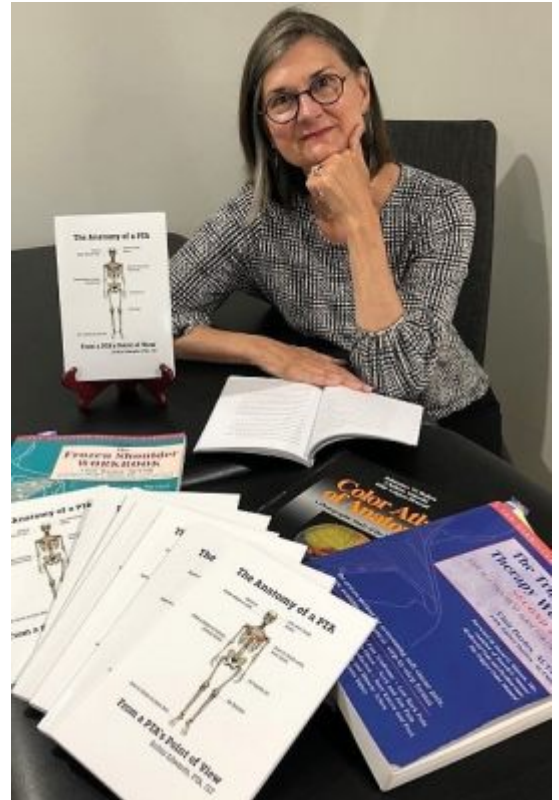Robin Edwards felt nervous at her interview for the Physical Therapist Assistant Program, but not for long.

Larry Gillund, Black Hawk College associate professor and director of the program, soon put her at ease.

"I was very scared. I was in my 40s," the 1972 Muscatine High School graduate said. "He made me feel welcome."

Gillund said "what really stood out is she never appeared nervous, just very excited to be there and genuinely happy to share her enthusiasm for wanting to be in the program."

The program accepted Edwards, and she began pursuing her [Physical Therapist Assistant Associate in Applied Science](#) degree.

"It was one of the best experiences of my life," Edwards said.

The PTA program prepares students to perform physical therapy procedures under the supervision of a physical therapist, and Edwards enjoyed learning from dedicated instructors.

"They weren't easy, but if you needed extra help, they were there for you," she said. "I loved the personal attention they were able to give us."

As a PTA student, she enjoyed clinicals where she was able to start seeing patients. She also liked observing surgeries and watched a total hip replacement and a total knee replacement.

"It really gives you insight on what the patient is going through," Edwards said.

Getting hooked

In high school, Edwards considered pursuing a career as a physical therapist, but she ended up working as a phlebotomist.

She left that position when she and her husband moved to Belgium for his career for a few years. After returning to the United States, she accepted a physical therapy technician position.

As a physical therapy technician, she worked in a clinic cleaning tables, stocking supplies and other needed behind-the-scenes work.

"That's where I fell in love with the field," she said.

Edwards was hooked and decided to pursue the physical therapist assistant degree.

After graduating from Black Hawk College in 2004, she accepted a PTA position.

Edwards enjoyed helping her patients and getting to know them during her career.

"While they are under your care, they really become family," she said.

Although Edwards retired from Rock Valley Physical Therapy in 2017, she remains connected to the field she loves.

Staying connected

Edwards wrote a book to help physical therapist assistants called "The Anatomy of a PTA: From a PTA's Point of View."

The book focuses on the social graces of being a physical therapist assistant, including professionally and positively responding to concerns.

The book became available in July 2019, and while she wrote it with new PTAs in mind, Edwards says it can help those with experience, too.

"When you work with the public, there are so many facets," she said.

Edwards shares what she learned about interacting with others, prepares readers for various situations they might encounter, and gives advice on how to respond.

Gillund said her excellent listening skills served Edwards well as a student and in the field, and her maturity, knowledge and people skills made it possible to successfully work alongside others.

"Her real passion is to help," he said. Along with helping patients recover from injuries and surgeries, Gillund noted Edwards has helped many of her peers improve their skills.

In addition to writing the book, Edwards also serves as a speaker for the BHC Physical Therapist Assistant Program.

Gillund said the program brings in clinicians with special interests and skills in topics not usually covered in a PTA program during students' last semester on campus.

Edwards teaches students about trigger point release, showing them how to apply pressure in different ways to release nodules in muscles, which eases pain.

"It's a great tool in your pocket," Edwards said. "I think it gives them an edge."

One of Edwards' favorite things as a student was learning from outside speakers. Now, the graduate shares her knowledge with current students.

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