

Earning degree at UWO ends 19-year balancing act

Linda Burnett started balancing work, family and school after her nurse's qualifications in Jamaica weren't accepted in Canada.

By Lisa Blackburn
The London Free Press

When Linda Burnett immigrated to Canada from Kingston, Jamaica, in 1969, she expected to continue her work as a nurse.

Instead, she went back to school in 1972. On and off over the next 19 years, Burnett balanced work, family and academic life. It was a struggle sometimes, says Burnett, but it was worth it. On Tuesday, she received her bachelor of arts degree in social sciences from the University of Western Ontario.

Burnett had tried when she first came to Canada to have her Kingston studies recognized. But the education ministry was only willing to give her Grade 8 equivalency.

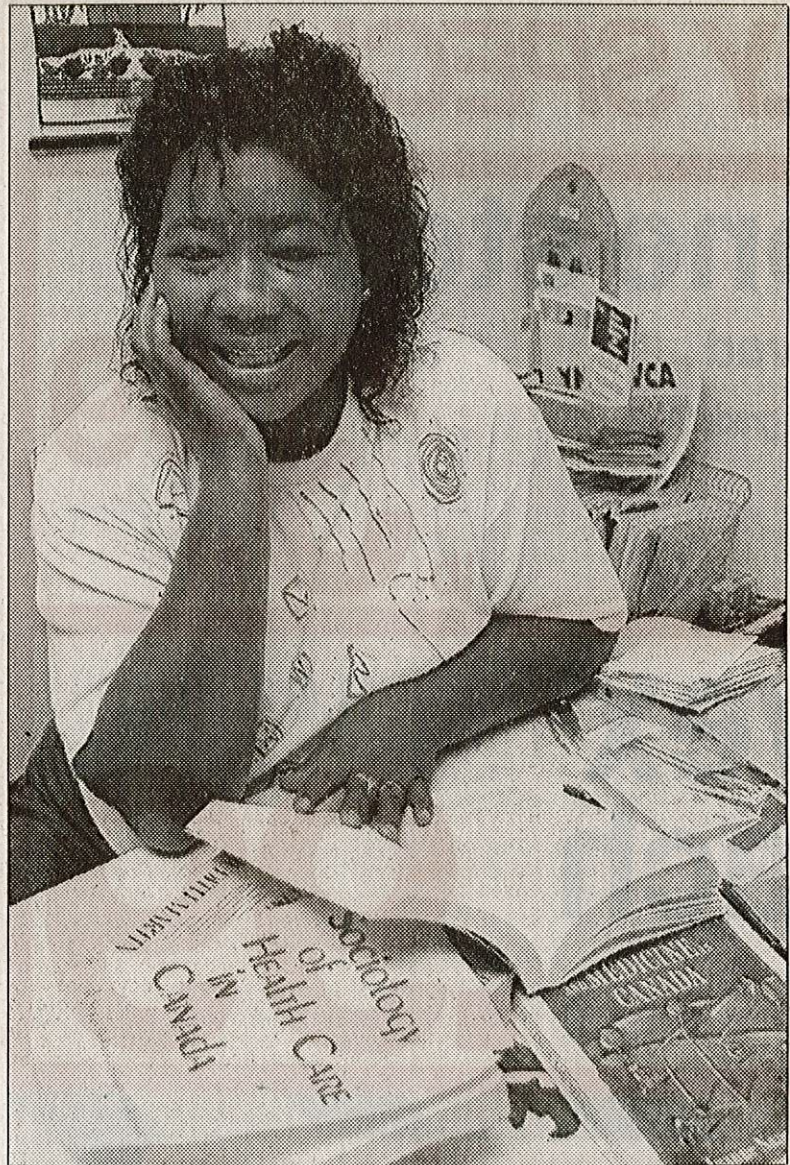
BACK TO SCHOOL: She started high school in 1972 at the Clinton Community Centre and finished her remaining grades in one year. The following September, she began training as a registered nurse at Conestoga College in Stratford.

At the same time, she was working at Alexandra Marine and General Hospital in Goderich, where she was living with her husband, Lawrence, and their four children.

After finishing her nurse's training, Burnett got a job at Victoria Hospital in London. But the education bug was still in her system. Having proven she could make the grade in Canada with high school and nursing, Burnett wanted another challenge.

"I started attending Western in 1980 just as folly, really. My first course was psychology . . . I couldn't get over the amount of reading I had to do."

Burnett continued working at Victoria Hospital while taking her degree one or two courses at



Sue Reeve/The London Free Press

Linda Burnett, a London nurse and mother, can pack up her books after receiving her bachelor of arts degree on Tuesday. She started attending Western in 1980 "just as folly, really."

a time.

MAKING TIME: "I took my vacation days and broke them down into four-hour slots. When I needed time for school, I took part of a vacation day. And when I ran out of that I took four-hour leaves of absence."

Burnett says her husband and children have been supportive. But during exam time, having three teenagers at home was a little tough.

"Sometimes to get away I'd go to the library, or take the car to Springbank Park, park in the

shade and work inside."

Last March, after 10 years of part-time study, Burnett phoned UWO to find out how her credits stood.

"I must have miscalculated, because the lady on the phone said, 'Oh, you're graduating this year.' I couldn't believe it. When I hung up, I let out about five big screams, I was so happy."

But aside from convocation, Burnett will also be busy with other celebrations. On Saturday, her youngest child is getting married.