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Anita Taide

March 15, 2010

Julie Bain, Features Editor
Ladies' Home Journal
125 Park Ave.
20th Floor
New York, NY 10017-5516

Dear Ms. Bain,

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, only 29 percent of American women age 25 or older possess a bachelor's degree. Unfortunately, too many women allow conflicts in work schedule, childcare and transportation to interfere with their educational goals. In my memoir, I share how I have overcome these challenges. I take my readers through the many obstacles I've faced, including my abusive marriage, layoff, and lack of emotional and financial support. More importantly, I describe how each of these obstacles has made me even more determined -- eventually allowing me to earn my master's degree.

My 2362-word memoir is entitled "Never Too Late to Learn"; it was inspired by the story "The Face of Domestic Violence," published in your March 2010 issue. Like this story, my memoir proves that we as women are capable of rising above our circumstances and making our dreams a reality.

I bring to *Ladies' Home Journal* nearly six years of professional writing experience. My writing credits include several articles in *Search Marketing Trends* as well as an article for *Ad News*. I have also authored several pieces that focus on personal enrichment as part of my graduate coursework; I will be receiving my Master of Professional Writing degree from Chatham University this May.

I would be happy to send you a full manuscript of my memoir upon your request. Enclosed is a SASE for your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Anita Taide

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Never Too Late to Learn

Anita Taide

Growing up, college was always a fun concept for me. I used to picture myself as a sorority girl, with lots of friends on campus and a boyfriend who visited me every night. I'd graduate with honors, find a wonderful job, get married, and live happily ever after. After graduating from high school, I was ready to make that dream come true. However, the road hasn't been easy.

Surprise Wedding

I remember how excited I was when I was accepted into the English Education program at Rutgers University. It was the spring of 1994, and my classes were scheduled to start that fall. Since I had four years of studying awaiting me, I decided to take a break that summer and visit India with my mother. I hadn't been there for eight years, and I was eager to see my relatives again. So when summer came, I packed up my belongings, said my goodbyes, and embarked for what I thought would be my 2-month-long journey.

During the first week of our trip, we decided to visit my mother's old friend. I immediately took a liking to his son. I started to visit him more frequently, reminding myself that I was only in the country for a few more weeks. Although neither of us wanted to rush into a

long-term relationship, our parents convinced us that that was the right thing to do. Two months later, at the age of 19, I was married.

My mother had returned to the U.S. after her visit, and I was left to live with my husband and his family. I tried my best to adjust to life in India, but it was hard. I didn't know anyone except for a few relatives. Furthermore, I was not permitted to work or attend college. Just when I thought things couldn't get worse, my husband began to abuse me both physically and emotionally. As much as I tried to explain my unhappiness to my parents, they told me to stay on and to try to make things work.

Then, eight months into the marriage, I discovered that I was pregnant. My husband and in-laws decided that it was best that I have the baby in the U.S. – that way, he would automatically become a U.S. citizen. It was only then that I was able to leave.

Back in the U.S.

I returned to the U.S. in August 1995, three months before my due date. After giving birth to my son Noel, I stayed at home for six more months. I told my parents everything that had happened, and that I had no intention of returning to India. I also told them how I longed to go to college and make something of myself. My father encouraged me to take things step-by-step, convincing me that there was no way I could handle a college workload while caring for an infant.

Instead, he encouraged me to enroll in a six-month medical assistant program at a local technical institute. He not only offered to pay for my tuition, but also to take care of Noel while I was at class – after all, he was retired and enjoyed spending time with his grandson. I obliged, since I knew that some education was better than none at all. I didn't have my license at the time,

so I walked to and from school – a 40-minute walk each way. In September 1996, I received my diploma in medical assisting.

At this point, I was still married. As much as I wanted to file for divorce, my parents were against it. They wanted me to sponsor my husband so that he could come and live in the U.S. They told me that things would be different if he came here. But first, they said, I should take a three-week trip to India. After all, Noel was almost a year old and had never met his father.

The Final Straw

In November 1996, I packed my suitcases and headed to India. Only a couple of days after returning, the abuse started again. I kept reminding myself that I was there for only three weeks. A few days before I was ready to leave, the revelation was made. During a call home, my mother confessed that she didn't want me to come back. My parents had sent me to India not to visit, but to live. They wanted me to give my marriage a second chance. I hesitantly obliged – and the abuse only got worse.

While I was in India, I wanted more than ever to work. I wanted to put my new medical assisting skills to use. Not surprisingly, my husband and his family held to their social convictions and neither allowed me to work nor study. I began to feel as though I was not capable of making any intellectual contribution to the world.

My mother visited India in early 1998. Again, I desperately plead with her to take me back. She finally agreed to send a ticket for me, but my husband convinced her to let Noel stay in India. I was heartbroken at the thought of leaving my son -- but I had to escape before it was too late.

The Start of a New Life

In February 1998, I was back in the U.S. – this time, for good. After three and a half long years, I finally had the opportunity to pursue a college degree. Although I couldn't afford a university education, I'd saved enough money to pay for classes at a local community college. I applied for admission just a few days after returning, and was accepted the same month.

I chose to pursue an associate's degree in Computer Information Systems. That way, I could graduate in two years, find a job without too much trouble, and move out of my parents' house. I didn't file for a divorce at the time, since my husband was still in India and had my son. I didn't want to risk giving up custody.

I attended college full-time for about a year. I still didn't have my license, so I took the bus to and from school. Although I wasn't in a sorority and didn't have a boyfriend, I felt as though my dreams had come true. I had my freedom, and that was more important than either of those things. In addition, I was more determined than ever to prove myself academically. I studied hard and excelled in all of my classes.

As I eagerly anticipated my second year of college, my mother said something that took me by surprise: "Why don't you go back to India and get Noel?" she asked. "He needs his mother." As delighted as I was to hear her say that, a hundred questions popped into my head at once: Will my husband let him come here? Where will he stay? How will I finish my education?

Making the Decision

Running on faith alone, I packed my bags for a third time and headed to India. Getting my son back wasn't easy -- but with some help from my aunt and the local police, I managed to do it. I told my husband that once I returned to the U.S., I would "sponsor" him; that way, he

could come and live here as a permanent resident. Two weeks later, in May 1999, I returned to the U.S. – this time, with Noel. I followed through with my promise, filing a green card application on behalf of my husband. As strange as it may sound now, I was willing to believe that he might change after coming to the U.S.

Since I wasn't able to support myself financially yet, Noel and I both lived at my parents' house. I stayed at home that summer, cherishing every minute of our time together. But part of me was also aching to go back to school and finish my degree. As I looked through the course catalog, I was pleased to find that many of the classes I needed to graduate were offered online. I returned to school that fall, enrolling in a mixture of traditional and online classes. My father assumed much of the responsibility of raising Noel while I studied.

Later that year, something struck me: I realized that I didn't have to depend on anybody else. I was my own person, and I deserved the respect and recognition I had been missing all my life. I decided to cancel my husband's sponsorship and file for divorce. Over the next few months, everything seemed to fall back into place.

Picking up the Pieces

In December 2000, at the age of 25, I received my Associate of Applied Science in Computer Information Systems. I graduated magna cum laude, despite the emotional turmoil I experienced while trying to recover from my abusive past. The same month, I found a job in walking distance from my parents' house.

After a few months of working, I was able to save enough money to move out. I found an apartment that was even closer to work. Noel continued to live with my parents, since it was

more convenient and he was comfortable with them. The same year, I bought my first car and became officially divorced. Then, just as things began to look up, I was laid off.

When I lost my job, my confidence took a nosedive. I felt like I wasn't qualified enough to find another job -- and the last thing I wanted to do was go through the interview process all over again. Then it hit me. This was the perfect time to continue my education. After all, I'd always wanted a bachelor's degree -- and I had enough in my savings to take at least a few classes while I worked part-time.

Back to School

In the spring of 2002, I was accepted into the Business Administration program at Rowan University. Soon after that, I applied for a scholarship through the community college I'd attended -- and was awarded half the cost of my tuition. When I met with my advisor that summer, I was encouraged to apply for yet another scholarship. I was ecstatic upon learning that I was awarded the second scholarship as well. This meant that I wouldn't have to pay a dime for my education.

Since I had enough money to live on my savings during the school year, I decided to enroll for classes full-time. Initially, I hesitated -- after all, money would be tight. Plus, I was seven years older than most juniors at Rowan. What would they think?

I learned to discipline myself financially. I stayed on campus between classes to save gas, avoided going out in the weekends, and temped during my breaks to earn some extra money. And even at 27, I blended right in. I joined study groups, visited my friends' dorms, and became involved in campus activities. I DJ'ed for Rowan's radio station and served in leadership

positions in the American Marketing Association and Asian Cultural Association. I knew that Noel was in good hands, although I wished that I could spend more time with him.

Before I knew it, my journey had come to an end. In May 2004, I graduated from Rowan University with a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and a 4.0 GPA. I felt like I had just won a 5000-meter race -- and my parents couldn't have been prouder. Now it was just a matter of finding a job.

Third Time's a Charm

At this point, I had exhausted most of my life savings and had only a couple of thousand dollars in my bank account. I spent 8-10 hours a day searching for a job. About a week after graduating, I stumbled upon a part-time internship listed on Rowan's Web site. I was called for an interview, and as luck would have it, I was hired as a full-time employee the following month.

Over the next few years, I was able to build my portfolio and gain valuable experience in the world of Internet marketing. But as successful as I was on the job front, I still wasn't satisfied -- I realized that my passion lay in writing, not in marketing.

In the spring of 2008, I started researching universities that offered master's degrees in writing. My parents discouraged me, telling me that there was no way I could work full-time, pursue a master's degree, and have enough time to spend with Noel. I told them that it could be done. That summer, I applied and was accepted into the Master of Professional Writing program at Chatham University. The program was entirely online, which was convenient due to my hectic work schedule.

I knew that the program would take a toll on me financially -- especially since I was still making monthly car payments and my rent had just increased. Plus, even though Noel lived with

my parents, I was financially responsible for him. I was relieved to learn that I qualified for a student loan that would cover half my tuition.

There I was – I'd just turned 33, and I was starting grad school. It seemed that the more challenges I faced, the more resilient I became. I often stayed up until 2 a.m. studying, only to awaken at 7 a.m. the next morning for work. I sacrificed my weekend outings and favorite TV shows. Despite my demanding workload, I was still able to make time for my family and friends. I knew where my priorities lay -- and in those two years alone, I became much more organized and disciplined in all aspects of my life.

This May, I will be graduating with my master's degree. Ten years ago, I wouldn't have thought it was possible. No longer do I feel trapped by my circumstances. No longer am I financially dependent on anyone else. Today, I am happier, freer, and more confident than I've ever been in my life. And ironically, it's not my educational qualifications that make me feel this way. It's knowing that I have what it takes to fight the odds and to meet my challenges head on.