

The Journey Continues

People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.

— Elizabeth Kübler-Ross

Nanci is a woman whose quiet and reserved manner belies the courage and determination that she carries within her. Challenged by serious health problems and struggling to raise a son and daughter as a single parent, Nanci has faced more than her share of difficulties. And yet she has not only survived, juggling a part time job at a law office, financial stresses and going to school full time, but has made the choice to move forward in spite of these challenges.

I could not speak more highly of any individual, says Ro, her mentor in the WomenCare program, immediately upon being asked about Nanci. What impresses me most about her, is her resilience and determination, her common sense and resourcefulness.

Ro talks about helping Nanci make the tough decision to return to school while in the WomenCare program and raising two children by herself; but it turns out that, ironically, it was Ro who became inspired. She herself, later decided to return to school; a decision Ro says she made largely due to the example Nanci set.

About to complete a degree in Web Design at Pennsylvania Institute of Technology, Nanci talks about being afraid and lacking confidence when she first considered joining the WomenCare mentoring program. But, at the time, more than anything she wanted to try to help her daughter Nikieta and that gave her the courage to continue.

When asked about what has sustained her through very tough times, Nanci speaks of *perspective*, which she says is *everything. I haven't had much luck and I have to catch myself all the time, but I always try to look at what I can do.*

This perspective has helped Nanci do many things. She takes pride in her son Joe who is now grown and a firefighter, always racing to the next call. She has also worked hard, as a single parent with limited resources, to advocate for her daughter, whose struggles with emotional and psychological issues have challenged Nanci to the core.

With mentor Ro's positive attitude to support her and the help of the WomenCare community, Nanci also found scholarships for school and a grant for a much needed computer, bought a car and even started driving again.

Nanci says: *Despite the fact that I couldn't imagine being able to afford a car, I did get one with my income tax rebate and the help of my brother who knew a car dealer. It was my perspective that made it happen. At first I thought: no way it will ever happen. Then I kept my mind open to possibilities and had faith that some way, somehow, it would and incredibly, the opportunity unfolded.*

In talking about her future career in design, Nancy says that learning new things has given her a renewed sense of power. She enjoys surfing the web and creating special effects using PhotoShop. It is clear that the unique journey she started two years ago as a WomenCare partner, continues today. **And that the light from within her shines more brightly than ever.**



(From left to right: Lae'janette, Lizette, Morgan and her daughter) Lizette adds that anyone **not** involved in YPSN is missing out. Here she is with her mentor at the Carnival, one of many fun activities sponsored by The Center Foundation.

YES, YOU CAN!

The first story Lizette, a teen parent in the Young Parent Support Network (YPSN) program, shares with me when we meet, is about her children, Lae'janette and Maurice. She tells me that she just made a pretend passport for Lae'janette, who is four. **It is little Lae'janette who holds a passport, but it is Lizette who is surely going places.**

Nominated by three teachers during this year, her senior year at Chester High School, to *Who's Who Among American High School Students*, Lizette credits strong support from her family, YPSN, friends and her community, for where she is today. *Without people helping me and my kids, I wouldn't be where I am. Without family, I couldn't manage—I need someone to help me up when I fall.*

YPSN has afforded her many opportunities not available elsewhere, all of which she is quick to tell you, she has used to full advantage.

Lizette attended College Prep Night and toured Temple University, has shared special time with her children at Family Game Nights, at the annual Pool Party and Carnival. Lizette also works to "give back", as she says, as a member of The Center Foundation's Advisory Board. There she adds a strong and intelligent voice to mentee concerns and issues. As an active and dedicated YPSN mentee, she has accumulated a high point total in the YPSN Incentive Program and is very excited about the computer waiting for her as a result.

When asked for one word to describe herself, she answers: *a leader and role model for my children. I have two little ones following me and watching every step I take. I know they're going to copy everything I do.* An English teacher at school greets Lizette every day with the another word that is appropriate: *ambitious*. Ambitious enough to decide in fifth grade that she wanted to go to college. A dream from fifth grade that will coming true this fall. In September, Lizette will begin Neumann College on a scholarship she received when YPSN connected her to Education Talent Search during College Prep Night.

Lizette's perfect attendance at school and Honor Roll grades today foreshadow her success in the future. But it is her steadfast determination that will get her there. Lizette says that every time her daughter says: *Mommy, I can't*, she jumps right in and exclaims: **YES, YOU CAN!** We say to Lizette, too, as she heads off to Neumann College: **WE KNOW YOU CAN!**