



Why I Went Back to School

We knew a guy who was always in school. Even after graduating, he pursued higher and higher education. As far as we knew, he had never left school to enter the work world. We called him “Continuing Ed.”

The stories on these pages go in the other direction. They tell of your experiences returning to school — to complete high school, to learn new skills, to know the feeling of holding a degree, to do something for family, neighbors and society in general. It’s remarkable how large a role our state community college system plays in furthering education and pride.

We received a couple hundred of these. Not a single one expressed an ounce of regret. Thanks to everyone who submitted a story. Visit our Web site to see more than we are able to publish here: www.carolinacountry.com

Next month we’ll publish some of the funniest stories you ever heard. And in September, we run a selection of your favorite photos. (Deadline for photos is July 15. If you send digital photos, make sure they are high-resolution, at least 300 dpi, and big enough for printing).

— Michael E.C. Gery

When I began to debate the prospect of returning to college at age 46, I said to my friend and advisor, “But I will be fifty when I finish school.” She replied, “You will be fifty anyway.”

— Bonnie R. Morgan

A place for the displaced

Some would say it was the worst day of their lives. I say it was the beginning of a bright future — my bright future. During 1996, several textile businesses shut their doors. We were given a choice: Relocate to another sewing factory (NOT!) or take a chance and start anew.

With the help of a supportive husband, I chose to start anew.

The Employment Security Commission’s displaced workers program gave me the opportunity to go to Carteret Community College and earn a degree in microcomputer sciences. The challenge of returning to school after so many years was overwhelming. But what a feeling of pride I had on my graduation day. My family watched their mother, wife and daughter — who entered college as a displaced factory worker — graduate college to become a police communicator with the Morehead City Police Department.

I am now going on the sixth year of my career, one that I would never have felt qualified for had it not been for returning to school. For those of you who think there is nothing else out there, take the chance.

Sandra Martine
Newport
Carteret-Craven Electric

To help in medical emergencies

I went back to school at the age of 57 in January of 1994. It was my first month of retirement, and I was determined to find something worthwhile to do. So I enrolled at Sandhills Community College in the emergency medical technician class. I was the oldest student in the class.

I had always wanted to become a member of a volunteer medical squad. My dad was a volunteer when I was a boy, so it runs in the family.

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Robert Hann, EMT.

When I finished the class, I took the North Carolina E.M.T. exam and became a member of Seven Lakes Emergency Medical Services, Inc.

I have been able to assist my elderly neighbors with things as simple as getting up from the floor after losing their balance. I have helped some people have a second chance at life after they went into cardiac arrest. And I have been able to comfort those who were inevitably dying.

I continue to go to classes at least once a month to keep my E.M.T. certification current, and I go to additional seminars to learn specialized skills. The rewards are limitless.

*Robert Haan
Seven Lakes
Randolph EMC*

To learn Spanish

While working for a surgeon whose practice had a high number of Spanish-speaking patients, I decided to go back to high school to learn Spanish. I was a registered nurse and had taken the community college courses, which were geared for travel and not everyday communication.

I asked the school board for permission to take Spanish I during the first period every day at the local high school. I informed them that I was a property owner in the town and paid school taxes for many years, and that I understood that the classes were not full, and I would be forever grateful if they could grant me a seat. I was granted my request.

The first day of school the class was full of 14-year-olds, and I was 41. After an

initial adjustment on my part, I began to see the students were not about to let this “old lady” get the best of them. And I was not going to let the students get ahead of me. It made for a very competitive atmosphere, and in the end, a very admirable respect for each other. Both the students and I were high achievers, and I felt the age difference was valuable to everyone. We all tried harder and achieved our goal of learning the language.

When I had to miss the last three weeks of class, the students gave me a going-away party with cupcakes and a “good luck” card, written in Spanish, and signed by each individual. I still have that card, and that was 20 years ago.

*Judith A. Cook, RN
Taylorsville
EnergyUnited*

Praying for support

After graduation from high school, I got my associate’s degree. Then, the place where I worked offered me many opportunities, so I decided to stay. During the next nine years, I married and had a beautiful daughter.

But I always wanted to be a teacher.

When my daughter was born, my craving to be a teacher returned. I was teaching her new things every day, and it brought pure joy. I prayed about it and went back to school.

It was hard on my family and me when I was both going to school and working. I needed health insurance and money to help with bills. I could not get financial help for school, because I was married and my husband worked.

So I told the Lord I needed \$10,000, and he gave it to me. I registered for a drawing along with about 400,000 other people and won. The prize was \$10,000!

In the spring of 2002, I graduated from Western Carolina University with honors. I am a fourth grade teacher at Riverbend Elementary, and I love it. This “back to school” experience is one that I

Send us your best Earn \$50

Here are the themes in our “Nothing Could Be Finer” series. Send us your stories and pictures. You don’t have to be the best writer. Just tell it from your heart.

SEPTEMBER 2003

“My Favorite Photo”

Our annual photo gallery of North Carolina people and places.

Deadline: July 15

OCTOBER 2003

“Why I Like My Electric Cooperative”

Is a cooperative different than other utilities?

Deadline: August 15

NOVEMBER 2003

“The Finest Neighbor I Ever Knew”

Tell us why and send a photo.

Deadline: Sept. 15

DECEMBER 2003

“How to Live a Long and Happy Life”

Do you know an older person who sets a good example for staying healthy and happy? Send a photo, too.

Deadline: Oct. 15

The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less.
2. Only one entry per household per month.
3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mail or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
5. Include your name, electric co-op, mailing address and phone number.
6. If you want your entry returned, please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. (We will not return others.)
7. We pay \$50 for each submission published.
8. We will post on our Web site more entries than we publish, but can’t pay for those submissions. (Let us know if you don’t agree to this.)
9. Send to Nothing Finer, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616. Or by e-mail: carolina.country@ncemcs.com. Or through the Web: www.carolinacountry.com

will never forget, and would do it all over again. I thank God and my family for seeing me through.

*Jill Mann
Canton
Haywood EMC*

To overcome the odds

After high school graduation, I was told I wasn't smart enough to go to college. I watched my friends get degrees, and I kept all my hurts inside.

In 2001, my mother was dying of cancer, and I quit my job to take care of her. Following her death, many people suggested that I return to school because of the excellent care that I gave her.

In April 2002, my husband sat up in bed, had an instant heart attack and died. I became the breadwinner of the house and had to make significant decisions. Rejection, hurts and fears all came, but I decided to be an "overcomer."

In May 2002, I enrolled in Brunswick Community College. Anatomy was a particularly difficult subject. One look at the book, and I went to my car and threw up, twice. However, through hard work, I made an A on the final exam.

Studying helps me not miss my husband and mother so much. Returning to school is making me a whole person with new ambitions for life. Going to school is helping me to be an excellent provider for my 12-year-old daughter. It is never too late to go to school.

*Beverly Moore
Supply
Brunswick EMC*

To teach in eastern North Carolina

I graduated from college at age 21. But settling into a career was not as easy as I had planned. During the first two years after graduation, I had a series of jobs. By 1977, I had a modest position at a nearby television station. From the outside looking in, it appeared to be a nice deal. I knew differently however. I just wasn't a TV kind of guy.

Still in contact with my college friends, I longed for some of the same adventures they were taking. Trips to Europe, to California, to New York. All these things seemed mighty nice. And mighty unlikely. I didn't have that kind of money.

The television station where I worked had a savings plan for its employees. So I started putting money aside. Over the months I saved a sizable amount. But where would I go? What adventure would I take?

The funny thing about actually saving money is that you realize how hard it is to scrape it together. And the more I saved, the more I realized that I wanted to invest that money instead of spending it on a larger-than-life vacation.

So in the summer of 1977, I started taking education courses at the local university. I hadn't exactly wanted to teach, but I knew that teaching is dependable income for eastern North Carolina. I love both eastern North Carolina and my family, so I decided to get teaching certificates in public education and ended up staying near the coast.

That was over 25 years ago. My teaching career has included experiences on the junior high school, university and community college levels. I've had some of the best students any person could ask for. Teaching is fun and rewarding in many ways. I guess I turned out to be a teacher kind of guy.

But it all began with a savings plan and the decision to invest. I'm still getting the best kind of dividends from that investment. And not all of them can be measured in dollars and cents.

*Kerry David Cox
Washington
Tideland EMC*



To get a pair of eyes

I am visually impaired. I went back to school to get some new eyes.

Southeastern Guide Dogs, Inc., is a training school for the blind in Palmetto, Fla. I trained for 26 days with my best friend, Jost. I toured the campus on my first two days there and was told about the guide dogs. I was also given a leash to break in Jost, who I met on the third day. The trainer matched me to Jost by my voice and walk. We trained together for 23 days. During this time I learned different commands with Jost, and we got to know each other.

In the second week, we were taken to Tampa for rigorous training. We crossed streets, learned about curbs and how to listen for traffic. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons, we had playtime. We took walks together and played with toys.

Jost is my eyes. He is the best thing that has happened to me. Now I have independence and freedom to walk without being afraid.

*Calvin Allison
Lincolnton
Rutherford EMC*

To start over in the Army

It was January 1951, and I left home without it — my high school diploma, that is.

Five months before graduating, I joined the Army and within 48 hours I was on a train leaving Raleigh for basic training. The first few days of pre-basic were devoted to testing — lots of testing. My good test scores did not make up for not having that diploma.

I soldiered very hard and made rewarding advancements, but I realized there was a serious price to pay for being a high school dropout. I completed my 3-year enlistment and returned to my original high school. I was the "old man" of the class but much wiser. I graduated with those kids and this time, with diploma in hand, I re-enlisted and started my military career all over. That is why I went back to school.

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Many months later I attended Officer Candidate School (OCS) and served the rest of my career as a commissioned officer. Following retirement, I continued a second career with the civil service.

Take it from an old soldier: If you leave home without your schooling, go back and get it, whatever level you need to make your dreams come true. You will be more than glad you did.

I prevented my kid brother from dropping out of high school. He went on to a career with the city of Durham. He thanked me later.

*Clinton C. High, U.S. Army ret.
Leesburg, Fla.
Haywood EMC*

To stay on schedule

When I began to debate the prospect of returning to college at age 46, I said to my friend and advisor, "But I will be fifty when I finish school."

She replied, "You will be fifty anyway."

That remark put things into perspective for me. Time was going to go by, and I could make time out of what I thought was already a busy schedule, or I could just continue to wish for my degree and the age of 50 would come and go without any real educational accomplishments.

Although my life was very busy when I returned to college, I knew that I had done the right thing. I had all my courses marked as to when I would complete each one and how many hours I would have left at the end of each semester. Things were going according to schedule.

What was not on the schedule, however, was what I heard the week I began my last semester: I had cancer.

How would I be able to continue classes? I had four classes – 12 hours, and I shed many tears debating whether I should drop out while I could still get some of my tuition back. I never could bring myself to do this, so I just took the approach that I would see how things would go for me.

Although my hospital stay was extended from one week to one month, I knew that I somehow had to return to my classes. My husband drove me, and my classmates were wonderful. In addition to supporting me through prayers and cards, they took notes for me and assisted me in catching up on my schoolwork. My professors at Gardner-Webb University were understanding and very helpful, as well. I finished my classes in December, thanks to so many people who stood by me and helped me realize my dream.

*Bonnie R. Morgan
Morven
Pee Dee EMC*



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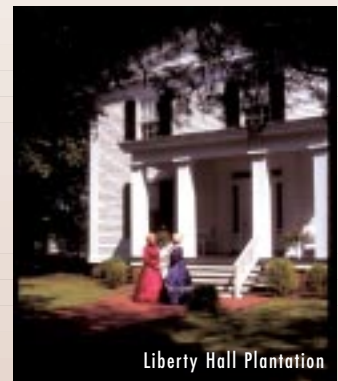
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