

## Opening the Door is the Hardest Part

### Steps to Completing Your Education

As a child, April Walls had the goal of serving in the army. During her teenage years, it became apparent that her service would be to her family and her community, rather than in the military.

April was taking 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade classes together in an effort to graduate early because of her pregnancy. She became a single mother at age 15, moved out of her parents' home, and found employment to support herself and her son. The demands of motherhood, keeping up with schoolwork, and working not just one, but two jobs, led to the difficult decision to quit school. Even though she abandoned her pursuit of education for a time, she always knew that she needed and wanted to complete this goal, and to go even further.

Always looking for a better situation, April's work included cooking in restaurants and working in convenience stores and a sewing factory. Her son's paternal grandmother took care of him while April worked. She was struck by a truck while working at a road construction company and was hurt to the extent that she could no longer do that type of work. An important event at this time in her life was meeting her husband. His mother was disabled, and April thought she might like to do CNA work. After receiving her CNA, she tried that for a time, but her back injury prevented her from being able to do that job on a regular basis.

This led to a job at United Chem-con in North Carolina, doing custodial and cafeteria work. She was laid off that job due to jobs going overseas. She had begun adult education classes two weeks before the layoff, and received her GED® certificate in 2013, only 26 days after being laid off. She feels that going to classes helped her with confidence. She decided to take the entire test in one day and passed everything.

Her adult education teacher in Grayson County, Missy Plummer, says, "April is a very hardworking, persistent individual. If she was having trouble with anything, she would review it repeatedly until she was sure that she understood it. I remember her going through the math calculator workbook numerous times before she actually took the test. I tried to be supportive of everything that she did." Missy taught April's son, now 21, when he was in elementary school at Grayson Highlands School. April is appreciative of the help she received. "Missy helped me a lot, and the math calculator booklet helped greatly. She took time for one on one; anything you thought you needed help with, she would offer help. Going to classes helped her with confidence."

April recalls studying for the test, saying, "I had forgotten much of the math but it came back with study. I always worried about the essay; everybody complained about how hard the essay was. That is what scared me the most. It was not as hard as what people had said. I wish I had done it earlier."

She also studied in the adult education program at Wilkes Community College, reapplied for her CNA license which had lapsed, and also earned her phlebotomy license.

The Career Readiness Certificate was another important achievement for her. This certificate indicates to employers that a person has met standards of achievement in workplace skills such as reading for information, locating information, and applied mathematics. April has proudly included that in her portfolio so that all her important documents will be organized when applying for a job.

April believes that accomplishing her goals is making a tremendous difference in her life. "It has changed me in that I intend to get a lot more done than scrubbing toilets. I'll now be able to get the job I want. Instead of just going to work, I'm going to be happy to be there, enjoying what I am doing."

She is now in LPN training at Smyth County Technical Center in a class for high school and adult students. She currently works part-time in home health care. She now takes care of her 82-year-old father-in-law in addition to her work duties. He lives on his own and she does housekeeping and cooking, administers his medicine, and helps him continue to be as active as he can.

She has now been married for 11 years. Her son is 21, and is on his own. Her 3 nephews, one age 9 and twins age 8 often visit on weekends. Fun activities for her include 4 wheel riding and games and hiking in the Grayson Highlands Park.

As encouragement to others, April says, "It is possible. It might take a while to get there but it is possible if you're willing. Missy Plummer said that the hardest thing about the program was just coming through the door and getting started. I knew I had to do it."

April summarizes her struggles to earn a living, rear her son, and pursue her education by saying, "It's been hard, but I'm glad I did it. It was well worth it; it made me tougher."

Submitted by: Sharon Hutchinson

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