

# 57-year-old grandma goes back to school



Marcia Degoutte outside LaGuardia Community College

Marcia Degoutte walks onto LaGuardia Community College Campus decked out in dress pants and a blouse partly hidden by a blue jacket she accessorized with a red and white scarf. Marcia is a 57-year-old Jamaican immigrant. Stout, she has a friendly expression and a dark complexion accented by salt-and-pepper hair.

Looking at Marcia among the much younger faces that file back and forth, you would think she is one of the professors. But Marcia is a second year student studying to become an occupational therapist assistant; today, Wednesday, she has a test that she needs to review for. So, she opens the door and heads for the library with a wide and confident expression.

What makes Marcia unique is that in addition to going to school full-time, she is also working full-time in a nursing home as a certified nurse's aide. Marcia has been working at Concourse Nursing Home as a nurse's aid for the past ten years. She has worked on all the floors and in all the different units.

So why does Marcia want to switch from nursing assistant to occupational therapy? "I was working on the rehab unit and saw how beneficial it was: People came for rehab on short term to restore function. I saw how they improved to become independent," she said.

Still, Marcia was reluctant to take the step toward occupational therapy given she had spent ten years as a nurse's aid and still had an aspiration to become a nurse. Then one of Marcia's friends got injured in an accident that severed her spinal cord. She was confined to a wheelchair and was now staying at a nursing home.

On visiting her friend at the nursing home, Marcia saw how the therapist motivated her. "She couldn't use the bathroom naturally; she had to use several devices. The therapists showed her she could still live her life with adaptive devices. They pushed her ... she was motivated."

Marcia was motivated herself. She now wanted to become an occupational therapist, so she went to speak with the occupational therapist at Concourse Nursing Home about the profession and how she might go about pursuing it. "She told me to go for it; that I could do it, and that she would be my biggest cheerleader."

The therapist recommended LaGuardia Community College as a good place to start, where Marcia has been going for almost two years. When she graduates she will be an occupational therapist assistant; however, Marcia's plan is to go to a four-year college where she will continue with her studies and become an occupational therapist, not just a therapist assistant.

Occupational Therapists help individuals and families who are unable to function by themselves due to illness, injury or disability by providing intervention geared toward helping them to regain functioning so they may partake in everyday activities.

Anyone who works full-time while going to school full-time can tell you that it is a daunting task, but Marcia has found a way to do it: She goes to school in the evening, her first class starting at 5:30 and her last class ending at 10 o'clock. Then she takes two trains to get home, and by the time she gets home it's 11:30. Her program requires her to do field work, which she does two days per week.

To maintain her full-time status at her job, Marcia has to work double shift on weekends, from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., and a regular 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. shift during one of the weekdays is required. But this is not Marcia's first experience with going to school and working full-time. While working full-time as a nurse's aid, Marcia went to Bronx Community College full-time and graduated with an associate degree in health.

Although Marcia is doing well in school she maintains that going to school full-time and working full-time is not easy. "It's hard," she says, "but doable." She went on to

say that her family and friends support her. Beatrice Awuyah, LPN, says, "Ms. Degoutte is one of the best CNAs. She gives all her patients tender loving care. I have no complaint; in fact, I call her 'doctor'."

Angela Lawrence, a nurse's aid at the nursing home, who herself is going back to school to become a nurse, says, "Marcia will make it because she has the drive, and she gets along with everybody."

Marcia Degoutte lives in the northeast section of the Bronx off White Plains Road. She is the matriarch of a home with three children, four grandchildren and a daughter-in-law. Marcia has raised four kids, one of whom is living on her own, and the three who now live with her.

Published in [Caribbean Life News](#)