

# My Transition from Student to Staff: A Personal Synopsis of My Experience

by Ailene Scott

In the fall of 1993, I entered an adult educational program called W.A.I.T.T. House (We're All In this Together). I decided that I needed to obtain my high school diploma. It was a hard decision for me to make at that time; there was so much that was going on in my life. However, once I decided that it was time for me to further my education I was determined to follow through. From the beginning I had many concerns, one of which was feeling too old to

return to school. Another was being in a classroom setting with many people a

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lot younger than I was. Furthermore, I felt as if I wouldn't know as much as others did.

The night before classes started, I really had a hard time getting myself ready for the first day. I totally psyched myself out, so much so that the next morning I stopped twice to turn around and go back home. When I finally arrived at school, I began to have intense feelings of shame and fear. I was ashamed for returning to the classroom at such a late stage in my life, and I was also afraid of failing. I quickly realized, however, that this class wasn't at all what I imagined it would be.

As I entered the classroom I noticed that there were two other women there who looked to be around my age. I quickly settled down and began to focus on why I was there. Many times along the way it got rough and I wanted to quit. But by August of the next year, I was the first participant in my class to complete the External Diploma Program (EDP). You can't imagine the feeling of pride and self-confidence that I felt.

Finally, the glorious evening of graduation came, and I was even asked to give a speech. I was so very proud of myself for seeing the

program through. That night was very emotional for me. As I stood there giving my speech, my eyes fell on my mother, and I began to think about the day that I dropped out of school and the promise that I made to my mother. I promised her that I would one day return, and I had. It really hit me hard that I had finally made it. I thanked God for giving me the courage to face all of the rough spots that might have prevented me from accomplishing one of my academic goals. I also thanked Him because my Mother was still here to see it. In the middle of my speech I started to cry because I had accomplished something for myself. I had earned my high school diploma.

Two years after I had graduated, I received a letter from W.A.I.T.T. House offering me the opportunity to interview for a staff position. I could not believe that a chance like that was there for me. I went to the interview. While there, I was informed that fourteen others were in the running for this position. I later received a phone call informing me that it was now down to four and I was one of them. I was then called in for another interview. I guess I said all the right things because a few days later I received a call informing me that they were offering me a position. Of course you know this just made my day. It was an honor as well as a privilege to work for the same school that I graduated from.

The first position that I had was assisting the EDP coordinator. I found that a lot of the program participants could really benefit from my experience. Some of them were on the verge of dropping out. I would take them aside and talk to them. I had a great success rate with the ones that I knew about and talked to. I felt really blessed to have been on both sides of the

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table. I remember the first time I was in a staff meeting, and I could not believe that I was sitting at the table with the same people that taught me, sharing strategies with them. It took me a while to get used to that concept.

When I first started working here I was enrolled at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. I started college with the intent of becoming a social worker. After being exposed to this side of education, I changed my major and started taking classes for my new profession. Currently, I am a teacher, tutor and testing coordinator and have been at W.A.I.T.T. House for 6 1/2 years. I would not trade my experience here for anything in this world. I no longer work with EDP students. However, if someone is talking about dropping out, my boss will have them make an appointment to talk with me. One of my major strengths is talking with a participant who didn't pass the test to enter EDP. Sometimes I tutor them for three months. During that time some talk of nothing except quitting. I have to speak to them almost every day. Finally they pass the test and enter EDP. Even while in EDP, some continue

to still talk about quitting. The day that they finish their work, some of them come running to me with tears in their eyes.

One day, all of us were standing in the hall crying as the students were telling me that that they had finished and were graduating. They kept saying to me, "Thank you for all your help!" and "Thank you for taking the time to talk to us." That was truly a precious moment for me. I often reflect on that when things get difficult for me.

Each time I attend one of our graduations, I have much pride in my heart as the participants that I have worked with receive their diplomas. The very first graduation that I attended I cried through most of it. I cried because I felt so honored to have had a hand supporting students, especially when I know the struggles that they endured accomplishing this goal.

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*Ailene Scott is the mother of seven children, four of whom are adopted. In the fall, she intends to go back to the University of Massachusetts in Boston for a BA in Adult Education.*

## Affirmations for Myself

by *Tewania Blacknall*

Today I pray for the insight, knowledge and wisdom to learn from all my mistakes made throughout the years.

I dream of one day counting my blessings, wiping my tears, standing in the midst of adversity, and facing my fears.

I dream of one day being completely in tune with myself and knowing why I cry.

But my ultimate dream is to be in the mainstream and to see my name across the sky.

I dream that one day...and it has yet to come...

that I'll sing my own music and play my own drum.

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*In a letter from prison, Tewania Blacknall says, "Writing poetry is very therapeutic for me. It has allowed me to tap into my inner mystery. My past doesn't define who I am. It's a part of my history."*