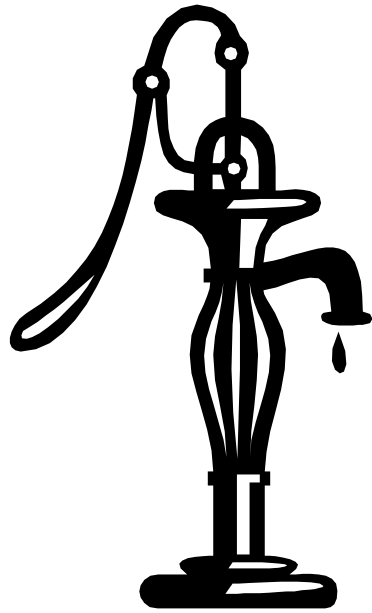


Learning





LEARNING

Learning

They said that I could not learn. They almost made me believe it, too.

Learning

But I know that learning is a part of my life. And without learning I cannot go through.

Learning

A greater confidence I've now gained, full of knowledge. I never knew that with faith in myself and trusting God above there is nothing that I cannot do.

Learning

Now with this new knowledge, I can go around the world through books. Now I can read and write.

Look out success!

Gloria Turner

STUDENT

Lazy Young

Teaching Learning Reading

Practical Diligent

Pupil

Słowomiv Chmielewski

HOW THE GED CHANGED MY LIFE

The GED program has given me the strength and courage to follow my dreams. The program has increased my confidence level, and it has given me a strong sense of self. I know now I can reach my ultimate goal. Today, I am a better person, mother, and grandmother. I feel I can be a mentor to those who are going through issues and problems similar to those I have gone through because I have a better understanding of me. I realize now that I am very fortunate to have the love of my family and teachers who are helping me at this point in my life. And I am very blessed to have such wonderful people in my life to encourage me to fulfill my dreams.

The GED program is a Godsend to me. All one needs to do is just enter the classroom door. When I took that first step, the world unfolded. And even though it may not seem like much to some, it was a beginning to me. I felt that many doors opened up for me, which I believed were closed before.

Carol Radcliff

EXAM ANTICIPATION

1/5/02 Saturday 4:50 a.m.

The night is quiet except for a few modern sounds. The sound of the TV, barely audible; the ticking of the clock; the clicking of the furnace; in the distance, a car passing through town on a main street. Most are sleeping. I lie awake, waiting. It has been two weeks since the exam. Did I pass all the subjects? The Science was the hardest. Was my knowledge correct? Did I guess right on the unknown?

As each day nears, the mailbox takes on a life of its own. Its presence is well known on a continual basis. It seems bigger, brighter, louder. Will it be the bearer of great tidings? Will it bring bad news, slowing down the progress of my goals?

I have procrastinated for 23 years. I finally took my GED exam. It didn't bother me all those years. I just pushed it from my mind, "I'll do it later." Later is 23 years to me.

Now I have waited for two short weeks, and they feel longer than 23 years. What is the ultimate outcome: did I, didn't I? The agony of wonder is much worse than actually taking the test.

If I didn't make it, I will start over and try again. I will not wait 23 years. I will do it now. For now is where I live. Eventually now will be career school. Then my career.

From now on my goals don't sit on a shelf in the back of my mind. I keep them dusted and shining with hope of accomplishing them. For what I do now is important. Not yesterday or tomorrow, but NOW.

Now, I wonder as I wait -- where is my exam? On a desk, in a stack, in a mail room, on someone's pile they'll get to someday? Only 12 more hours. I can check the mailbox again. The mailbox will speak to me. "Yes, I deliver what you want" or "No, I do not have it." When finally it appears, the envelope will be a breath of anxiety. "Is it thick or thin?" I must stare at it. I must open it.

Yet, I still wait.

Kathleen Fields

TO PROJECT: LEARN

I have been coming here to Project: LEARN for some time now.

Each time I come it is in my heart and soul to learn what I can. I am always trying to get something out of every setting. In every class I try to take home something, even if it's only one word. I learned from my father's farm you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him or her drink the water.

So what I am trying to say is there is plenty of water at Project: LEARN if you want to drink it.

Russell Walker

AUTUMN THE APPLE'S FIRST WEEK
AT A NEW SCHOOL

A Fantasy about Food

Today was Autumn the Apple's first day at school. She had just changed schools, and now she had to make new friends. Autumn the Apple sat at her desk wishing she was back in Farmland with her old friend, Mary the Mushroom. While Autumn the Apple was sitting at her desk, Brittany the Broccoli Head came up to her and asked her if she could sit next to her. Of course, Autumn the Apple said yes.

Over the next couple of days, Brittany the Broccoli Head and Autumn the Apple became really good friends. The next morning, the teacher came into the classroom and said, "Class, we have a new student today." In walked Mary the Mushroom, Autumn the Apple's friend from Farmland.

Boy, you should have seen Autumn the Apple's face light up as bright as a star in the sky! They both gave each other a really big hug. Now Autumn the Apple is really happy; she has her two best friends, Mary the Mushroom and Brittany the Broccoli Head, and they all lived happily ever after.

(Teacher's note: This story was written for the writer's preschool daughter, as part of a unit on nutrition.)

Melinda Barnes

MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

When I was 19, I enrolled in a GED class called Even Start, which is a family education program. Even Start is for parents who need their GED or need to "freshen-up" their skills and who have a child under the age of 7. The program also includes parenting skills along with academic studies. I took the GED test in May 2001, when I was 20, but was just shy of passing it.

In November 2001, I took the test again and waited for six weeks for the results to come; those six weeks felt like an eternity. When I did receive the results, my mother would not let me read it. She read the diploma aloud, and I got up from where I was sitting and read it myself. I was shocked when I read it. I thought I would never get my diploma. I did.

Three days later, when I went to school, I asked my teacher, Lory, if she wanted to make a copy of my diploma. She said, "Of course, Brandi." The next day, my teachers and the coordinator of Even Start gave me a card, a cake, and a balloon that said "Congratulations." I was so embarrassed; my face was so red.

Now I am going to further my education by becoming a cosmetologist, my ultimate dream. No matter what people think of me, I can and will achieve my dreams and make them real. Finally, I am now a graduate. I am so pleased with myself.

Brandi Murphy

THE CAREGIVER

I walk to the mailbox again today, hoping that when I open it I'll find the results of my GED test and find that I have passed. As soon as I get the results, I will enroll in the course, cosmetology, something I've always wanted to do. Now, finally I am taking the opportunity I've always hoped for.

As I think back over my life, I've always taken care of everyone else but myself. I was raised on a sharecropper's farm where they grew cotton, soybeans, and corn. That was back when everything was done by hand in the fields. Everyone in the family had to work in the fields to earn a meager living. After working hard all day, we would go home and feed the chickens, milk the cows, and slop the pigs. After that was done, we carried in water for the night and the next day. One of the adults had to chop the firewood. We children had to carry the firewood into the house because we cooked all of our meals on a wood cook-stove. After supper, Janice and I would wash the dishes. We were all dead tired after such a long day of work and chores.

We all lived in this big, old house. At one time it had been a schoolhouse. Now it housed our family of fifteen people that included parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings.

When I was about five and a half years old, my mother, Sally, died of cancer. It was the saddest day of my life. I couldn't believe my mother was gone. My heart longed for her hugs and kisses, the comfort of being held in her lap, and the smell of her hair.

It wasn't long after mother died, that Dad remarried a woman named Sue. She had a little girl who was too little for me to play with, although I was big enough to help take care of her.

Over time, Dad and Sue kept having children, until there were six of us. Because I was the oldest, I had to take care of them all of the time: bathe them, change their diapers,

and wash their clothes on an old rub board. I also had to play with them, keep them happy, and out of Sue's way. Sue didn't like having so many children. I thought when Dad remarried, I'd have a new mother. Dad had a new wife, but Sue never wanted to be a mother to me. If it hadn't been for my Grandmother Rosie, who gave me lots of love and attention while I was growing up, I would not have experienced unconditional love from an adult. My grandmother was there for me all of her life until she passed away. That was long after I married and had children of my own. It was Grandmother who taught me the things I needed to know, to become an adult.

By now my parents had eight children and the workload just kept increasing. I loved my sisters and brothers, but I didn't like taking care of them all of the time. There was never any time for myself. Dad wouldn't let me go anywhere or do things with kids my own age.

Dad didn't believe in us kids going to school very much either. Dad never went to school at all, so he believed that if he got by without it, so could we. He kept us out of school so much that we couldn't pass from one grade to the next. I failed third and fourth grades, because Dad kept us out of school too many days in order for us to pass. There was one whole year we didn't go to school at all. This put me three years behind; I was now three years older than all my classmates. When I finally entered the eighth grade, I was almost sixteen.

Then I did a stupid thing with some friends at school. We all decided to skip school for the day and play hooky. We didn't do anything bad; we just hung out together and talked about teenage stuff. When we went back to school to catch the bus home, we all got caught and we all got expelled for two months. After that, Dad wouldn't let me go back to school at all. Since I was sixteen then, the law couldn't make him do it.

I really felt trapped now! Things at home had been bad enough before. Now that I couldn't go to school

anymore, I felt like there wasn't any hope for me to get the education I wanted so much. Now that I had to be at home all the time, I never got to see or talk to kids my own age. I had to find a way to get out!

One day while my parents were at work my cousin, Louise, and her boyfriend drove out to our house. They brought a guy with them who wanted to meet me; he paid a lot of attention to me that day, attention I was starved for. Within a month we were married.

We stayed with my parents for two weeks while we looked for a place of our own. I was giving the house a good cleaning, doing the laundry, and putting the clothes away. When I got to Dad's room and opened the dresser drawer to put his things away, I saw a letter addressed to me. This was a letter I had not seen before; it was from a boarding school that I had applied to, with help from Aunt Lola. I was to work part-time to pay for my room and board and Aunt Lola would pay for the rest of my school expenses. It said that I had been accepted and how and when to register for school. My heart sank! I was furious at Dad for keeping this letter from me. I didn't love Jerry, a man I barely knew. I did it just to get away from home. I couldn't believe it! Once again Dad had stolen my education from me. Had I seen the letter in time, I would not have gotten married.

Of course the marriage didn't last; the only good thing about it was my three beautiful children, two girls and a boy. Eventually I did meet someone that I loved and who loved me in return. He adopted the children, and now we are a family.

Over the years we had our ups and downs, but we always found positive ways to resolve our differences. Then my mother-in-law became terminally ill and required full time care. She refused to go into hospice care. What she wanted was to stay with us and be where we could take care of her with comfort and support. Once again, I became the primary caregiver because she wasn't able to do anything for herself, and she wanted only me to do things for her. She was in great

pain and said that I was real gentle with her. Five months later she died at home like she wanted.

Time passed. Our children were all grown-up and on their own now. Our oldest daughter had married and divorced several times. Her husband at the time became physically abusive to her children, and he went to jail over it. The state got involved with their case and wanted to put the children into foster care. Our daughter asked my husband and me to take the children, so we went to court and got legal custody. Once again, I became the caregiver for someone else's responsibilities. When would it be my turn?

Then one day I realized the only person standing in my way was me. I now had the time and the opportunity to go back to school. All I had to do was take that first step, and I did just that. I enrolled in a class to study for my GED. It felt really good to be in school again. The teachers inspired me to keep going and not give up. I studied hard every day. I finally took the GED test; now I'm just waiting for the results.

I walk to the mailbox again today! Would this be the day? I reached in and took out the stack of mail looking for that one special envelope that would give me the answer I wanted. Yes, it came! I opened the letter and inside was my diploma. I had passed the test. Now it is my time!

Barbara S. Hall