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**Mother of 8, Tamara McCoy Serves as Student Speaker at Nurse Pinning Ceremony**

**[Bridgeview, IL]** Tamara McCoy of Chicago’s South Side would not let anything get in the way of achieving her dream of becoming a Registered Nurse, including the birth of her *eighth* child! During the ninth month of her two-year Nursing Program at Northwestern College’s Violet L Schumacher School of Nursing, Tamara gave birth to her son Le'Gend Eli', and *three* *days* later returned to class. She was determined to complete her degree, and she had her husband and seven other children rooting for her success.

This past June Tamara graduated with her Associate of Applied Science in Nursing. A week later, she was one of 29 graduating nurses who participated in the Summer Pinning Ceremony for its Violet L Schumacher School of Nursing. It was there that Tamara shared her story as one of two student speakers to address the Class. Her message to her fellow nursing students and others: *Don’t be afraid to chase after your dreams, even when it looks like it’s either impossible, too late, or could never happen*. “I had so many obstacles in place before, during, and even after I completed the Nursing program,” Tamara explained. “But quitting was never an option for me, so don’t let it be for you!!”

Tamara grew up in the south suburbs of Chicago, the third of seven children (5 girls, 2 boys), all very different but full of love and very close. Their household was a strict one run by her mother, Rochelle Achampion, a woman with a strong sense of family and discipline, but also one who made sure they took trips, went to parades and participated in after school activities. Her father, Tony McCray, was always there when they needed him and made sure she and her siblings had a relationship with him, no matter what. Tamara would be the first college graduate out of the seven kids in her family, as well as the first out of two generations.

Tamara met her future husband Lorenz Slack when she was in the 3rd grade and knew then that he had a huge crush on her. But it wasn’t until a basketball game her freshman year in high school that she finally would succumb to his charms and call herself his girlfriend. In 2003, a sophomore at 16 years of age, Tamara dropped out of Hillcrest High School in Country Club Hills when she had her first child. Despite having a goal to return to school to prepare for the career she always dreamed of, it would take approximately 8 years for that to happen. In 2011 Tamara returned to school to obtain her GED, the first step toward achieving her career goals.

From the start of their relationship her freshman year of high school, Tamara and Lorenz stuck together through good times and bad, building their family and facing whatever challenges came their way. They had their second child before they married in March of 2005, and while her husband worked as a truck driver, Tamara worked odd jobs at Wendy's and Target to help support the family. As their marriage grew stronger, their family expanded. While caring for her then 6 children, in 2009 Tamara became a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), yet within two years knew that she wanted more of a career. She enrolled in a Medical Administrative Assistant program, completed it and continued to work in a nursing home as a CNA.

After Tamara had her seventh child, her focus shifted more towards simply being a mom, making sure all of her children were succeeding in school and in life, and ensuring that they had the best opportunities available. Her only goal then was to be the best wife and mother she could be, and she let go of her own childhood dream of becoming a nurse. As a child Tamara had watched her grandmother do wonderful things as a nurse; it was her grandmother’s passion for her career and patients that inspired her to want to follow in her footsteps. But with 7 children and a job in home health, Tamara believed her chances of ever fulfilling her nursing dream were gone. Her focus had shifted from herself to her children.

However, as a mother, Tamara also knew that she needed to set the example for her children. Despite telling them that there was no mountain too high to climb and how with faith in God all things were possible, in her heart, she knew she was not leading them by example. Then she watched as her own mother entered nursing school, and she saw her drive to succeed. It was her mother’s example that gave Tamara the courage to move forward and make her own nursing dreams come true.

In spring of 2015 Tamara walked into Northwestern College, enrolled and started her Nursing Program in June. When she first walked through the doors she felt welcomed, and she was excited to learn that the College’s Violet L Schumacher School of Nursing maintained small class sizes and schedules she could make work in her extremely busy life. Tamara explained how she was comforted to know that Northwestern College had so many tools in place to help her complete this intense and challenging program, such as tutoring and online help. It was a relief to know that she could rely on those services to get her over the hurdles she knew would come.

According to Tamara, those hurdles came fast. First and foremost, she had to figure out a routine for herself and her 7 children, relying heavily on her biggest supporter, her husband Lorenz. Tamara also had to deal with the naysayers around her, spewing negative words concerning her decision to pursue nursing school. There were the fears within herself that she had to face, that maybe going after her own dream was the wrong thing to do, or at least the wrong *time* to do it. Finally, she had to balance all of these competing issues while pregnant with her 8th child when she began nursing school. But quitting was not an option for Tamara, for she was setting an example for her children that no mountain was too high, and dreams were to be achieved not given up on.

A time came when Tamara failed her first class and she was faced with feelings of failure and embarrassment. Had she bitten off more than she could chew? Was this journey an impossible one? Luckily, Tamara’s drive to succeed and dedication to set a positive example to her children easily squelched her momentary lapse of confidence.

Tamara had a team behind her, helping her to cross the finish line. First, Lorenz worked extra hours so she did not have to work much during school, and he was her biggest cheerleader. No matter what obstacle or fork in the road she faced, her husband would simply say, “*Tamara, you did good. Don’t worry.*” While that helped a lot, she explained, she still worried. Second, she had her dad there to make sure she moved forward. He didn’t want her to have anything else to stress about so he came over to help clean the house, feed the children, and one of her favorites, cook Sunday dinners for her family. Both Lorenz and her dad vigilantly reminded her of her destiny, praying with her whenever she needed extra strength.

But it was Tamara’s children who became her constant strength. They wiped her tears when she cried, told her it was ok when things were going wrong, and they made sure she stayed on task with studying and doing homework. The tables had turned! They had grade competitions with weekly tests, final grades, and GPAs, which meant everything to them, and to her. As a result, her children each moved up into the next grade, and Tamara graduated with a Nursing degree! According to Tamara, she owes much of her success to her 8 children (5 girls and 3 boys): Eliyanise, 14; Elishanae, 13; Lorenz Jr, 11; Eliyah, 10; Lawrence, 9; Elijournee, 8; Elijahvai, 5; and Le’Gend, 17 months. Her pride showed as she described them as best friends to each other, honor roll students, and each with their own personalities and a love of learning, sports, and active church participation.

With her diploma in hand thanks to her 8 children and her entire team of supportive cheerleaders, Tamara is studying hard for the NCLEX nursing licensure exam that she will sit for in late August. She has two job offers in hand to consider, both contingent on passage of the exam, and she has plans already in place to enroll in the Bachelors Nursing Program at either Governor’s State University or Chamberlain. Ultimately, Tamara plans to continue her education beyond her Bachelors, with a goal of being a Doctor of Nurse Practice (DNP) and working in an OBGYN clinic so she can have more of a one-on-one with the mothers she has as patients. Finally, with the keys to a more financially rewarding career in hand, Tamara and her husband have plans for a new home in a new neighborhood with greater opportunities for her children. While she proved to them that no mountain was too high to climb and with God, all things are possible, Tamara’s future goals prove that her mountain climbing days are not over yet!

**About Northwestern College:**

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