



GED Scholars Initiative

Getting on Track • Bob's Story

At 69 years old, he has the demeanor of a young man in his 20s with a sense of humor to match. His worn leather jacket, slightly grayed ponytail, and pierced ears might indicate a rebel without a cause in his younger days, but there is much more to Bob Rojc than meets the eye.

For instance, someone might never know from just looking at him that he is a two-time cancer survivor, he is dyslexic, or that it took him four times over 50 years to receive his GED. But Rojc didn't stop at his GED; he is now a freshman student at Kent State University. Though the process to get to where he is today has been a struggle, the Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) program and GED Scholars Initiative have been shoulders to lean on throughout.

While most people enjoy sitting on the couch thinking mindless thoughts, Rojc took the road less traveled. For him, it was while sitting on the couch day after day after defeating cancer

for the second time that Rojc had his first 'defining moment' and made the choice that he was "not leaving this planet without an education." He found assistance with the Sixth District Compact ABLE program.

"It was the first time in four tries; I found a good ABLE program with Joyce Taylor, and two damn good teachers who still keep in contact with me."

The Sixth District Compact is one of the 118 ABLE programs housed in Ohio. ABLE includes Basic Skills Education, GED Preparation, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Family Literacy, and Workplace Education. Classes are held at various times throughout the day in a variety of locations, and the classes are made up of people who vary in age and cultural backgrounds. Rojc attended the ABLE programs to get his GED, but others have gone to improve their basic skills, get a job or a better job, go to college, help their children or grandchildren with

school work, or a combination of the above.

The ABLE classrooms were a perfect fit for Rojc. He felt that unlike the other three tries at receiving his GED, these classrooms didn't feel like high school where he previously had to be the class clown to hide his insecurities. Instead, he found strength in the small classroom settings. He also received a push at ABLE that he had not yet received anywhere else.

Here, an ABLE teacher told him he had potential and pushed him to write about conquering his cancer. This helped him discover his love for writing, and he hasn't stopped exploring it yet, "I have always been blue collar, but I wanted to be a writer."

This same writing assignment provided Rojc with his second defining moment: He learned that he could complete something great given a little guidance. At first he was apprehensive about writing the story, but after losing sleep for days at a time, he decided that he would try it just to get some rest. Because he pushed through his life-long buildup of insecurities and wrote his story, he was the only one to get published in his

entire class. He remembers the day he found out joyfully:

"Normally, I am the 1st one in class, but that day I was last. When I got to class, my teacher stopped and said 'you made it,' and being my usual sarcastic self, I responded 'I've been accepted, 'bout time!'"

Because of his will to push through the difficulties of writing, Rojc was invited to the Ohio Literacy Resource Center's annual Ohio Writers' Conference, which is a professional conference that celebrates the writing accomplishments of adults who participate in ABLE programs. That year, Rojc's "Return to Health" was one of 84 published entries out of a submitted total of over 350 pieces.

He remembers attending the annual Ohio Writers' Conference as a "really big deal," but nothing compares to the moment when he first opened his *Beginnings* book.

"My teacher, Nicole, told me to open my book and read my story. I told her 'I already know what it says. I wrote it!' But since she insisted, I did it any-

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ways. Nothing had really happened to me until this point. When I read my name, well, that's the reason you and I are here right now. It was a hell of an accomplishment for me."

After this, Rojc realized that he did not have to stop at a GED, but rather he could go to college and be successful at it. His ABLE instructors pointed him in the direction of the GED Scholars Initiative at Kent State University. Rojc attended the Dominion Foundation funded Bridges Program summer session where he was taught study strategies and learned everything he needed to know about transitioning from a GED student to a college student.

He also received a stipend from the GED Scholars Initiative, which was created by the OLRC as the first of its kind to offer academic, financial and

social support to those students who have earned their GED and are continuing their education at Kent State University.

Since discovering the GED Scholars Initiative, doors have begun opening up for him, and with its aid and support, he struggles less. Rojc, who in previous years thought he could explain his trouble reading and writing with eyesight problems, learned that he was dyslexic. With the computer accessibility in the labs and the support and patience of the GED Scholars Initiative, he has tutors that can help him ease through the everyday stress involved with dyslexia.

"If I need any type of assistance, GED Scholars are here to help me. Without this program, I don't know where I would be, but probably not in college."

Though busy with the battle of endless work that college students endure on a regular basis, Rojc has continued his quest of writing and has even participated in the entry reviewing process for the Writers' Conference. He also returned to the conference the following year to speak. Although everyday is a struggle, he finds solace at the OLRC and GED Scholars Initiative.

"I was really fortunate to find this place. This program is really great."

Rojc hopes that he can inspire other people to keep pushing through their education. His goal is to someday find a venue where he can speak to other adults who may have learning disabilities or just had hard times in school like himself and show them how the ABLE program led him to the GED Schol-

ars Initiative and the OLRC, which have changed his life.

"I would love to find somewhere to speak about these programs {ABLE and the GED Scholars Initiative.} I learned about mine in the local paper, but a lot of people don't know about it. We've all had problems, and if I can help point someone from the other side of the tracks in this direction, I would. 'Cause I know my tracks weren't straight either."



• The GED Scholars Initiative was created by the Ohio Literacy Resource Center and is the first of its kind in the nation. The center works with other programs and offices at Kent State University to meet the needs of GED Scholars. The Initiative addresses the needs of students who earned their GED and attend Kent State University. Through research and development, this initiative provides students with support to meet the university's academic standards, complete programs studies, gain technological expertise and become aware of career opportunities.

www.gedscholars.org