Della Mae Burns Scholarship

Della Mae Burns always enjoyed learning, but never had the opportunity to attend college, or even high school. As the oldest of seven children, she left school after only completing third grade to help care for her siblings.

When Della Mae had a family of her own, she often worked two or three jobs to keep the family afloat. She valued education and hoped someday to earn her GED, but her family and work always came first.

Della’s daughter, Cheryl, followed her mother’s path. She excelled in school, until long work hours conflicted with her studies and she dropped out of high school. But invoking determination learned from her mother, Cheryl juggled family, work, and college for over seven years to complete her bachelor’s degree. During that time, she served as ISU’s SNA president, president of the Illinois Student Nurses Association, member of Mortar Board, and a Peer Support Person. She graduated from ISU’s Mennonite College of Nursing in 2002, at age 33.

After graduation, she worked as a cardiac ICU nurse and on the open heart surgery team, before accepting a position as nursing lab coordinator with ISU. In 2012, Cheryl completed her Master’s Degree in Nursing and is a board-certified Nurse Practitioner.

Cheryl was the first person in her family to attend college, receive a bachelor’s degree, and the first to receive a master’s degree. Cheryl credits her perseverance to her mother, Della, who is the role model for strength, dedication, and hard work.

Cheryl recognizes the unique challenges of being a first generation college student, and hopes that those receiving a scholarship in her mother’s name, also benefit from their combined story of strength, dedication, and hard work.