

On August 8, 2008, I made one of my life's longest and yet most rewarding journeys. I remember looking out of the window of my home that morning and thinking, "It's a great day to leave the Bay Area." When I decided to attend nursing school, I knew I wanted to explore this country beyond California. So, at 25, I packed my vehicle, left San Francisco, and headed south to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, to attend The University of Southern Mississippi. I was overcome with joy when I started the program. I was determined to be a success. I worked extremely hard in college before leaving the West Coast and had driven from San Francisco to begin studying for my future career. However, it wasn't long before reality settled in. I began to become overwhelmed with the sheer amount of coursework. I struggled to manage the workload that each of my classes demanded. It appeared these classes required more time than I had to give.

According to the USM Nursing Program policies, if a student fails an exam, they are required to meet with the professor of the class. In accordance, I made an appointment with the instructor. I hoped it would allow me to understand the material better and exactly what I was missing to navigate the course successfully. Unfortunately, the meeting took a very different direction. A direction that I was unprepared for. After reviewing my exam, my professor opted to discuss my future and the possibility of my leaving the nursing program altogether. She informed me that I would not complete the program and should return to California. Subsequently, I did not pass the course *Adult Health* and would be required to repeat it the following semester with the same instructor.

In my second attempt, I was more determined than ever. My eyes were set on success, and I was determined to pass the course. However, I continued to show minimal improvement. I did not pass the first two exams, which resulted in a second meeting with the same professor. Verbatim, she gave me the same speech the previous semester. I felt utterly rejected and

withdrew to a very dark place. However, the co-professor of the class saw my potential and determination. She admired my courage in starting this journey and decided to provide me with some much-needed guidance. She took the time to sit down with me and show me the areas where I needed to improve. She also gave me specific instructions on advancing my studies and what I needed to do to pass the class. As a result of her guidance and my determination, I earned a grade of B in the course.

My experiences in nursing school have taught me a great deal about myself, others, and the world around me. Although it had been extremely trying at times, the program has helped me discover my extraordinary strength and enabled me to grow immensely both as a nurse and as a person. I have learned that there are often phases in life when people and events pose formidable challenges; however, with perseverance, you realize that these situations are merely obstacles. If you work diligently, remain confident, and stay focused on your goals, you can overcome these obstacles and achieve anything in life. I have learned that if you believe in yourself, the seemingly impossible dreams are possible, as true success comes from within.

This became evident in April 2017, when I was given the most devastating news. In April 2017, I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer. Terrified does not even describe the thoughts going through my head. My entire life stopped. I was no longer a wife, a mother, or a nurse. I was a breast cancer patient.

I endured aggressive chemotherapy, radiation, and surgeries for the next eleven months. Although I could utilize several resources through my insurance, I could see firsthand those that could not. At this point, I decided to dedicate my recovery to helping those in need. Working alongside my local nursing organization, we provided free mammograms and follow-up care to a dozen women in the Gulfport, MS, area. In addition to screenings, educational seminars were

provided to inform women of the free resources available on our site. We celebrated our success in October with a breast cancer program, where I was honored for my hard work and dedication to this cause.

All these experiences have led me to redirect my focus and strive to obtain a higher educational degree, focusing primarily on Nursing Education. I remain steadfast in my original goal of becoming a nursing instructor at the university level. I genuinely embody being the change I seek to make by ensuring no other nursing student is discouraged or told to “go back home.” I am also determined to found an organization that focuses on education, health wellness, health disparities, and mental health for children and young adults. The agency will be a place where individuals are taught the importance of education and learn about all aspects of a healthy life. I hope my organization will provide a place for children and young adults to know how to holistically care for their bodies, minds, and spirits through medical, mental health, and spiritual services.

Since starting my nursing journey, I have remained committed to achieving my goals. Not even stage four breast cancer could stop me. I am my ancestor's wildest dream, and I will continue to uplift and inspire those around me by providing a safe place for individuals so that they may one day take their education to uplift and inspire those around them.