



85-year-old GED Student Says Graduating is on Her Bucket List



It's 5:30 p.m. on a Thursday, and Gladys Tomlin enters her classroom at Glades Central High School. Her hair is perfectly coiffed. Her outfit includes a belted sweater and matching layers. Her nails are hot pink, her ring fingers have an accent of silver sparkles. A gold cross hangs from a chain over her turtleneck.

Ms. Tomlin pulls out her heavy GED prep book and dozens of tattered and bent sticky notes peek out from the pages, holding her place on important lessons. She has been working all day, like her fellow classmates, but they go to class nightly during their Adult Education class to prepare for the GED tests that will earn them high school diploma.

This scene is repeated by hundreds of students throughout the Adult Education programs in Palm Beach County schools every evening. So, what makes Ms. Tomlin any different from her peers? Born in 1932, Ms. Tomlin is 85 years old. And she is determined.

“It’s on my bucket list to get my high school diploma,” she explained. **“It’s something I want to do before I die.”**

Raised in the small town of Bartow, Florida, Ms. Tomlin had to drop out of school in the ninth grade to help her parents raise her six brothers and sisters.

She has been working in the School District for 28 years as a ‘foster grandparent’/teacher aide, first for Cholee Lake Elementary School, and for the past 23 years at K.E. Cunningham/Canal Point Elementary. “The kids are always running up to me, hugging on me, and calling me Grandma,” Ms. Tomlin said.



She raised her own seven children with her husband of 57 years, and when her husband passed away four years ago, Ms. Tomlin grew bored. “I finally had free time with no yoke around my neck,” she joked, though her demeanor quickly sobers. “But I do miss him.”

“She was always moaning about it, so we told her just get her GED,” said Cheryl Tomlin, Gladys’s daughter-in-law. **“Our pastor told her to ‘let your memory be your motivation.’ She was a good student. We told her it will all come back to her.”**

Since she started classes in August 2016, a member of her family drives her to class every evening and sits in the classroom while Ms. Tomlin and her fellow students review their lessons for three hours each night. And like any student, she also needs family to help keep her on track when it’s time to focus on homework.

“We sometimes have to tell her to put down her Bible and get back to studying her school work,” Cheryl Tomlin said.

Earning the GED isn’t an easy task for any student, said Mitsie Johnson, Assistant Principal for Adult and Community Education at Glades Central High School. There are four test areas that cover reading and writing, math, science and social studies.

“It’s a tough test because you earn the same high school diploma, just rather than having a school name, it’s from the Department of Education,” Johnson said.

As an employee of the School District, the cost of taking each of the four components of the GED is covered by the District. It’s a process that can take some students two years to complete, but Ms. Tomlin is determined to see it to completion.

The family recently celebrated Ms. Tomlin’s birthday together, “And we’re going to celebrate her graduation next, and then her coronation,” Cheryl Tomlin said. College is also a goal Ms. Tomlin and her family haven’t dismissed. “She has adult children who have failed to graduate,” Cheryl Tomlin said. “We’re just so proud of her.”