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Eleanor Roosevelt

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GRADUATION

Students overcome obstacles to graduate

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
Staff Writer

Omia Wilson has not let motherhood keep her from graduating. When her son Tykel Smith was born she told herself "I've got one more year. I'm finishing."

Wilson had watched people around her leave high school because of parenthood but realized that wasn't what she wanted.

Wilson will graduate with both a high school diploma and a certified nursing assistant license. This summer she plans to continue her job at Taco Bell and work as a CNA. By fall she'll start the nursing program at Gaston College, then it's on to a university for a bachelor of

nursing degree. Wilson hopes to continue her education by studying to be a nurse practitioner.

She's eager to make money for herself, her son and to give back to her mother Janice Wilson.

"I want to help her out. She has sacrificed to give me what I want," Wilson said.

Her mother purchased newborn clothes for Tykel and provides childcare.

Owens advises others, whether a teen parent or not, to "keep your head up, look toward your goals."

Anika Patel has overcome a learning disability and now tutors another student. For years she had to read aloud in order to comprehend. Her parents and teachers encouraged her to continue reading and by eleventh grade she was able to read and understand silently.

For her senior project, Patel tutored a KMHS student who is autistic. She has enjoyed the satisfaction of helping someone else.

Patel's learning disability does not affect her intelligence. She organized a Relay for Life team, competed in the Martin Luther King oratorical contest and earned a Future Teachers of America scholarship.

Patel will attend Gaston College then transfer to UNC-Charlotte where she'll major in elementary education or business. Her parents are Subas and Nilesh Patel.

When Rafaele Smith was a freshman at KMHS the young man doubted he would stay in school. Problems at home kept him distracted from schoolwork and a quick temper landed Smith in fights.

Smith's grandmother, Fanny Smith, and aunt Priscilla McLeave, both pastors, teamed up to help him out. McLeave opened her home to the struggling teen. Sensing when he was tempted to misbehave, McLeave would anoint Smith with oil and pray over him as he slept.

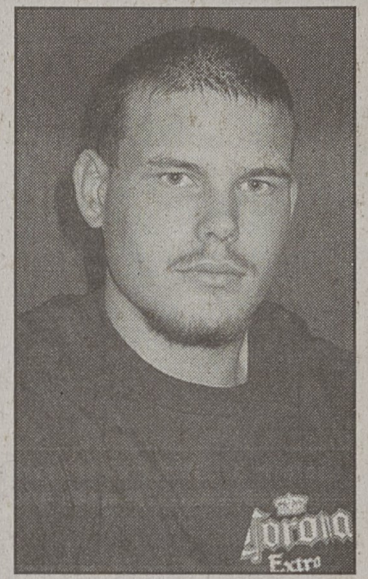
His grandmother instructed him to read from the Bible to improve his literacy skills. She allowed him to conduct church services,



OMIA WILSON



ANIKA PATEL



DUSTAN HUDSON

building his confidence, and purchased him drums to play at church. The instruments served as an outlet for frustration.

Smith calls his grandfather, Leroy Smith, an inspiration. The man takes his grandson to the flea market on Saturdays and asks him about school. Sharing his own successful battle to overcome a temper, he has given his grandson a good example.

Now Smith has been accepted at Johnson C. Smith University.

"I believe I will make it," he said.

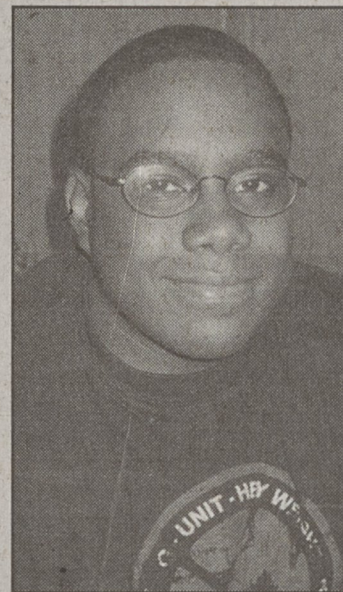
Today Smith and his father, Leroy Smith Jr., have improved their relationship. Smith admires him for raising seven children.

"I don't believe I could do that," he said.

Dustan Hudson hasn't let a hearing impairment keep him from succeeding in the classroom and on the football field.

Hudson played on the KMHS team all four years as a defensive lineman. He was named most improved player this year. He credits Coach Dave Farquharson and Coach Brian Thompson for helping him improve. Hudson also lifts weights, which gave him a strength advantage on the football field. The first year he played without an interpreter. For the past three years he's had one.

Hudson will study welding at Cleveland



DANIEL MULL

Community College. He's gotten a head start at KMHS by taking a college-level Huskins class under Ed Herndon.

After his sister Megan Bledsoe was diagnosed with leukemia, Hudson organized a fund raiser at school for the Leukemia Society.

His parents are Tracy and Gene Bledsoe.

Siblings Carla and Daniel Mull lost their mother Shirley Mull to cancer their sophomore year. Despite that, the two are coping and succeeding.

"She taught us well. We knew we couldn't give up," Daniel Mull said.

Several years ago they watched as their mother dealt with the death of her mother, Granny Powell.

"We did the same thing," Daniel said. "I don't think



CARLA MULL

any parent would want you to give up."

While their mother was at Gaston Memorial, the two would visit after school.

Mrs. Mull would not let her children stay the night at the hospital; instead, she made them go home so they would be rested for school the next morning.

Their aunt, Geanie Moore, came to North Carolina to help out while Mrs. Mull was dying. Because their mother had moved to North Carolina from New York to raise her children the family decided they should stay here. Judith White, a member of their Kingdom Hall congregation, agreed to open her home to them.

Daniel will attend North Carolina State University to study international business. Carla will study culinary arts at Johnson and Wales.

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Congratulations
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Kings Mountain High School Junior Marshals are Amber Malpass, left, front, Heather Wilson, Stephanie Smith, Christine Sisk. Kristyn Funderburke, left, back row, James Gladden, Brandon McClain, Trey Robinson, Cody Barrett, David Hughes and Lacey Beam. Drew Martin and Travis Volz are not pictured.

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