

Beginning to Succeed

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

Each time when I hold my driver's license in my hand, I feel happiness, gladness, even pride. I feel self-confident because I did it – I learned to drive, and that was an accomplishment!

A few years ago circumstances occurred that my husband and I remained at home alone because our children were living away from home for a few years. My husband was sick and all of his care, not only indoors but outdoors too, fell upon me.

I understood that we had to have our own private transportation. This was necessary to be independent from other people and feel free. My husband's health did not allow him to drive. Only I could solve this problem!

For American people (even women) this is not a big problem. They start to drive from sixteen and continue until ninety and even more. For me, at my age, it was a problem bigger than global warming for earth, because in my life I had never held a steering wheel. I understood that I didn't have another chance and I believed in myself. I decided I could do it.

I received my driver's license three months later. Now I have been driving for almost eight years. Oh yes, I was sixty-seven years old when I started to drive!

~ Ragiye Ibragimova

LEARNING TO OVERCOME MY DISABILITY SO I CAN BE FREE TO FLY

I did not know I had a learning disability until I started second grade. Teachers tried to help me understand addition and subtraction, but the higher the numbers went, the more I wanted to stop or shut down. I would get up and go over and listen to books on tape instead of working on math. In reading and spelling, I would say or write the word “dad” instead of “father,” which was the right word. Again, I would go listen to books.

“Angela has lots of problems with her work,” my teacher said to my mom. “She can’t focus because when she is not looking at me. Angela is lost, but if she is looking at me, she can stay on task.” The teacher continued, “I feel strongly that she is reading my lips; she needs to have her ears checked out.”

My mom said, “Angela, you need your ears tested by a specialist.” I needed to have tubes in my ears. My mom and I went to Children’s Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, to have my surgery. In one week I was back in school, and I was clearly hearing my teacher and classmates for the first time.

I just cannot explain how difficult having this learning disability was. I thought fixing my ear would fix my disability, but it did not. The next year, they put me in a special classroom. I was upset at the world, so I said to myself, “I give up on learning; I am too set in my ways.” It was like saying, “How do you teach an old dog new tricks?”

Years went by. I became shy around people and too nervous to say a word. I was afraid of making a mistake and having classmates laugh at me. I was like this until my husband came along and said it was okay to talk and to speak

my mind. Once when thinking back, he said to me, "I wish I had never encouraged you to talk and speak your mind because now you never shut up!" We both laughed.

We started a family together, and it was wonderful until my children started West School in Lancaster. While they were in kindergarten through second grade I was okay, but once they were in third grade I had to learn all over again. I attended the literacy class at the library where I learned that Helen Keller had a different disability. She needed someone to teach her to care about herself; then she started to learn. She knew she had to tell her story to other people because people with disabilities can learn if they have someone to care about them. I started GED class, and I have caring people around me, so I will not give up.

Now I have three teenagers, no husband, and one dog. I know now I can make it through anything. Teaching myself to care about my disability is hard because I am the hardest person I have to prove my worth to. To love yourself is to care about your hopes, dreams, and future.

My teachers help me understand what my disability is and how to work around it so I can learn. Teaching people without a disability is easy, but teaching people with a disability is not. Teaching a person with a disability is not teaching only subjects like reading, math, and social studies. It is also teaching them to care about the person inside the body like Helen Keller's teacher did. To care, to teach, is an awesome gift to give. My teachers are teaching me to understand my disability and to appreciate my gifts so I can be free.

~ Angela Keller

MY LIFE

When I was a youngster growing up I used to think that I had a very loving family that had not a problem in the world. My mother and father both worked and provided the best life that they could to me and my 2 brothers and sister. We always got what my parents could afford, but sometimes it wasn't exactly what we wanted.

I can remember one Christmas I wanted a bike. It was a bike that all the kids at school were talking about. It was called a SIGMA. It was white and gray with a free spinning sprocket. It had handle-grip brakes and mag wheels! I wanted that bike so bad, but I got a Huffy instead. I was upset, but after about 10 minutes I got over it, went outside, and was on that bike all day long.

By the time I was 13, I started to see changes with my mother and father. They were not as happy as I remembered when I was young. There was not a lot of family time anymore. We stayed at home a lot, and it was quiet in the house. When we played games like red light/green light, my mother and father would sometimes play with us, but all that had stopped. My father stayed in the backyard a lot working on everything he could get his hands on, and we started to spend a lot more time at Grandma's house.

Well, eventually they got a divorce, my father moved out, and we moved in with my grandmother. We lived with her for about two years and then my mother got an apartment around the corner. The years after that were kind of rough on my mother. She was raising four kids in a one-bedroom apartment.

My mother was a very laid back person. She did not complain a lot and was not big on discipline. She worked at a nursing home and went to school at night so she could be a nurse. I don't think she made the money that she wanted to, but it got us by.

One time for my birthday, when I was 15 or 16, I asked for a stereo. I was thinking she was going to buy me a small, hand-held boombox, but to my surprise she went out and got me a stereo with a CD player, tape player, and a record player, all in one. It also came with two speakers and a sub woofer for more bass. I think that was the best thing that happened since my mother and father had split up.

The hardest thing about that time was that I had a lot of questions that I did not want to ask my mother about things that I would hear from my friends about girls and sports. I wanted to play football, but I wanted my father to take me to the Boys & Girls Club and practice with me like all of my friends' fathers did.

I can remember when I was 16 or 17, my father called one day. I picked up the phone and said "hello" and he said he was going to come and pick me and my brothers and sister up for the weekend. He had moved to an apartment complex with a swimming pool, so we went swimming all that weekend. It was like everything was back to normal for the weekend. We were a family again, and we had no worries. My dad was back in the picture, and we talked to him a lot more often, but with us not living in the same house things were still different.

My brother and I got older and started spending a lot of time outside in the neighborhood. As we got older, our friends started to go to jail because they would get in trouble with the police.

My brother got caught one day and he went to jail for about two years. That was about the time I was done with selling drugs so I got a job at McDonald's. I think I was the only one on my street at the time that did not go to jail. I think I was the lucky one.

Well, after that, I dropped out of school and worked. I have had a lot of jobs from restaurants to being a janitor. All of those jobs were labor jobs with bosses saying "Do this and do that." I kept thinking that there had to be a better way of life for me.

When I started the job I have now, in shipping and handling, I thought it was a very good job. But after working there for three years, I began to look at my life and want more.

Sometimes at work, people from the front office bring in pictures of their new house or their new car and I always wondered how they got in the position to be able to have those things and not work so hard. I decided that I wanted to be able to go to work without the physical labor and get paid for what I know mentally. I think that can happen for me if I get focused on something and then stick to it. That is where I am today. I want to get my GED and go to college or get some kind of continuing education. I feel that if I can better myself by going back to school I can't be limited in the workplace. I have come to the conclusion that education is the key, and with it I will have more doors open. I want to be someone that was here for a purpose and did something good with my life.

~ *Jamiean Ruffin*

FULFILLING MY GOAL

I have been in a constant struggle with myself my entire life. I have always tried to improve everything. Nothing was ever good enough until it was perfect. Now I am ready again for that thinking, and I am going to push myself into the next chapter of my life. I am not going to stop until I am content with myself and have become who I know I am capable of being.

Many times in my childhood I pushed myself to be better and do more than what was expected of me. In school and at home, I always felt like I was in competition with myself. I felt that I had to be perfect in school and always be the best in the class. At home I felt that I had to keep up the same stamina to keep my parents proud of me. I always felt that there was so much more expected out of me because I was the brain of the family. My parents were always so proud of me, but it was always hard to feel proud of myself because I always felt that it was unfair to my sisters who didn't accomplish as much as I did.

I always felt that the world thought so highly of me. It was hard sometimes to try to be perfect. My teachers and parents always thought that I would be the one to succeed and do great things with my life. I was on the right track my entire life. I not only accomplished everything I attempted, but I mastered it and was the best at it. I was always my own biggest competitor. It was hard trying to keep everyone proud of me all of the time. The stress and pressure sometimes was almost too much to handle. I did sports and different activities just as something else to master. Things really started becoming too easy for me.

Then it happened: the time came when I felt that I had let everyone down. I had brought failure to everyone

that had put so much time and effort into my success. I felt that I failed myself and everything that I worked for my entire life. Life then became an unknown. I didn't finish high school, and I didn't get my diploma. That was the very first time in my life that I failed and didn't complete something. Due to all of the stress and pressure that I felt growing up to be perfect, I finally cracked. I wanted to be more normal and party. I wanted to rebel and show that I was a child, that I too could make mistakes. I ended up getting pregnant at 17 and becoming a mother by 18. I thought that my life was over and that I would never be anything because I was a failure.

Failure to complete one major thing in my life helped me to succeed in another. I became a mother. I devoted my life and time to my child. Everything that I had and knew I put into my daughter. I found love, and that was greater than any judgment or anything anyone could say or do to me. I realized that this was my life, and I embraced it. True happiness had entered my life for the very first time. She was someone who couldn't judge me for not being perfect, but rather someone who loved me for my flaws. The one thing that I once saw in my life as a failure really was just success wrapped in a different way – a way I never expected or thought I was ready for.

Now I am ready for something else in my life: to go back and complete what I started a few years back. I want to finally complete school and get my GED, to show myself and my daughter that I am still not a failure. I want to prove that I can still do it. I just needed to take time for the direction my life led me. I have spent the past six years raising my daughter and realizing the greater part of life. It is time for me now to repay her by educating myself and doing better for my family. She has given me confidence to make me want to be better.

Life doesn't always take you in the direction that you expect. It doesn't always lead you in the easiest way. The key to success is being able to handle what life gives you. Not to despair. To keep your head up and know that there is always tomorrow to take you into the future.

~ *Angela R. Nicolson*

A NEW CHAPTER

An important goal I would like to achieve in the next few years would be to develop a career and be an example to my family.

I am from a big family and, unfortunately, a highly under-educated one. I was never shown an example of anyone who worked “smarter not harder.” The women in my life have never had lives outside the home. None graduated from high school, learned to drive cars, or even had a job once their children came along. For whatever reason, it’s become a legacy to the women in my family not to enjoy life, just to live it.

When my thirtieth birthday was looming, I began to realize that I had a whole lot of time left to live. By choosing not to have a litter of children, I didn’t have to spread myself out. There was still a chance for me to end the cycle. I realized I could help everyone in my life just by helping myself.

I took a driving lesson two months before my birthday. I passed my driving test two weeks later. My sisters passed their driving tests soon after. By the end of the summer, I had inspired, encouraged, and taught several of the women in my life to drive.

It was then that I realized that without an example, I had never had anyone to aspire to be like.

Now that some of my family had decided to make an example of me, I had to move forward for all of us. I joined the ABLE class and made it a point to let all of my siblings know how exciting it was. I hoped that they would follow me. I decided that college was the next logical step. I passed

my GED test in December, 2006, and now I'm going to be a freshman at the University of Cincinnati. My sister has joined me in my educational venture; she is now enrolled in a community college.

Together, we are making a new path for those in our lives to follow. My hope is that more of my family will join me and help me to inspire their children and my children. I have started a new chapter for our family, and, by rewriting a few pages, I know it can be a great story.

~ Lianna Bramer

STRIVING FOR SUCCESS

My name is Kim, and I was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio. I had a learning disability in school and had a hard time. I have always wanted to improve myself in education.

When I was young, I always wrote my feelings down on paper. That is how I got myself through school. I also took up sign language, which became helpful when I went through some hearing loss. There were bullies in school that would pick on my speech. I knew I was slower than others, but they made me feel that I couldn't accomplish anything. I had to take speech therapy to improve the way I talked. This helped me feel a little better, but I still had low self-esteem.

I graduated from Mt. Healthy High School with a diploma in 1980. My junior and senior years, I attended a vocational school and studied secretarial skills. After I graduated, I went on to other training programs. I trained at Goodwill and learned factory skills. From there, I entered Jewish Vocational Services and worked in a factory packing Proctor & Gamble's products. I boxed the products and labeled them for shipping.

From there, I did odd jobs that included babysitting for both babies and senior citizens. I also worked in retail stores as a sales clerk and stock clerk. I am currently employed with Pierre Foods and have been for the past five years. I attend their Learning Center to better my math and open the door for better opportunities in the plant. I am very proud of myself because I recently got a promotion; I am now a Line Coordinator. I have been given many new responsibilities.

My learning disability has NOT held me back. I continue to strive for success. I've grown each and every day, and my self esteem has improved.

~ *Kim Wilson*

KEEP PUSHING

My mother believed in me more than I did.
I dropped out of school and had me a kid.

She looked out for me. She wanted the best.
I sort of gave up. I wanted to rest.

I was wasting my life. I was going nowhere.
She pushed me to want. She pushed me to care.
She pushed me and pushed me to go back to school.
I had to get up. I had to enroll.

Now I got my diploma and I'm going to college!
Where would I be without mom and her knowledge?

~ Aaron Keffer