

Cover: Jacqueline Bopp said “You can never give up.”

The Pursuit of Happiness

In May, Jacqueline Bopp, Kansas City, Mo., is due to graduate with an associate’s degree in food and beverage management.

“For me and what I’ve through, just to be in college has been a challenge,” Bopp said. “I’ve seen the bottom of the bottom.”

Born to an unwed 18-year-old mother, Bopp spent her first year with a diagnosis of “failure to thrive.” She didn’t walk or talk until after age 2. Just shy of her fourth birthday, she was adopted into a biracial family with five other adopted siblings. In school, she was told she had learning disabilities and a speech impediment. She didn’t read fluently until the fifth grade.

Bopp, now 28, goes to JCCC classes 8 a.m.-5 p.m. three days a week, works at the McGee Street Cafeteria at the Hyatt Regency Crown

Center two days a week and volunteers at Operation Breakthrough St. Vincent’s Child Care Center as a way of giving back for her children’s care. But it hasn’t been easy.

After high school, Bopp attended Longview, a Metropolitan Community College, planning on a major in child psychology. She took 1 ½ semesters of developmental English and math classes.

“You have to understand what takes most people two hours to learn takes me double or triple the amount of time,” she said.

Eventually Bopp

dropped out in 1998, married, had two children, and then, as she says, “went through a life-altering situation.”

That is a nice way of saying that Bopp left an abusive husband and fled with her two children, a diaper bag and the clothes on her back. Bopp spent the next 10 months in three shelters until she was accepted for transitional housing. During this time, she worked and volunteered at soup kitchens and clothes closets.

Just under the 24-year age limit for Job Corps, she was accepted to the program and earned a business certificate. Two Job Corps instructors encouraged her to continue with college.

“I doubted I could do it. I had been told I was not college material because I have learning disabilities,” Bopp said.

Nevertheless, Job Corps set her up with a Pell Grant to start at Penn Valley, MCC, to pursue a career as a chef apprentice. She took general education classes at Penn Valley, and, with the help of “Ways to Work” loan program, was able to purchase a car to drive to JCCC, a cooperative program with MCC for hospitality management. Lindy Robinson, assistant dean, design and hospitality management, steered Bopp toward the food and beverage management program because of the time demands Bopp faced from the chef apprenticeship program and being a single mother.

Bopp is grateful for three JCCC scholarships – one from the Restaurant Association and two from the Office Professionals League. Her goal is to open a bed and breakfast on the outskirts of Kansas City, Mo. But her work has to be a good fit – one that allows her to spend time with her children and give back to the community.

“It’s not the situation that determines who you are; it’s how you respond and handle the situation,” Bopp said. “You can never give up because you never know where life will take you. I’m living proof of beating the odds. I never thought I would accomplish as much as I have and receive the many blessings I have from God, my parents, community and children.”



Jacqueline Bopp prepares food in the JCCC kitchen as part of her *Food Management* class.