In pre-medieval Europe a monk, traveling the countryside on a missionary pilgrimage, found a starving young boy wandering through his burned-out village in a daze, orphaned after the village had been destroyed by a band of marauders. The only thing he carried was a piece of fabric from his mother’s clothes that had torn off in his hand as she was taken away by one of the invaders on horseback.

Delivering him to the monastery, the monk set about teaching him to read and write. He schooled the boy in literature, history, and scientific thought, and trained him in the skills of debate and negotiation. The boy learned much and grew eager to know more of the world.

When he left the monastery he traveled to the royal city and became squire to a knight, who trained him in horsemanship, swordsmanship, and the subtleties of court society. After several years, and no longer a boy, the young man’s talents were brought to the notice of the King, who made him an advisor to the royal court.

Contemplating his life’s journey one day, he felt that he must acknowledge the support of his mentors. He took some of the fabric from his mother’s dress, which he had always carried with him, some of the wool from his monastic robes, and some of the silk tunic he now wore. With this he fashioned two cloth stoles, embroidered with the runic symbol of his village, the crest of the knight he had served, and the emblem of the royal court. He then presented these stoles to the monk and the knight, along with letters proclaiming his gratitude. Eventually, he became a widely respected royal ambassador, but he never forgot the kindness and generosity which had enabled him to achieve his success.

It became a tradition that spread throughout the country and beyond. The stole became a symbol of achievement for students in all faculties, with varying colors and emblems symbolizing different levels of study and institutions. Today, the stole of gratitude is worn by a graduating student during the commencement ceremony as a symbol of their academic achievement and presented with honor to those who provided aid and support in reaching their goal.

The stole is worn during the commencement ceremony. After the ceremony the new graduate presents the stole to someone who provided extraordinary help or support, i.e. parents, relatives, or mentors who have helped with wisdom, words of support, or with financial assistance. Immediately after graduation, the graduate may take the stole from around his/her neck and place it around the neck of the recipient, along with words of thanks. Recipients will never forget the kindness inherent in the recognition and sentimental feelings connected with being presented the Stole of Gratitude.

Stoles of Gratitude may be decorated. Presenters often write a few words of love and appreciation on the back of the stole using a permanent, fine tipped marker. Friends and family of the graduate may autograph the front or back. The stole of Gratitude is a lasting symbol of love, appreciation, and academic accomplishment.