



Student Spotlight

The question was never whether Lisa Jewett was smart. The question was whether she knew it.

As a young child, she struggled in school. As a teenager, she rarely showed up for class. And as an adult, a methamphetamine addiction made it unlikely she would ever finish high school, let alone college.

Jewett had a brain. But in the darkness of drugs, she'd almost forgotten it.

Fast forward 30 years, and you can imagine how nervous she was when she stepped onto the San Joaquin Delta College campus for the first time. She was then 45 years old, but she felt like a child. Her hands were trembling. Could she handle college?

In the end, Jewett didn't just handle college. She conquered college. For the first time in her life, she had the chance to walk in a commencement ceremony last month, earning three associate degrees and two certificates, with honors. She's working toward a career as a substance abuse counselor.

"I'm proud as heck," she said. "Proud as heck, and happy. I don't know. Words can't express how I feel."

Jewett's younger days were complicated by a number of factors: family difficulties, learning disabilities and, of course, the drugs.

One day she finally gave up the meth. Her two daughters had always been her focus, but the drugs got in the way. "I wanted to be totally a part of their lives, to be a part of their softball games and their cheerleading," she said. "The minute I got clean, I walked away and never looked back."

That was 10 years ago. Still, she didn't know if she could ever return to school, which had always been such a stumbling block.

What Jewett didn't know until just a few years ago is that she was afflicted with dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD.

Suddenly her struggles made sense. At last she understood why it had been so hard.

After a fire destroyed her home in Hollister, the single mother relocated to the Stockton area where she met her husband, earned her GED and finally enrolled at Delta.

She still remembers that first day, how scared she was. "I didn't know what a syllabus was," Jewett said. "I hadn't used my brain for years."

But when she explained her disabilities to her instructors, she found out about support services on Delta's campus. And she relied on those services heavily, staying on campus until 8 p.m. on weeknights for tutoring, and practically living in the computer lab.

With each day she gained a little confidence. And then came the grades.

A's. All of them.

"I was shocked," she said. "I cried, I jumped up and down, I called my husband at work... no, I called my kids first."

At Delta's Commencement ceremony, Jewett walked down the aisle and raised her arms into the air triumphantly. She had missed this moment so many years ago. She was going to take full advantage of it now.

Jewett is transferring to CSU Stanislaus in the fall. But Delta will never be far from her heart.

"That's another thing to cry about," she said with a laugh. "I feel I owe a lot to this school. The teachers have been amazing. I hope I can give back someday."

And she added some words of comfort for those who are floundering as she once did.

"You don't always have to live in the darkness," she said. "My passion is to help people know that living in the light is so much better."

by Alex Breitler



LISA JEWETT