

Where should I begin? At this stage in my life elementary school is pretty much a blur or it is at least blended together with my children's experiences. And as far as junior high school goes well academics were not at the top of my list. I was what most people back in the day would have referred to as a "social butterfly". I was a cheerleader and a gymnast; I played volleyball, softball, ran track and played soccer. The closest thing I had ever thought of as a career choice in Junior high was that I would someday be a Dallas Cowboy cheerleader. How cool would that be? Well that certainly didn't require any further education, not from a college anyway. Unfortunately Mother Nature did not see that career choice for me, as I was not blessed with the right equipment to further my career as a cheerleader.

So, off to high school I go, still no goals in sight but it is just high school right? Well that's at least what I thought. I came from a family where nobody had attended college and as far as my parents were concerned college was only a place to "drink and well, be merry". I never even considered the fact that I could go to college. My father started working for General Motors when he was 18 years old. My mother and he married right after she graduated from high school. A year later their first child came followed by three others. My mother stayed home and raised us while my father went off to work seven days a week sometimes ten hours per day. We were your average American family.

When I turned 16 I was offered a job as a file clerk in a physician's office. It was a great job I went to work right after school at noon and I worked until five, Monday through Friday. I thought I was doing great. By the time my friends and I had graduated from high school I was offered a full time job as a medical assistant while most of them were going off to college. I was making money and thought things were great. Where I went to high school many children came from families of doctor's lawyers and professional people and there was just no question that their children would be attending college. It was sort of an unwritten rule. I can remember my boyfriend at the time; he was very smart and his father was a surgeon. It was natural to think that he would for sure pursue higher education and the counselors at school pursued him regularly. I was never called to the counselor's office regarding my educational future. I was never guided by anyone and made aware of all the possibilities that were out there for someone like me. At the time it never really bothered me much, I was working and earning a living, of course I was living at home still. I Could not afford to move out on the amount I was earning. In the fall when my friends went off to their fabulous colleges (my boyfriend went to Michigan) I decided to enroll in Mott Community College. It seemed like a logical choice; I could stay working, attend college and have it all.

I started out taking basic courses, it didn't take me long to figure out that nursing would probably be the best path for me. I was already working in medicine anyway, I liked what I was doing and I guess I figured why not. I began taking all my prerequisite courses necessary to be considered for the nursing program. Then I ran into a huge problem. Money, how was I going to quit work and go to school full time and still be able to take care of myself? It just didn't seem possible. Instead I found another job, well actually several. I started coaching high school cheerleading and teaching gymnastics at a local gym. Those two part time jobs took me on a very different journey from school. I loved working with kids and especially in an area that at the time I had a passion for. I worked my way up the ranks of coaching and ended up the Varsity coach of the high school team and I was coaching class I, II, III and IV gymnasts. So by day I worked as a medical assistant and the evenings I spent in the gym coaching. Believe it or not that wasn't quite enough for me, the next summer I took on another part time job weekends only in a clothing store. (I wanted the discount). Needless to say I was pretty busy. So much so that about two months later I came down with a severe case of Mononucleosis and was hospitalized for a week (Insurance was so different back then).

Obviously something had to give. I eventually gave up my part time clothing gig along with the discount and continued working for the doctor's office and coaching. By the time my friends started returning from college they were doing internships and preparing for their future careers and I realized I really wasn't going anywhere. I decided to go back to school with the money I had saved and give it another go. I finished all my prerequisites for nursing and I was ready. But wait, another road block would land in my path; there was a five year waiting list to enter the nursing program. Well I must say this posed quite a problem for me. Five years and they wanted me to remain an active student while I waited. Who had that kind of time or money to do? I pondered my choices for a few days and went back to see the counselor. I asked "is there anything that I can do with all these allied health classes besides nursing"? Low and behold a career in dental hygiene. I can honestly tell you dentistry never even crossed my mind, I hated the dentist, who didn't? I thought for a brief moment and when I was told they make somewhere between \$25 and \$30/per hour with no weekends or holidays I asked "where do I sign"?

I had to give up my job as a medical assistant, the schedules just didn't work. So I went out and promptly found myself a job working in the hospital, I figured why not they have three shifts surely I could work around school and work. After three months working in the hospital I met my husband. He was a resident at the time, we hit it off instantly. I gave up my gymnastics coaching and a year later left the cheerleading job behind as well. I was married in July with one year of clinicals left. By the following May I completed my clinical training, took my multiple board test and by July I became a Registered Dental Hygienist.

I began searching for work in my new chosen career and found two part time jobs in separate offices. I really liked what I was doing and I felt like I had actually accomplished something. A few years later I had children, reduced my work down to part time and eventually decided to stay home full time and raise my children. Of course I believed nobody could do it as well as me and I was only working because I liked it, I no longer had to work to survive.

For many years I was content, it was only every once in awhile when that awkward occasion would arise and we would find ourselves in a group of people all conversing about where they went to college. I used to be so embarrassed that I had only gone to community college and I never went on to complete my degree. I kept telling myself that an associate's degree was good enough for the work I was doing and it was, but it wasn't enough for me, I wanted more. Now I can tell you I am not somebody who loved school so to continue on had to be quick and painless. I searched and searched online for something that would lead me into teaching without losing the credits I had and without taking the next four years of my life to complete. Then it finally hit me I found Ferris State University home of the "promoted" program. I am sure most of you have never heard of this but it seemed so simple. If you had an associate's degree in a technical field and you were interested in teaching this was definitely the career path for you. It was 30 credits online totally and only 1 year long. Surely I could handle a year. I instantly applied and I was accepted along with 6 other cohorts. Together we blindly entered into a world of higher education. We came from all different fields and I was for sure the odd man out. Everyone else had a skill they could teach at a skill center. My degree you actually needed a community college so I was never sure how it would work. At the time I had never really thought it through because I was for sure the professors at Ferris had and I thought if Ferris was going to let me in then why not take the opportunity. Whoa that was a mistake. Nobody at Ferris had ever even heard of us, I mean there was a whole 7 of us how could they have not? Needless to say they had no idea who we were or how we all arrived, but we were there and we were all aiming for the same goal. We all wanted to become teachers and start influencing the youth of America.

I signed up for my online classes along with my other cohorts and it was a great year. We all had each other to lean on for all of our classes and since we had done a two week stay on campus right before we began our program we all had faces to go along with our online names. This was truly the perfect fit for me. In that same year however, I had some life altering changes occur which forced me to have to return to work. Someone was watching out for me because I had found the perfect job, it was part time 52 weeks as a dental hygienist working in the Genesee County Head Start Program. The job began as school began and when I finished school and had to student teach my 52 weeks would be over. Perfect! Or that is how it was supposed to go but that's not

quite how it went. As the year came to an end each of us had to do an exit interview. No big deal right? We all took the classes necessary to move on and now here we were ready to graduate. But wait I can't graduate, I am missing some key educational experiences. At my interview I had been informed that I am short at least 6 general education classes and I would need to finish those and I would be allowed to graduate. So here I was so close and yet so far. Ugh! Back to school what a dreadful feeling walking out of Mary Clines office that day. But it was going to be okay I had come this far, it was too late to quit now. I also received some good news at the same time. My boss at Head Start thought I was a valuable asset to the program and they extended my grant for another year. Whew breathing room, I once again formulated a plan and thought I will take my general education classes online, continue to work and when the next year runs out I will student teach. Sounds like a plan until life gets in the way. My marriage was coming to a destructible end; I had a son who was struggling with school, drugs and many other issues and a daughter who was athletically gifted and wanted to pursue travel volleyball and competitive dance. I had no time to student teach and taking care of 2 teenagers alone was exhausting. I'm still not quite sure how I did it. Not only did I do it, but I managed to maintain a very nice grade point average. Once again when I could see the light at the end of the tunnel and my bachelors degree would be close at hand, I was hit with yet another roadblock. I have approximately 149 credits and I still could not obtain a bachelors degree because I could not afford to quit my job, which they made permanent last year. Yay! And student teach. With a heavy heart I phoned Mary Cline to remind her of the conversation we had had on my exit interview. I had asked her then if I was not able to student teach right away would I still be able to get my bachelors degree? She told me yes. When I spoke to her this time, very excited that I had completed everything she wrote down for me, I was instantly saddened to find out I would still not have the coveted bachelors degree I so desired. I wish I could learn to stop falling into the same hole.

Another new chapter in my life begins, in walks Roxanne Cullen. We spoke at length on the phone and I had told her at this point in my job I had discovered a whole new world. I work for our most fragile population and with those at greatest risk. To further my career and hopefully go on to work at the National Head Start level I must obtain a bachelors degree. I also explained as a single mom of 2 whose husband not only left the marriage, but left the state as well, I needed to work to care for my children. Once again I am at a crossroads, this time however an unusual door opens for me and Dr. Cullen who I will be forever grateful to has informed me of this wonderful BIS program. Not only would I obtain that precious bachelors degree, but I will be able to do so much more than what I had originally set out to do. I am so excited to be here I can't even begin to express my feelings. There is also hope for me to continue on with my education and possibly get a masters degree in public health.

I love my job and the children I serve and I hope to complete this degree and rise to an even higher level than where I am at now.

P.S. my son is no longer addicted to drugs; he has completed his GED and began college at the age of 17. My daughter made the national volleyball team at Oakland Elite and continues to wow everyone with her stage presence as a dancer. I am very proud of both my children and I know they are proud of what their mom is doing with her education.