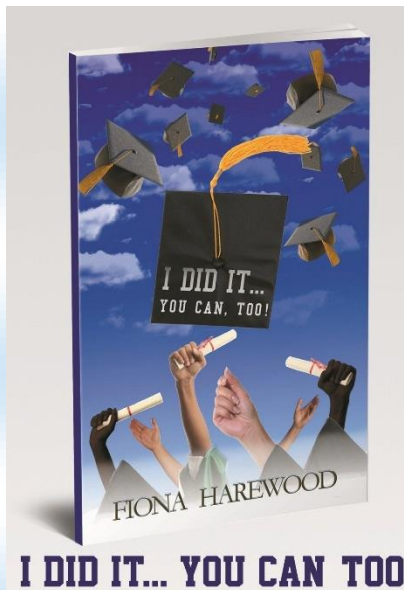


Necessary Resources For Your Journey

“Faith is like radar that sees through the fog - the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see.”- Corrie ten Boom, A Dutch Christian Holocaust survivor.

Faith

I mentioned earlier, faith is what I leaned on to get me through the difficult phases of



returning to school. I realize there are skeptics, but I know faith works for me. Remember I said questions and doubts plagued me about returning to school? Well they also followed me there when I started, so I allowed my faith in God to quiet me before the start of every class. I focused on the end of the semester and believed in the possibility of earning an ‘A’. Everything else in between was just the process I had to endure. No matter what your belief, rely on it and your personal strength to see you through.

There will be challenging courses. There will be subject matters you love to learn about and then there will be others that will make you question if your brain is wired like other people’s - you simply won’t get it, at least not immediately. As I mentioned before, math was my most difficult subject. Here again, I prayed when it got rough, but the Bible says, Faith without works is dead, so I had to find help, too.

Whenever I had a difficult course, I sought the help of a few friends and my children - even my daughter who was then in high school, assisted me. Many times I left the classroom confused, but I vowed not to return in the same state of mind. I utilized tutors, did as many practice problems as possible, asked questions in class - I explored all possibilities so I could understand and pass. I was determined not to just get by in challenging courses, but to comprehend the subject matter and pass them with honors. Why have I said all of this? Because I need you to understand it is okay to ask for help and to learn to use the resources available to you. You may say you don’t have the support, but if you are willing to ask for help you may be

surprised. It was my experience that friends I reached out to and asked for assistance while I was in school, helped me along - they took time out of their busy schedules to help me work through my academic struggles.

Getting assistance with assignments is one thing — but during the mid-terms and finals, you will be on your own. The trick is to prepare beforehand. My strategy was to rework homework assignments with which I struggled and received assistance. I would go through each step several times until I felt confident I understood everything. There was no point in getting an ‘A’ in a homework assignment I was helped with if I still didn’t grasp the concepts.

Remember, the tests scores will let the teacher know if you understand the material or not because there will be no one helping you as you take the tests. My personal success story? I passed every math course with an ‘A.’ So don’t ever give up - rely on faith and persevere. If I were able to move from a failing grade to a grade ‘A,’ you can definitely do so, too!

Find a Mentor

You may ask, “What is a mentor and why do I need one?” Well, a mentor will have confidence in you and assist you in achieving your goals. Mentors will hold you accountable. He or she will be concerned about you, listen to you and be your friend. Mentors will be advantageous to you because they can guide you through a problem you may be facing, help you focus on your goals, assist you with preparing for college, aid you in meeting interesting and successful people, offer support with test preparation, be a source of encouragement to you so you can realize your dreams and be an asset in many other areas of your life. You may even later decide to mentor someone.

A mentor can be your teacher, your guide, your motivator, your counselor and should also be someone you respect and admire. Possible mentors can range from a parent, to your next door neighbor, to a class mate you admire, or a successful person in the field in which you are interested. Although I never had a personal mentor, many people with whom I came into contact were instrumental in helping me progress. The saying “There is nothing new under the sun” suggests someone else has passed that way and you can learn from their experience for example, during my second semester, I was at a gathering where a young lady was singled out and

congratulated for graduating summa cum laude. I didn't even know what it meant to graduate with such an honor, so at the end of the event I found Andrea, the young lady who was acknowledged for her outstanding accomplishment, and inquired about her achievement. I learned that summa cum laude is Latin for 'with greatest honor.' It is followed by magna cum laude (with great honor), then cum laude (with honor). The guidelines for achieving these honors vary across universities. When I asked Andrea how she managed to obtain a GPA high enough to garner such an honor, she told me she shunned everything that was a distraction during school, studied hard and rested well at nights because she found when she did not have enough sleep that it was difficult for her to concentrate in class. I decided then, the summa cum laude honor was certainly something I should aim for. A few years after this conversation, although I did not make the highest honor, I graduated magna cum laude.

Now you may ask, "How do I find a mentor?" Start by identifying what you need. In your case, you may need someone to guide you along the path of returning to school or someone to help you with a difficult assignment. Then construct a list of all the people you know and include parents, friends, neighbors, pastors, coaches and many others. Remember, these should be successful people you love, admire and respect. Be sure not to limit your list to a certain age group or gender, because you never know where your help will come from. Also, add to your list people whom you think will help you to find a mentor.

After your list has been completed, you should contact these people. In contacting each person you should ask him or her, the question that is foremost on your mind. In this case it may be, "I am returning to school, I need someone to help me along, can you help me?" If you have already gone back to school, you may need someone's help with an assignment. In that regard, pointedly ask, "Can you assist me with a math assignment?" If you find that the person seems uninterested or has no knowledge of how to assist you, then you might ask him or her to recommend someone who can help you. If he or she doesn't know anyone who can help, or refers someone with whom you are not comfortable, proceed to the next person on your list.

Study Time

I have always admired my younger brother who is now a gynecologist. While he was in grade school he scarcely studied and never paid too much attention in class - judging from the

many complaints my mom received regarding his disruptive classroom behavior. I used to wonder how it was possible for him to always get straight A's in school. Later, though, as he approached the age where he had to take the Caribbean Examination Council and his university exams, his attitude towards studying changed, and his head was always buried in a book. That's when I realized, no matter whom you are, you cannot make it if you do not study. That being said, it is essential to study to maintain good grades. Personally, I found it's easiest to study while what I did in class was still fresh on my mind, rather than waiting until days later to crack open the books. But you will develop your own study habits. The essential thing is to set aside time to study.

If you have kids, finding study time can be challenging but don't be dismayed, it can work! If you have to study while the children are up, ensure they are fed and their little needs are taken care of. For those capable of reading, give them interesting books and encourage them to do like mommy or daddy is doing. Remember, just as children learn the negative things they see, they also learn the positive. If they attend school and have homework, if you can manage it, do yours while they do theirs. If you cannot accomplish both tasks, assist the children with their homework first, then make time for yours. Remember, everything good requires sacrifice.

For the younger children who are not in school and can use a coloring book, give them crayons and encourage them with "smiley stickers" for good behavior while Mom or Dad is studying. Try not to let the television parent your child while you do school work. It has been proven that too much television exposure has negative effects on children. If you have to sit your child before the television, find an educational show or DVD that they will like that is both entertaining and educational.

Discipline Yourself for Online Courses

With advanced technology, many colleges offer online courses and for some majors the virtual classroom is required. Some students prefer online courses because they do not have to sit for hours in a traditional classroom. Others, like me, are not sold on the online classroom - I believe the workload is often heavier than traditional classes. When choosing online courses, make sure you have good time management skills because these courses have heavy workloads and strict deadlines.

On the other hand, online courses can be advantageous for the busy professional, the student who already spends too much time on campus and the distance learner who may be based in another city, state or country. And online courses are certainly beneficial for the winter months when travelling is hazardous.

The online course format is more stringent on the deadline for submissions; if you do not complete the required tasks at the set time, some courses lock you out of that assignment, or if there is a submission deadline, the system registers the time you submit your work, making the professor aware that your assignment is late. As such, it can be more difficult to get good grades in these courses if you lack self-control.