

Get Your GED or Lose Your Job

Pearl Brathwaite

On my first day at Mid-Town Manhattan 5 Adult Education class, I was ashamed of myself because I saw so many students who were so much younger than I am. I wanted to leave, but I came to terms with my feelings. I need to be here. If I don't get my high school diploma, I will lose my job.

When I began working for an adult daycare center 15 years ago as a nurse's assistant, they did not require a high school diploma. However, last year, they hired an outside agency to manage the business. The new agency requires all their employees to have high school diplomas. The reason this happened is because the agency is now regulated by New York State. Before this, it was considered a private center and was not under New York State regulations. I think that they are trying to improve the standards by requiring all staff to have their GED.

When my boss called me to ask me about my diploma, she told me that I would have six months to earn my GED. I was devastated. I didn't know how I could ever go back to school. I thought my schooling days were over and I was just waiting to complete my years of employment so I could retire.



After a few months, I became very comfortable with the younger students in the class. We were soon good friends. We were all exchanging ideas about how to do math in different ways, and some students shared their computer skills. When I started, I didn't even know how to turn on a computer. I was glad I was sitting near a younger

student who was very helpful showing me how to use the computer. Some students were very loud and needed some guidance about how to behave in class, so I would sit and discuss with them the reason why we are all here. We are here to achieve our goals. We want to improve our lives. We are getting a second chance. We shouldn't waste it.

Leaving her young daughter and son with her mother in Trinidad-Tobago almost 30 years ago, Pearl came to the U.S. to make a better life for them. After eight years of hard work, she was able to bring her children here. Both have graduated from high school and have families of their own. Her daughter has earned her Master's in social work. It is now Pearl's turn to pursue her education.

