

# I Believe Doors Will Open For Me!

*Submitted by: WIA Dislocated Worker Participant, Reese Aarthun*



I had a bad feeling as I walked with the department manager to an office where someone on the phone told me that my job had been eliminated and that my employment would be terminated due to a reduction in the work force.

My world crumbled. I am the primary breadwinner in our family since my husband had to retire due to a health issue. I carried the health insurance. I also was only four years away from early retirement.

The next month, I attended some meetings at the Marathon County Job Center and literally felt a light go on in my brain when a group leader talked about retraining. The thought in my head that day was: “I could be a Social Worker”, a passion I had developed from my years of volunteer work with Hospice.

I completed an application for the WIA Dislocated Worker Program and I was put on a wait list for funding. I continued to apply for jobs in my field and was turned down most times for being “overqualified”. The dream of becoming a social worker didn’t end. It turned out that UW-Stevens Point had added a major in social work. I had a business degree which allowed me to waive two years worth of classes. When no job appeared, I enrolled at UWSP.

My mother lived in Stevens Point and I planned to stay with her on nights that I had late classes. As it turned out, it was fortunate that I could spend that time with her because she became ill, was hospitalized three times during the semester, and died January 4<sup>th</sup>. A Winterim class starting in January on Gerontology got me through that first few weeks of grief.

My mom wasn’t sure about this new career, nor was my husband. However, my mom would have been so proud to see my 3.9 GPA. It was the first of many such semesters. One in six students on the UWSP campus are nontraditional students, defined as: married or divorced, parents, veterans, age 25 or older or had taken a break in their education. To that definition I add “caring for an aged parent”. Making sure she was safe and cared for at her home while working part-time in Wausau and attending school with 16 credits was challenging.

With my mom’s death a new expense was added. It was mid-winter and I had to make decisions about whether to brave winter roads or stay at a motel. There was never an option in my mind to miss classes. I still had not reached the top of the list for retraining assistance. I added a second part-time job as an office assistant for the Non-Traditional Student office. My internship

began in June 2010 and brought alive, hospice social work for me. I eventually was given my own, although small, caseload.

Once again, I had to deal with a personal problem that summer. I was diagnosed with breast cancer on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and treated with two operations on August 12<sup>th</sup> and August 24<sup>th</sup>. Julie Eder had notified me that my name had made it to the top of the funding list for the WIA Dislocated Worker Program and in the midst of my medical treatment, I met with her and signed up for the tuition assistance. Cancer didn't stop me from attending the first day of class on September 7<sup>th</sup>, continuing my internship, and continuing my part-time jobs. To that I added the unpaid duties as president of that organization.

In my second semester, I was nominated for and received a University Leadership Award. And, in my fourth semester I was recognized as the 2011 Distinguished Graduate for the Sociology/Social Work, inducted into Alpha Kappa Delta Honor Society, and was nominated for the Chancellor's Award. A project I presented for a class and continue to work on is creating a brochure listing free cancer screenings in the area for people who don't have insurance. I am proud of that. Another proud accomplishment is the work I did to expand information to non-traditional students on the UW campus.

Doors have opened and seemingly impossible obstacles have been overcome to make the achievement of this goal possible. I believe doors are going to open for me and I will be in a place where I can fulfill my career objectives.

An opened door that greatly helped was funding for two semesters and a Winterim through this (WIA) training program. I really appreciate the financial help through the WIA Dislocated Worker Program. Some may feel that investment in someone my age (57 when I lost my job) would not provide a high enough return. What sets workers like me apart from others is that we have worked and achieved, then lost a large part of our identity. We are motivated to succeed because we have always worked hard and want to continue. We are the kind of worker who would have balked at retirement because we like to work but would have taken it because it was expected and then found another career, possibly as a volunteer.

My plan was to retire in four years and then volunteer for hospice until I couldn't work anymore. Now my plan is to take this education and work at a higher level in social work in whatever practice I am able to work. Right now I have four viable possibilities to explore further. Two are in medical practice, one is home-based and one is education based. I am "working" all four leads and just waiting to see which door opens first.

Thank you to this Program and Julie Eder for the assistance and getting me where I am.

*Clarice J. Arthur*