# BABY STEPS LEAD TO COLLEGE

By Gail Cawley Showalter

Before I could see it, I knew the path was there.

Dear Single Mother,

I know you love your children. my guess is they are your life. On this Mother’s Day I hope you have the pleasure of a restful day. Maybe you can prop your feet up, pour a hot cup of tea or coffee, read the newspaper and take a nap. Monday morning may not be so peaceful. As tough as life can be for you, allow me to suggest a turn in your path which will alter your destination.

Take baby steps. If you cannot take a leap of faith, perhaps you can take baby steps.

Baby steps made a giant difference in your life.

 This journey may intimidate you. College seems like an impossible hurdle for many single parents. If you think this is the case for you, take another look at the possible destinations.

Perhaps you will have more income. Perhaps you will have a better chance for advancement. Perhaps you will simple have a life altering experience.

For me it was all three. When my children were nine, seven, and six years old, I made the decision to return to college. I was a teacher and the only avenue for higher income was to have a higher-level degree. It seemed like an adventure. Then I looked at the whole road map. The thought of moving three children to another city, locating daycare, and a place to live for three months in the summer, and paying for it all was an overwhelming leap of faith. So I just took one step at a time. The verse in Joshua 3:13-14 came to mind as I faced each hurdle along the way.

“When the priests who are carrying the Ark touch the water with their feet, the river will stop flowing as though held back by a dam…”

Only after they stepped out did the river stop flowing.

There were some potholes along the way. I had to take the Graduate Records Exam, commonly known as the GRE. I had not taken a standardized test in eighteen years. I had to arrange for three open slots in daycare for three summer months in a city where the openings were few. Parents often held the places over the summer just to be sure they had them in the fall. I made the arrangements in stages.

I’d prepared for the GRE with workbooks for that purpose. Even so, it was no easy feat. When I received the results I had mixed feelings. I had scored fairly well on all three sections. Trouble was –they only counted two of the three. And I didn’t quite make the cut for The University of Texas Graduate School. This meant I’d have to gather letters of recommendation, transcripts, fill out more forms, and meet with the Dean in order to be accepted on probation. This was not usual for me and required that I swallow my pride. I could have given up at that point. I could’ve said, “Maybe this isn’t meant to be.” My desire to prove the test wrong was as strong as my desire to achieve something that would change my life. I’m not sure how I expected it to change. The salary increase wasn’t that significant. The meeting with the Dean was a formality. He nodded, signed a paper, and I was accepted. It was the first inkling that determination is a big part of reaching a goal.

I still would have to make arrangements for the care of three children while I was in class. Most openings in the nice centers were not available just for the summer. Parents told me, “Parents pay for spots to hold them even if they weren’t using them in the summer.” The University had an office for ‘returning students’ that gave me a list of 100 childcare centers in the cities. They had everything from tiny home-based centers to very large ones. There were centers that focused on horseback riding, computers, and nothing at all. I wasn’t having any luck on the day I finally visited St. Martin’s Lutheran downtown Austin. My thinking was that it would be too expensive and certainly wouldn’t have a decent playground located in the city as it was. I had an appointment with the director and she cordially welcomed me and gave me a complete tour. She pointed out that the new playground had been given an award and then asked, “May I sign up your children?” Stunned I asked, “You know I have three children?” She said she did and I was able to enroll all three in one of the highest quality daycares in the city.

The last piece in the puzzle was housing. It was too late to qualify for University housing and I lived too far away to do the research needed. Carliss, a lifelong friend lived in Austin and began to search for me. Time was running out. I had a deadline for getting any of the down payments for tuition and childcare back. We had posted on bulletin boards in every place Carliss could think of. Shortly before the last week to back out Carliss called, “I’ve found an apartment that you can sublet. It is in a quaint complex in the ----------- area of Austin. She will leave her things. You can lease it for the summer.”

It was going to happen. But how would I manage the day-to-day routine and all the changes for the kids?

The shuttle bus system runs like a spider-web across the city with stops all our The University campus. Imagine my surprise when I learned that the bus stopped at the corner near the apartment and drove directly to the corner of St. Martin’s Lutheran. I could pick up either of two buses from there and would be taken to the front of the Education Building where all my classes took place. This was truly amazing considering the size of The University of Texas in Austin.

The odds of me figuring all that out and making it happen all in my own power are slim. But one baby step at a time taken in faith blazed the trail of a giant.

When we were finally on our final trek home for my children put a poster on the back of our station wagon: “Hurray, hurray. We’re happy as can be. Mom just finished at UT.”

Education is something that can “never be taken away from you

It is about more than the education. It is about expanding your reach, exposure to new ideas, and experiencing self-awareness and building self-esteem. It is about the journey. Along the way many step up to an awareness of their self worth.

Many university campuses have support services for nontraditional or adult students. A student who is married, 25 years or older, or a parent is considered to be nontraditional.

Steps

The decision is the first step.

 Collect information as you would for a vacation. Learn about the college, look at maps, and determine the cost. Determine a budget. Envision the experience.

 Selecting the university that is right for you may be as simple as surfing the web. Classes can be taken by correspondence, via Internet, and in distance learning programs.

Financial assistance may be a deterrent for some single parents who wish to go to college. There are many sources of aid. It does require effort and research, but the payoff is worth it

If you cannot possibly go to college at this time, do not lose sight of the future possibility. The wait was worth it.”

SIDEBAR:

Some sites that might offer help are:

* [www.bookstore.petersons.com](http://www.bookstore.petersons.com) Distance Learning Programs
* [www.pueblo.gsa.gov](http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov) Nontraditional Education information
* [www.utexas.edu/world/univ](http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ%20To%20locate%20U.S)  to locate U.S. colleges online
* [www.online.uophx.edu](http://www.online.uophx.edu) Nontraditional college credited program & helpful literature. May call 1-800-765-4922
* [www.richmond.edu](http://www.richmond.edu) Women’s Resource Center at University of Richmond, VA
* Search on the web at “Student Financial Aid” and “Federal Pell Grants”

SIDEBAR

“What an Adult Should Consider Before Enrolling in School”

by John Griffin, Chief

Bureau for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education

Department of Consumer Affairs

* Make sure you clearly understand the total cost of the program, including supplies, etc.
* Read the enrollment agreement and catalog carefully.
* Obtain as much written information as you can, including catalogs, from the various schools.
* If you want to know whether the school’s credits transfer to another institution, always check with the institution that will receive the credits.
* Only rely on what is in writing, not what is told to you orally.

SIDEBAR:

Resources-

“Money for Adult Students” a pamphlet

Available from: Energeia Publishing, Inc.

P.O. Box 985

Salem, OR 97308-0985

(503) 362-1480

“Nontraditional Education: Alternative Ways to Earn Your Credentials”

Available from: U.S. Department of Labor

Bureau of Labor Statistics

Or call 1-888-878-2356