires a form of dedication and strength that is difficult to comprehend unless you went through it yourself. Given the extent of the obstacles involved, I never would have envisioned being in a room full of people who have overcome extraordinary challenges to achieve their academic and career goals. **And yet look around you.**

Two years ago, I met a fellow mature student who had summoned up the courage to return to school at the age of 40 after her husband passed away. I remember being wholly touched by her strength and resolve. I realized then that although we are all adult learners, the similarities end there. Every adult learner here today brings with them a rich and unique set of experiences. Their journeys of determination and perseverance are both astonishing and awe-inspiring. They are proof that it is possible to emanate strength in the face of uncertainty. That it is possible to start out with nothing except the unwavering belief that hard work and commitment will eventually pay off in a brighter future for you and your loved ones.

I applaud all of you. May the dedication and devotion that carried you this far continue to be the driving force for achieving your future goals and aspirations. I cannot wait for the rest of this special day to unfold. As this day neared, the realization of the importance of this ceremony dawned on me. The members of the organization, who are responsible for making today a reality, are just as special as this event itself. The London Council for Adult Education and its members have at their core the value of life long learning as a route to enablement and self-improvement. Due in no small part to their efforts, adult learners can have more optimistic outcomes, which in turn has a direct impact on the inclusivity and cohesiveness of our community. I would like to end with one of my favourite quotes by William Hazlitt—“Prosperity is a great teacher, but adversity is far greater.”

Please join me in a heartfelt show of gratitude to the London Council for Adult Education for putting on an incredible event today.