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WKU-O grad went from homeless to master's degree

By Keith Lawrence Messenger-Inquirer
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Western Kentucky University-Owensboro elementary education graduate Taylor Smith and her fiancée, Bret Bocianoski, left, make their way into Blandford Lecture Hall on the campus at Owensboro Community College on Monday before graduation ceremonies for the college.

Photo by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer | geans@messenger-inquirer.com



Amanda Brothers

Photo by Greg Eans, Messenger-Inquirer | geans@messenger-inquirer.com

Amanda Brothers made her dream come true Monday night when she walked across the stage in Blandford Hall at Owensboro Community & Technical College.

Western Kentucky University-Owensboro was recognizing its 2022 graduates including Brothers, who was the student speaker at the ceremony.

She told her teachers, fellow graduates and their families how she went from being homeless in Texas to completing her master's degree in sociology in 10 years.

Brothers said she starts working in June as a therapist at Counseling Connections and is getting married this summer.

In 2012, she said, when her son was 1, her ex-husband kicked them out and they lived in a homeless shelter in Texas.

In 2014, Brothers said, both of her parents were diagnosed with cancer within one month of each other.

So, she came to Owensboro to help care for them.

Brothers said she enrolled at OCTC with plans to become a nurse.

But between working, caring for her parents and attending classes, she said, "I was not a good student."

In 2016, her father succumbed to cancer.

"I learned my hard work ethic from him," Brothers said.

She had a daughter three months later, she said.

In 2018, Brothers graduated from OCTC and enrolled at WKU-Owensboro with a major in social work.

COVID-19 hit in March 2020 and she graduated with her bachelor's degree in a drive-thru ceremony and began classes for her master's in social work.

That fall, Brothers' mother died of cancer.

With all that going on, she completed her master's degree this week and will graduate with 3,712 other WKU students Thursday night in Bowling Green.

WKU-Owensboro no longer has a commencement exercise in Owensboro.

Instead, it had a recognition night for graduates Monday.

Fifteen of them came to walk across the stage and have a sash placed over their shoulders.

Taylor Smith of Owensboro will go from college to elementary school.

Next fall, she'll be teaching third grade at Meadow Lands Elementary.

Graduation, Smith said, "is nice."

Brooke Sangalli of Owensboro is on the same career path.

She'll be teaching at Deer Park Elementary School in the fall, but she's not sure which grade yet.

Her inspiration, Sangalli said, is her mother, Sherry Sangalli, who plans to retire next year after 35 years in education.

Keith Lawrence, 270-691-7301, klawrence@messenger-inquirer.com.

270-691-7301

klawrence@messenger-inquirer.com

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