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Like mother, like son

MAY 26, 2016



This year's Spring commencement at Georgia Southern was a special time for mother and son Beckie Lee May and Austin May, both of whom graduated with degrees from the University.

Beckie, a math teacher in Walton County, Georgia, received her Education Specialist degree in Instructional Technology, and Austin received his Bachelor of Science degree in computer science. For Beckie, the moment was especially sweet, and was the culmination of a life of hard work and persistence.

"My son is the reason for all of my successes," she said. "I raised him as a single mom and earned all three of my degrees while working and raising him and his sister. I knew from the minute he was born that I had to do more with my life and be a good role model of success to him.

"Being able to share graduation weekend at Georgia Southern with him was neat, but on the Saturday of his graduation, it was all about him."

For Austin, the road to a degree was a difficult one, but he said reaching the milestone has been a defining point of growth in his life.

"Getting to that day was a rocky road," he said. "You have days where you crush it and days that crush you. It was a difficult climb. I joked that I wanted to carve a brick out of the IT building as a token for all my time spent in there."

Beckie previously earned a Bachelor's of Business Administration in Information Systems from Georgia State University, and worked as a software developer prior to becoming a teacher. She has been teaching in Walton County for nine years, and chose to pursue her Education Specialist degree in order to better integrate her technological background with her love of teaching.

"I am and will continue to be a high school math teacher," she said. "My new degree in Instructional Technology and new endorsement in Online Teaching and Learning will allow me to advance in my career and be a teacher leader in classroom technology."

While he was still an undergraduate student at Georgia Southern, Austin received an internship as a software developer for AT&T in Atlanta during the summers of 2014 and 2015. His hands-on training led to a job offer from the company, which hired him at the end of last summer as an applications developer. He will begin his full-time employment there in late June, and Beckie says she couldn't be more proud.

"I feel like he is actually the better role model of success and certainly is one that his 14-year-old sister looks up to," she said. "I am so incredibly proud of all he has accomplished on his own in the four years that he was away at college."

Realizing a dream

MAY 26, 2016



As any new college graduate might claim, Georgia Southern alumnus Wayne Williams said the journey to receiving his bachelor of general studies degree with an emphasis in business and management with a minor in writing, wasn't an easy one.

"It was tough. Most of my school work was done in the wee hours of the morning, and I didn't sleep a lot," he said with a laugh. "Most of my school work would be done after everything else I was working on was done."

Williams, 57, began pursuing his bachelor's degree in 2009 at Georgia Southern University after retiring in 2005 from a 25 year career in the Army. He considered it a personal goal to complete his degree, but got even more than he bargained for when he found a passion for writing, and skills that he could pass on to local youth who he mentored through the youth organization he founded, Youth Career Camp Inc., and being a leader in the church he also built from the ground up — [New Beginnings Christian Outreach Ministry](#) in Statesboro.

"This organization was part of the purpose of me going to school," he said. "I wanted to set an example for the kids I was working with."

And while he didn't tell the youth he worked with that he was in school, he did use what he was learning in the classroom to better their experience with his program.

"In some of the business classes I was taking, I learned entrepreneur training which I used to train the youth," he said. "It impacted the way that I would interact with them and teach them. I also gave them some instructions to teach them how to start business and actually be able to do that at their age —whether it's pushing a lawnmower or selling lemonade, it gives them some experience and leadership."

Not only did he gain skills to pass along to youth he mentored, he also gained self-confidence and a love for writing, which is helping him with his current project of writing an inspirational and devotional book.

"My education has given me an opportunity, and my writing studies were really helpful and gave me confidence in myself," he said. "I really think without it, I would have had a much harder time putting my book together."

Williams credits Lori Amy, Ph.D., in the Department of Writing and Linguistics for helping him find his passion for writing.

"She was amazing, I learned so much from that entire class from how to deal with classroom situations to writing and self-expression to the whole pedagogy of writing," he said.

He added that his professors truly worked with him throughout his educational career and helped him to succeed.

"When I started, I would tell my instructors, 'I need to learn, I need the education — give me something that I can use now,'" he said. "I wasn't focused on a letter grade, and that was my focus the whole time I was in school.

"Some instructors were very, very helpful and they just understood. They let me know they couldn't curve homework, but for most part when I needed extra time, they would give me a little more

time, but I still had to do the work that everyone else did. The instructors were amazing — that's what made me want to continue, instructors that really cared."

Even more special for Williams is that he shares his alumni status of Georgia Southern with his two daughters, Tia Richardson ('07) and Tasha Spears ('10).

"It was the overall experience for my daughters and family while they attended Georgia Southern that helped me make the decision, not only to attend school, but more specifically to attend Georgia Southern," he said.