

Nursing program graduate fulfils dream after life took a different path

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For one graduate of the Licensed Practical Nursing program at Okanagan College in Penticton, it was a step along a journey that was nearly 20 years in the making.

Lauri Park was just out of high school when she first considered nursing as a profession, but it turned out her dream would need to wait.

"I've always wanted to do nursing," said Park. "My life took a different turn when I had kids."

Like many mothers, Park needed to care for her three children, so working to put a roof over their heads and food on the table became her priority.

"Basically, it means having to work at a job that you're not really that fulfilled in, making money to pay the bills and whatnot," she said.

A total of 34 students donned their caps and gowns - 12 in Penticton and 22 in Kelowna - to receive their practical nursing certificates.

With no job shortage in the nursing field, a few of Park's classmates have already secured jobs, while others expect to find work soon. Graduates write their nurse licensing exam on Jan. 9.

Park decided to reflect on what she wanted out of a career after being diagnosed with a serious health problem in June 2006.

"It made me look at my life and think about what I really would like, to be more fulfilled, and live life with greater purpose and go after my dream," she said.

Park plugged away for several months, taking three correspondence courses she needed as pre-requisite classes for the program, working full time and caring for her family as a single mom. She was one of 20 applicants chosen from a pool of more than 160 people and had her first day of classes in January.

"It was nerve-wracking, and my stomach was doing flip-flops," she said.

"It was also exciting because I was

able to do what I've always wanted to do."

After their time in the classroom was complete, students then did a six-week practicum, followed by six weeks of one-on-one instruction working alongside a nurse.

Park said the road leading to her current destination has been rewarding, but it remains yet another stop on her journey.

"It was nice to get somewhere I wanted to go," said Park. "I eventually want to get my degree in (registered) nursing. I just wanted to take the LPN because it was only a year, and I wanted to come out with something before I decide to actually commit to the four-year degree program."

It was more than the achievement of a lifetime goal and an abundance of job opportunities drawing her into the nursing field.

"I really, really love people," she said. "I'm really compassionate about people, and I just really thought that that's one way to connect with people, and I found it really was."