



L&C grad overcomes struggles to find career in nursing

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GODFREY – After struggling to complete her education for years, a chance meeting introduced recent Lewis and Clark Community College graduate Christine Poe-Garrison to L&C's nursing program.

Poe-Garrison began as a part-time college student in 1992, when her daughter was 7 months old. Not exactly sure what she wanted to pursue as a career, she took general study courses while working full time as a telephone operator.

“I rarely saw my daughter’s eyes open,” Poe-Garrison said. “I would take her to the babysitter at 7 a.m., go to school, and then, after school, I would go to work. I picked her back up at 9 p.m. This was my normal day as a new mom.”

Time passed, and six years later, Poe-Garrison became pregnant with her son, who was born premature. Despite a prolonged hiatus, she still wanted to complete her education, so in 2000 she went back to school. Unfortunately, her son underwent heart surgery that same year, and she again put her education on hold.

Persistent as ever, Poe-Garrison again tried to go back to school to become a registered nurse (RN), but due to an injury her son sustained, she was forced to drop out once again.

“At this time, I asked God, ‘What’s wrong with me? Why can’t I complete my education like other people?’” Poe-Garrison said. “I remember an advisor instructed me to become a licensed practical nurse (LPN), and I instantly felt humiliated like she was saying I was not good enough to be a registered nurse.”

The advisor went on to explain that Poe-Garrison might do better in an LPN program, which is shorter. She took the advice and completed LPN school, but she still longed to be an RN.

In 2008, Poe-Garrison began working at Ranken Jordan Pediatric Bridge Hospital, where she experienced a chance meeting that changed her life. L&C Associate Professor of Nursing Rodney White had brought nursing students to the hospital for clinicals. Poe-Garrison said their blue and white uniforms sparked her interest, and she approached White.

“I went over to ask what school were they from, and Rodney told me Lewis and Clark Community College,” Poe-Garrison said. “I went on to tell him my story, and he invited me to come out and see the school. I began to take the rest of my classes to complete the general studies for my nursing degree. I had to take all my science classes over again to start the program, but I say, to this day, Rodney White was my God-sent angel. I know he was. I thank him from the bottom of my heart. He has been there for me every step of the way.”

White, who eventually became one of Poe-Garrison’s instructors, said he is inspired by her story. He cites her as an example of the American dream fulfilled.

“Christine proves if you have the drive and the insight, you can make anything happen,” White said. “She is one of those people, who sets a goal and, without losing sight of her obligations to her family, makes it happen. Christine was dedicated to becoming a compassionate, caring registered nurse. In clinical settings, patients would comment on how Christine would make a wonderful nurse some day, and now she is. It is a fabulous story.”

White encourages all LPNs, if they have the ability, to pursue becoming an RN.

“We should all strive to receive our full potential in life, and I have a feeling, Christine is not done yet,” White said.

Before joining L&C, Assistant Professor of Nursing Vickie Rodgers taught Poe-Garrison in a certified nursing assistant (CNA) course at a long-term care facility nearly 18 years ago.

“Christine and I have weaved in and out of each other’s lives for years,” said Rodgers, who taught Poe-Garrison again at L&C. “I watched her go from CNA to certified medication technician. She hit many bumps in the road, but she never saw them as roadblocks. She always went around them.”

Poe-Garrison, who is now the assistant director of nursing at Crestwood Health Care Center, graduated from L&C in 2014, and she recommends L&C’s nursing program to anyone who wants to pursue a career in the field.

“L&C provided me with the best training on state-of-the-art equipment,” Poe-Garrison said. “My instructors gave me an understanding of the knowledge I need to carry out my nursing skills in the real world.”

Poe-Garrison currently lives with her family in East St. Louis, Illinois. Eventually she wants to earn her bachelor’s degree in nursing. She has some advice for those wanting to finish their educational goals.

“Hold on to your dream,” Poe-Garrison said. “Hardship often prepares ordinary people for an extraordinary destiny, and every day is a second chance.”

For more information about earning a degree at L&C, visit www.lc.edu.