

LIVE & LEARN

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President's
Scholarship
recipient
Kimberly Locke
and family

Kimberly Locke and her forever-family...

Student nurse, wife, and mother of 11, Kimberly Locke will soon be completing her associate degree in nursing to become a registered nurse. She is now preparing for the Clinical Performance in Nursing Examination (CPNE), and her President's Scholarship is helping to pay for this very important performance exam.

In a letter to the College expressing her appreciation for the President's Scholarship award, Kimberly wrote of her "very supportive and loving husband," Ty, with whom she is raising 11 (soon to be 13) children. It is their goal, she says, to "give each one a chance for achieving their dreams of a normal and healthy forever-family to call their own." But with such a large family, she explains, "It is difficult at times to do everything a family wants to do." That's why Kimberly decided to continue pursuing her dream to become a registered nurse, knowing that then she'll be able to contribute more to her family financially while working in a field she cares so deeply about.

Kimberly says that the ability to continue on her path at a steady pace is now, in part, "thanks to the people who chose me to be the recipient of this wonderful award. You have made it possible for me to not have to worry as much or to have to find a way to stretch our already squeaky-tight budget as far as I thought we'd have to in order for me to take the CPNE...I feel so honored and so very fortunate that I am still weeping from joy and relief...On behalf of me and my little family, I would like to say thank you for what you have done to help all of us further a dream. Becoming a graduate and a registered nurse is almost as important to my family as it is to me."



1 Serina age 19: Our mother is really special. She gives everything she has to give and we are all proud of her for teaching us you can be anything you want in life. She says that the value and strength of family is where you build from. She has also taught us how to overcome ignorance of others and that we should just strive to learn as much as we can in life because that and love are the keys to success.

2 Jayse age 14: It is good that my mom can multitask as well as she does and that she still gets to watch *Everybody Loves Raymond* on Monday nights (which is the only show she gets to see).

3 Jada age 15: Mom is always saying "practice makes success" and that I will accomplish my goals if I strive for them. Well, our mom works hard at everything from early morning to late at night and I am so proud she doesn't give up even when it is so hard sometimes. I believe in my mom.

4 Danielle age 16: I am proud of Mom being able to study and having been able to come this far with all the obstacles at times. The fact that Mom is still able to be a mom to all of us as individuals and do all the things she does, like cooking, laundry, and talking to us is amazing. I am happy to have her for a mom. I don't think there is another mom out there like her and I am glad she is mine.

5 Lorian age 11: My mom is really a great mom. She has time to love all of us and is still going to be a good nurse, and that is great. She says this will also help her pay for all the weddings and college that her and Dad will have to pay for.

6 Ty (husband): My admiration for Kimberly is constantly growing for all she does everyday. The fact that she is a constant role model to our children and teacher of life is enough to just love her. But she takes it many steps forward and just gives herself completely. This is a woman at 35 years of age that has overcome so much in her life and still continues to give more of herself than she ever is willing to take. Kimberly teaches the children and even me that we can do whatever we may put our minds to. I am the luckiest man alive to have found my soul mate, friend, and her beauty is a bonus.

7 Janna age 11: It is cool what Mom has learned about nursing and she still takes care of the family as usual, which is better than other moms I know.

8 Leah age 9: When does Mom study? Is that what she is doing late at night? I am happy she is happy. I am also happy she knows what to do when we are sick.

9 Jarah age 7: Learning is important and it's great Mom is doing it all! I forget she is in school because she doesn't study around us much.

10 Kimberly Locke

11 Jesse age 3

12 Jaylin age 2

13 Brandon age 9: My mom is cool and I am glad she likes school. She fixes the best chicken too.

More about Kimberly and her "little" family

What is a typical day like in the Locke household? Well, it is hardly what most people would call typical. And when 3:30 in the afternoon rolls around, with husband Ty off in the 15-passenger van to pick up the children (and a few neighbors' kids as well) from three different schools, Kimberly may, on occasion, actually find 30 minutes of free time. What can a mother of 11 do with that much time on her hands? Many of us would probably just put our feet up for a while, but that isn't Kimberly Locke's style. As she says: "I could do one load of the typical 40 loads of laundry I do in a week (that's a good week!). Or I could start preparing dinner, so I can be more available to the children and their many homework questions and nightly spelling tests. There are the toys strewn about the floor that the toddlers felt the need to display everywhere. I could always restock the refrigerator in the kitchen with milk and juice from one of the three fridges out in the garage...I could mix up a gallon of lemonade to drink for dinner, though one might not be enough for that meal. I do make my own dinner rolls, so I could work on that, but they take too long to rise. I could work on the weekly grocery list, but that is a chore in itself. Or maybe I should study something while I have the chance, so I don't have to stay up so late tonight. There's always something I can find to do."

Thirty minutes later the house fills up with the buzz of laughter and the voices of children, ages two to 16, talking about their days and discussing what they think Mom has planned for dinner.

A bit of background

Kimberly and Ty Locke began with four biological children of their own. Then, several years ago, they decided to add to their family and became licensed foster/adoptive parents through the state of Texas. Over the years, they fostered more than 20 children and then started to adopt them as they realized the deep need for permanent homes for foster kids. "It seems the more information we gathered and meetings we attended," Kimberly recalls, "the more encouraged we were to not just talk about the crisis involving these children and their permanency needs but to act on it."

The Lockes started with one of their many foster placements, a four-day-old baby boy, adopting him at age seven months (5th child). Soon thereafter they fostered, and

then adopted, two little girls (6th and 7th). Then came a young teen, who arrived with the plan of staying one week, and the Lockes adopted her as well; she is the oldest daughter—now in college (8th). One evening, after swaddling and holding a beautiful baby girl at one of the foster parent meetings, a caseworker asked if they would consider taking her with the intention of adopting. They did; she was adopted on Kimberly's birthday (9th), "the best present ever!" Kimberly exclaims. And next, after receiving a call about a sister and brother, and the question—would they be interested? The answer, of course, was a resounding yes (10th and 11th).

The question may come to mind—when will they stop? According to Kimberly, "We haven't ever set a goal of numbers or thought or even really discussed it. We just know that there are always kids out there longing to be part of a family, any family, and to have a home to return to, even if it's just to do their laundry or have dinner with the family." And while the casual observer may think about how lucky their children are, Kimberly says that it is she and Ty who feel that "we were the lucky ones to be chosen for these children."

The children the Lockes have adopted have all experienced some kind of hardship, but with the Lockes, they can take comfort and experience normalcy and permanency in a home that is always open to them. Kimberly is quick to point out that the children give them so much in return. "We love the feeling, after a long day of whatever has gone on (and believe me that can be just about anything!), when Ty and I will just smile at each other, and there is this mutual, knowing feeling that we have made it through successfully, that tomorrow is another day, and that our children are all safe, happy, and healthy—everything a parent wants for their kids."

Another question one might ask is why would Kimberly Locke consider trying to finish a college degree when there is so much to do already? To her there's a simple answer. "It



is an extra dream-come-true for me personally. I enjoy the Excelsior College program; in addition to allowing me to work towards becoming a nurse, it has given me the flexibility to work at my own pace. And with the networking system online, I still have a chance to communicate with fellow students going through the same situations and stresses that I have about returning to school. The opportunity to finish this degree is an asset to my family as well." Currently a licensed respiratory therapist, she says that becoming an RN will be the culmination of a 15-year dream. "I was so excited when I was accepted as a student and started taking my tests. I would budget and save in order to take a test and order books, and it always seemed to work out in my favor."

The goal is within sight

Kimberly will soon be taking the CPNE, the final exam of the nursing program. Passing the CPNE will make her an Excelsior College graduate and enable her to sit for the NCLEX in Texas—the final hurdle to becoming licensed as a registered nurse. She admits it isn't all just about obtaining a degree and finishing a personal goal, it is also an accomplishment for her husband and children. "They have all stood by me, supported me, and encouraged me, as I have them, to reach a dream or goal. They have been there, hushing each other during the few days before a test, celebrating for me, and with me, when I would pass a test, and hanging out with their dad on the three-day weekend I was gone to a nursing workshop and skills day." It is also about her children having a role model. They look up to their mother. When Kimberly tells them to follow their dreams and goals, not to give up, to believe in themselves daily, to know that sometimes you have to do without and make sacrifices to better your lives and yourselves, they can see that she practices what she preaches. "This program has also opened my eyes to my strengths and given me knowledge that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. It hasn't been about just getting a degree to get a job; it has been about adding a chapter to our lives and knowing we are all stronger for being a part of it."

So, what's next?

Recently the Lockes were thrilled to learn that they've been selected for brother and sister siblings, who, by the time this article is published will have joined the family (12th and 13th). And just when they thought life couldn't get any better, they received the news that Kimberly had been chosen as the recipient of an Excelsior College President's Scholarship. This award, by saving them the

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Awarding Kimberly Locke funding for the CPNE gave us great pleasure. She is an excellent student, and taking her CPNE was the only requirement she had left to fulfill before graduation. After receiving her thank you letter, I smiled to myself and thought it's just an awesome feeling to help an individual like Kimberly to fulfill her dream.”

-Valerie Di Cioccio, scholarship administrator

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CPNE cost, will allow them extra money to purchase needed beds, dressers, and children's items they would've otherwise had to do without for a while.

In her letter Kimberly wrote, "please know this has meant so much to the Locke family. We have had a rough couple of years like most families, but things have improved for us tremendously, and this is a huge blessing in our lives. Not only do I feel so very grateful and honored to be a part of

Excelsior College, I now feel I could never say enough about the feeling this college has bestowed upon me. I have met and spoken with so many wonderful people since I started, and I will look forward to my next venture of working on my bachelor's degree through this school, which is my school, too...I even bought the t-shirt and sweatshirt and proudly wear both...I am so excited about the potential of becoming an Excelsior College graduate."

Kimberly mused that sitting through her oldest daughter's high school graduation last year was one of her proudest moments as a mom. "It also sent a twinge of desire to be able to walk up and accept my degree for all the hard work that I and my family have put into this goal of mine." If everything works out, the Lockes are planning to bring the whole family to Albany, NY, for Commencement 2004. If they don't make it this year, though, Kimberly assures us that they will come to celebrate her bachelor's degree a couple of years from now. ■

Just before publishing this issue, we learned that Kimberly Locke passed the CPNE. Congratulations Kimberly!

President's Scholarship



The President's Scholarship was established in 1994 as an institutional aid program to help cover the cost of the College's Enrollment Fee, the Student Service Annual Fee, and fees for Excelsior College Examinations and nursing performance exams. The scholarship is based on financial need and is awarded in amounts up to \$1,000. Both prospective students and those actively enrolled in one of our degree programs are eligible to apply. Since the start of this program, hundreds of students have received assistance through the President's Scholarship, which is funded in part by the generous contributions of Excelsior College staff.

Interested? You can apply by completing the Excelsior College Scholarship Application form located at the Excelsior College Web site, www.excelsior.edu.