In the past I would have worried about some one that got excited about dissecting and sorting through the inner workings of a baby pig. This week that thrill belonged to me. The culmination of animal dissection in biology was more than just a natural progression of learning. Please let me explain why completing this Biology lab in December of 2011 is seriously a highlight of my life.

 In 1974 I entered West Liberty State College as a freshman eager to study. My declared major was biology and I intended to study for two years at the college and go on to West Virginia University majoring in Dairy Science. I knew it would require lots of work and determination, but I thought that I was up for the challenge.Little did I know that two weeks into the school year I would allow my dream to be squashed and my life sent in an entirely different direction.

 Upon entering the chemistry lab there was concern about my ability to learn the Periodic Table and corresponding material since I was blind. To make matters worse upon entering the biology lab there were all these microscopes and corresponding materials to be studied. The teachers did not know what to do with a blind student. I did not know how to tell them that I could learn. Along came the guidance counselor and I thought we could find a remedy to the situation. Instead what I experienced was a well meaning counselor who also had no idea what to do with me. In combination the academic team thought they were facing an impossible tast when it came to teaching a blind student the science kiriculum. In short order I found myself changing my major to social work. Away I went down an entirely different path taking me on a journey that would result in completion of a biology lab thirty seven years later.

 Yes, my life did follow the road more traveled and easier for all. I regret not that I became a social worker and later worked in vending programs for the blind. I certainly do not regret raising my five children with all the joys and challenges that brought. I do not blame those academic authorities that could not figure out how a blind student could succeed in biology. I take responsibility for the path I chose. I did not have the confidence to think that I could be a successful biology student and I may not have hadenough skills of blindness to be a successful biology student. What could have happened differently in the life of a blind seventeen year old farm girl to enstill the confidence needed to take on the academic world of science?

 In 1978 while living in Philadelphia and working in social work, I encountered the National Federation of the Blind. It took me a while to join and I have never looked back. It has taken years of rubbing shoulders with other blind people to understand that dreams can come true. Little by little as I journeyed through the life of raising children, working and experiencing somewhere along the line confidence grew and pushed me to courageously step forth and say that I still wanted to learn that science stuff.

 Combining my love for nature, my love for working with blind children, and my still great curiosity in the life sciences, I once again turned onto a new path in the journey of my life. I enrolled in the University of Michigan Dearborn with an Environmental Studies major and a naturalist focus.

 I did have a struggle convincing faculty that I would be safe in the chemistry lab. There was a big difference this time around. I was determined to get into that class and follow my dreams. I was ecstatic when I completed that lab two years ago. This week I finished my first biology lab. I had a wonderful teacher who did not question whether I could do the lab, but just questioned how together we would get the job done. My professor, Dr. Julia Kelly, went out of her way to find models of specimuns that others were looking at under the microscope. She did not let me get out of anything and even better I did not want to miss any thing that I could learn. As I stated in the beginning, this week we dissected a baby pig. I was determined to get my hands in there and learn all that I could. However, my lab partners were reluctant to let me use the sharp cutting instruments. I protested and the professor told them that I could do some of the dissecting and I felt a thrill of victory.

 The victory was on two counts. First of all the professor believed in my abilities to participate fully in the class. Secondly and much more important was my belief in myself to push forward for equal involvement and participation. When I felt my courage wavoring I remembered the many blind people that have poured into my life and helped enstill the confidence that I needed to insist upon doing my part.

 I hope you have a glimpse of why completing this biology lab has been so important to me. Determination and confidence have led me down this path and I will never go back to the times of letting others reroute my dreams. This time I have taken the road less traveled and it has made all the difference.