

Adult Education Connection
By Karen Gent



In the 1950's, getting a high school education was not without its hardships. For a fourteen year old young man living on a mountain farm, just getting to and from the two- room schoolhouse could be a daunting task. Tommy Meade, of Honaker, Virginia, lived in the Big A Mountain area near the Buchanan-Russell County line when he was a young teenager. He faced a 4-5 mile walk to school each day- one way! Poverty was definitely a factor in this young man's quest for education. There was no money to buy school

books, which had to be purchased by the students at that time, and no money to buy suitable clothes to wear to school. Discouragement prevailed, and Tommy Meade decided to quit school and help his family by working on their farm. In spite of his situation, Tommy knew that it was important to get an education.

At age 18, Meade got a job in the coal mines. He married Eura Fuller at age 19 and was soon drafted into the army. There he worked as a supply clerk and served in the guided missile artillery battalion. While serving in this field, he learned a lot about electrical things.

At age 22, Meade was released from the army, and returned to Virginia to work in the coal mines, where he stayed until retirement. Meade attended night classes whenever he had the opportunity to learn about electricity. He became very good at it and worked as a mining electrician for the rest of his career. Meade even became an instructor in his field of work. In addition to this, Meade owned and operated two small businesses of his own- a television cable system and a heating repair business.

Meade always had the goal of earning a GED in the back of his mind, but while he was working and raising a family of three children, he never had the time to fulfill that goal. He always stressed the value of education to his children, and consequently, Meade proudly states that all three of his children are college graduates.

After a 38 year career, 3 heart attacks, and a bout with cancer, Meade decided to try to achieve one more important goal in his life. He decided to attend a GED class and prepare to take the GED tests. Even though it had been 55 years since he quit school at age 14, he still had a desire to earn his high school credential. He says that his wife encouraged him to take action by saying, "Don't just talk about it; do it!"

Meade expresses that he found the classes to be motivating. He says that attending the class was a key factor in his success. He says he was motivated by being with the other people in the class, and that it was very helpful to have a teacher to answer his questions. Meade quickly passed the science, social studies, and reading tests, but found that it took a bit more preparation for the writing and math tests. Meade stated that someone once told him that the GED Tests were easy. "They didn't know what they were talking about," he says. "The tests were harder than what I expected."

Soon after his 70th birthday, Meade took his final GED test and earned his GED certificate. He recalls that it was a good feeling, like a heavy load had been lifted from him. In his fatherly words of wisdom, Meade advises, "If you're in school, stay there." However, Meade states that he would highly recommend the GED program for any person who didn't complete high school. "It's a great program," he says.

It's never too late to learn. For information about preparing for the GED Tests, contact Southwest Regional Adult Education at 889-5424, or call toll-free at 1-866-581-9935.