

## *Featured Sponsored Ministry*



### **Caroline Center Intention for the Month of November**

We ask that you pray for Caroline Center’s current class of trainees – that they may be strengthened by Blessed Theresa’s faith and vision and inspired by Mother Caroline’s courage to pursue their studies with vigor; to reach the happy day of graduation; and, to speedily attain work in their new chosen healthcare professions.

### **Shawntae’s Story**

#### **Expecting the Best from Herself**

*Written by Claire Hartman who regularly blogs for Caroline Center at [ccbroom.com](http://ccbroom.com)*

**29**-year-old Shawntae is unassuming. She sits off to the side in the crowded Caroline Center classroom. Quietly. By herself. The rest of the women are chatty and jokey, a thinly veiled attempt to hide their nervous excitement and hopeful expectation. Today is the day they find out if they passed the Pharmacy final exam. Passing will mean the difference between continuing on to a working internship at a local pharmacy before graduation or flunking out of the program. So yes, most of them are slightly nervous. Except for Shawntae who sits there quietly. By herself. Finally, the instructor arrives with the exams in hand. He immediately tells the women what he knows they are dying to hear:

“Congratulations! You all passed!” A collective sigh of relief and a big whooping cheer is let loose in the classroom. “Now, before I go into the analysis of your answers,” the instructor continued, “I’d like to pay special recognition to one among you who had a perfect score...” Before the instructor can go any further, all the women in the classroom point to Shawntae. “How you know it’s me?” Shawntae protests, shaking her head. “WE KNOW!” her classmates exclaim.

“...Shawntae!” the instructor confirms. Shawntae takes it in stride, displaying neither false modesty nor showy glee. It’s not something she spent any time thinking about or hoping for. It just is.

“How do you think the other women knew you were the high scorer?” I ask when I interview Shawntae later. “I don’t know,” she shrugs. I guess ‘cause, well, since day one I’ve always had the highest score on every test. So, you know...” “Yeah. That could be a dead giveaway,” I smile. “Did you think you had it in you?”

“I’m not going to say I didn’t think I could do it,” Shawntae explains. “But I thought it would be pretty hard. And it was. I especially had a hard time just finding time to study. But...I did. So, you know...”

Shawntae doesn’t seem so much to manage her expectations as to squelch them. She’s had a lot of practice. Over the years she learned to expect nothing but disappointment from her drug-

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addicted father, who was eventually forced from their home after attacking a then 19-year-old Shawntae. As for her mother, well Shawntae loved her mother and felt she could depend on her. But seeing the kind of pain and abuse she too had suffered at the hands of her father and how much responsibility she now shouldered alone, Shawntae just didn’t want to ask too much of her mother. So, by choice, she lowered those expectations. Neither did Shawntae expect much from the schools she attended. Though she graduated from both high school (a failing urban school, now closed) and community college, she did so with very little guidance and no direction. And although she is now engaged, for the longest time she could expect nothing but heartache – and worse – from the other men in

her life. On more than one occasion Shawntae suffered physical and sexual abuse at the hands of men she knew and didn’t know. Still, Shawntae carried on, not with great expectations, certainly, but still with some sense of hope. And modest dreams.

“I always wanted to work in a pharmacy,” Shawntae confided. “It’s just something I thought I’d be good at.” And so she enrolled in a well-known medical assistance training program. She paid them good money to train her and get her a job. But even they disappointed Shawntae.

“I wanted a career, but all they wanted was my money. They were supposed to help me find work. They didn’t help me with anything. Once they had my money, I couldn’t get a hold of them.”

The concept of constantly being disappointed by those in whom she had put her trust was about the only thing Shawntae had come to expect out of life. This was just the way it was. She could be a crusader and rage against the system or she could keep going. Try the next thing. Hope...but not expect. Enter Caroline Center.



**Caroline Center is located in Baltimore, Md.**

“They have made all the difference,” Shawntae explains. “I’m the quiet type. I’m more of a listener, but now I know I have a voice. And I’m not afraid to speak my mind when it’s necessary. Sister Kennedy taught me that.” There was something else Caroline Center taught Shawntae.

“They taught me to expect the best from myself. That I had it in me. That I could do it.”

“And you did! How does it feel to be number one in your class?”

“It feels good,” Shawntae admitted. But there was even something more that bolstered Shawntae’s faith.

“They help you *after* graduation! I know I will still have an advocate when I leave here and go out into the working world. They will help me get a job and they’ll help me with other things, too. They give so much and they charge me *nothing*. They’re like family.” Shawntae’s experience at Caroline Center has opened her eyes to all sorts of possibilities. She now dreams bigger and hopes for more. And dares to expect that at least some of it will be realized. It is something she is eager to pass along to her 6-year-old son. “I want him to be able to come to me. To be able to express himself. To tell me what he wants and needs and worries about.”

To this day, despite everything, Shawntae loves both her parents unconditionally, and knows in her heart that her mother did her best. Still, things weren’t always easy for Shawntae growing up.” I was afraid to go to my parents. I never got the right response, if any. It’s important for my son to know he can always come to me.” That is the most important thing to Shawntae. And

Shawntae also has dreams for herself. “I want to be a pharmacist. Not just a pharm-tech. I think I can do it.” Caroline Center thinks so too. If I were Shawntae...I’d expect nothing less.

## **WENDI’S STORY:** *A Heart of Gold*

*Written by Claire Hartman who regularly blogs for Caroline Center at [ccbroom.com](http://ccbroom.com)*



In some ways, Wendi’s story is a familiar one. Like many of her Caroline Center colleagues, she had adult responsibility thrust upon her while still a child. Her father left home when Wendi was just 14 years old, leaving Wendi and her mother to fend for themselves. To help out, Wendi went to work at a McDonald’s. She was good at it and after a while became a manager. She stayed there for 4 years before taking a job as an assistant manager at a Target. By age 19 she was living on her own. She is not afraid of work; she has already worked more than half her life. But now, at 29, she wants something “more fulfilling.” She would like to be a nurse one day and work in a hospital setting. She is a high school graduate but knows nursing will require many more years of training and study. And that is why she enrolled in the Caroline Center Certified Nursing Assistant Program (CNA). Other members of her family had been through the program and swore by it. Wendi knew it was a good place to start. That is not to say it would be easy. Like so many others in the program, she had to juggle work and school. To accommodate the Caroline Center schedule, Wendi took the night shift at a place called Retail Rose’s. During the course, she usually got home around 11:30 PM and studied until 1 AM. She was up by 6:30, out the door by 8, and at Caroline Center by 8:30 or 9 where she trained until 3PM. That gave her precisely one half hour to get to work and do it all over again.

With so little time between work and training, she worried about studying enough. Throughout the course, Wendi grappled with anatomy, particularly the workings of the heart. She needed a more dimensional visual aid than her book provided. One day she had the clever idea of making a clay model of the heart, with all its chambers and valves. It helped her immensely and became the key to her success in anatomy. Still, there was one other thing that made the 15-week course particularly difficult for Wendi.

“The hardest part of the whole thing is being away from my daughter, Keisha,” Wendi confided halfway through the course. And therein lies the twist that makes Wendi’s story a little different. You see, Wendi did not give birth to Keisha, but she did raise her as her own ever since Keisha was a baby. Today, Keisha is 7.

“I met Keisha’s mother at a card game,” Wendi admitted. “One day she dropped her off at my place and never came back.” To Wendi, it is just that simple. “I’m her mother. And she’s my beautiful baby,” soft-spoken Wendi stated quietly, not defiantly. The love she has for Keisha is palpable. The same quiet but steady love and care that Wendi showed to her own mother so many years ago and now has for Keisha, Wendi also put into her studies. By the end of the course, her steadfastness had paid off. Wendi was one of only 6 graduates from the 53rd class of Caroline Center to be awarded the coveted opportunity to participate in a post-graduate practicum at St. Agnes Hospital. And so, for four additional weeks, Wendi will continue her education in patient care in a hospital setting. It is a partnership Caroline Center has worked hard to cultivate and one that is mutually beneficial. St. Agnes knows from experience that the Caroline Center grads they offer the practicum to will be well worth the investment. So far, all of the Caroline Center women who continued on with St. Agnes were offered jobs at the hospital. So there is more than a very good chance that Wendi will be offered one also. After that, for Wendi, hopefully nursing school. I think she would make a very good nurse. She certainly has the heart for it. And just to be clear, while the key to getting through the anatomy course for Wendi may have been her heart of clay, my guess is the key to her success in life will be her heart of gold.