



GED Scholars Initiative

Overcoming Obstacles : Marianne's Story

Marianne Jackson's mother always told her, "If you take one step - God will take two." This has been a mantra that Marianne has repeated over and over during her academic career.

Marianne learned to love writing in the ninth grade. She used to write love letters for her girlfriends to the boys they liked. Often, the letters began with "My Dearest Darling." Marianne charged fifty cents a piece for these crafted love letters. It was the first time she realized she could make a little money as a writer.

Marianne grew up one of seven brothers and sisters in a two bedroom, single bathroom home. She tells of the time when the high school she attended performed routine Tuberculosis tine testing as a moment that changed the direction of her life. She experienced swelling at the site of the injection—not because she had contracted Tuberculosis, but because of an allergic reaction to the injection—the doctors and nurses weren't aware of the reaction and administered the standard treatment for a person diagnosed with TB: placement in a sanitarium. As a result, Marianne missed a full year of

school. She missed graduating with her class by 1/8 of a credit. Marianne trained herself and worked in jobs that didn't require the presence of a high school diploma but soon realized others were promoted in job, title and pay over her. There was little she felt she could do about this predicament, she said "I was stuck." For a driven, self-starter, this was not a comfortable place to be. She decided to go to college but knew that wasn't possible until she studied for her GED.

Instead of celebrating her hard work, Marianne kept her GED a secret because of the negative social stigma. The stigma can be an obstacle to non-traditional students who may feel shame or embarrassment that they are not as intelligent as traditional students. In reality, life has gotten in the way. It is an uphill climb to overcome this obstacle. Without an adequate support system and a safe learning environment in which to ask any question or admit a need, a non-traditional student often feels daunted by the challenge. Marianne persevered.

While Marianne attended the Kent Stark Campus, a year passed before she saw a flyer

pinned on a bulletin board for the GED Scholars Initiative. Marianne credits the Initiative for inspiring her to continue her college education. She knew the dropout rate for non-traditional students was high, and she wanted to keep moving forward. The emotional support she received from the Initiative came at a crucial time for her, when she had no other academic support system.

Part of Marianne's transition into college classes was overcoming technology used in the classroom today. "I didn't have sufficient knowledge. When I was schooled for GED years before, technology wasn't as prevalent as these days. When I was a sophomore in college the GED Scholars Initiative helped me a lot. Computer training was now available. Tutors were available to give me the extra support I needed to understand how to operate the computer and how to navigate the programs. Having this help alleviated a lot of stress." Everyone faces unique challenges in chasing after their dreams. Marianne points out, "I missed so much. The GED Initiative helped me. They had all the information I needed. I could go into the GED office, tell them what I was looking for and they could help me. I struggled my first year."

One of the accomplishments for Marianne that has changed her life is applying to and working toward the NEOMFA (Northeast Ohio Master's of Fine Arts) degree in Creative Writing. "I could do what I al-

ways loved to do: read and write. It's unbelievable to get this degree in Writing. If you can read, you can do anything." Marianne graduates in Spring 2009 with her Master's of Fine Arts degree from Kent State University.

Marianne works as an outreach assistant for David Hassler, Outreach Director, at the Wick Poetry Center in Satterfield Hall. Marianne credits Maggie Anderson, Director of the Wick Poetry Center, as an inspiration to her on her journey through Kent State. In the Wick reading room she is surrounded by voices that have been read and heard. It is an inspiring place for her to be as she sits with a stack of student papers to grade. She leans forward with a warmth in her voice and eyes that sparkle, "Everyone has a story and a voice that needs to be heard." There are comments written in the margins of the papers that any aspiring writer looks for before the grade at the end of the paper.

*"If you take one step-
God will take two."
~ Eula Mae Thomas*

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She leans forward and talks of the importance of timing. "Timing is so important—you know when you are in the right place. Doors open when you are in the right place. Opportunities arise that normally wouldn't be there." Obstacles are "just a springboard...without them there is no learning. If you are overwhelmed or feel paralyzed figure out a way through so when you encounter those feelings again, you'll be able to handle it. Fear of failure is a normal reaction to an unfamiliar situation—but do it anyway."

It is this wisdom that helps Marianne as a mentor to a GED

Scholars student. It is just like Marianne to come alongside of another student to return the help and encouragement she has received from the GED Scholars Initiative. Her accomplishments show, by example, the difference between saying and doing. Marianne is the mother to five children, grandmother to nine grandchildren and wouldn't be where she is today without the help of her grandmother, Lessie Mae and her mother, Eula Mae. The journey and the story of her life unfold before her just as her mother said about one footstep followed by two.

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- The GED Scholars Initiative was created by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and is the first of its kind in the nation. The center works with other programs and offices at Kent State University to meet the needs of GED Scholars. The Initiative addresses the needs of students who earned their GED and attend Kent State University. Through research and development, this initiative provides students with support to meet the university's academic standards, complete programs studies, gain technological expertise and become aware of career opportunities.

www.gedscholars.org