

## **JUST KEEP GOING**

We all get discouraged sometimes. I see it frequently when clients come to my firm. They are in pain, frustrated with their recovery, struggling with finances, worried about their jobs, and dealing with the effects on their families. This is a story about a woman who faced adversity but prevailed in a lifelong goal to finish law school. It reminds us that we can reach our goals when we simply refuse to quit.

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In New York, in 1988, Abdul met Annette, 28 years his junior, and also from Sierra Leone. She studied business at Bernard Baruch College, and later worked as an assistant in the finance department at the U.N. She was content at her job. But Abdul wanted more for her. "To him, that was not enough, being someone else's assistant," she said. "He said, you can do better than this."

Eventually, Abdul persuaded Annette to apply at NSU law school. But there were setbacks. Initially, Annette did not score high enough on the LSAT admission exam. Instead, she enrolled in an intensive, online program known as Alternative Admission Model Program for Legal Education, or AAMPLE, and passed that exam, winning acceptance to law school in 2003.

That spring, the family prepared to move to Weston. Annette, pregnant with their fourth child, planned to start classes that fall. Instead, in April 2003, Abdul was diagnosed with stomach cancer, a month before the birth of their son. Annette postponed law school to take care of her husband, who soon learned he was dying. "Promise me you'll go to law school, if not for you, then for me," he told her.

"That was his last wish to me, and that was my promise to him," Annette said. "I saw my world collapsing in front of me. I thought it was a bad dream, a nightmare. Before he died, he said, 'We're not going to give up.' I said OK. But secretly I cried every day, from that day until the day he died."

In September 2003, just five months after the diagnosis, Abdul died. Intent on keeping her promise, Annette moved the following summer to South Florida, where she knew no one, and was now raising an infant and three children alone. She started school that fall. "I was like a zombie at first," she said. "The first semester, I almost dropped out...I used my promise to him as my own way of dealing with this."

At school, she was back in jeans and sneakers and carrying a backpack, like her teenage daughters. "It was kind of funny because we were all in school," said Anne-Marie, 17, her oldest daughter. "We'd say, 'How was school today, mom?' We had homework; she had homework. We'd make jokes, 'Let us see your report card.'"

Her daughter, Annette, 16, became her "legal secretary," helping with computer research. The older girls took over the housework, making dinner and taking care of their younger sister, Aisata, 9, and brother, Abdul, age 4.

"It was hard getting used to at first," her second oldest said. But, "there was no doubt in my mind that my mother would finish." She would not have finished without her children, Annette said. "The pressure was too much. My daughter said, 'Mom, you can't give up. We've come too far.'"



Annette cried the day she picked up her cap and gown. "I want my kids to see me as an example.

In the midst of adversity, you have choices to make. If they have a dream, I want them to say, 'If my mother can do it, I can do it, too.'" Her children accompanied her on stage for the graduation ceremony.

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