11-4-1982

UA12/2/1 College Heights Herald, Vol. 48, No. 21 Magazine

WKU Student Affairs

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INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVES TO GREEK LIFE • WORKING AT A SPOUSE ABUSE CENTER

John Carpenter
You are cordially invited to attend an Open House to celebrate WKYU-FM's second Anniversary.

To kick-off our birthday celebration and membership, WKYU-FM will have an open house on Sunday, November 7th, from 2-4 p.m. at our studios in the Academic Complex. Please set aside a few minutes to stop by and visit with us and many of WKYU-FM's other friends, and to enjoy tasty refreshments and tasteful entertainment.

WKYU FM 889
The Public Radio Service of Western Kentucky University

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3 Fraternities, sororities — they're not for everybody. But neither is going it alone. At Western, independent social groups abound. Here's a look at the people and what brought them together.

Story by Barry Rose. Photos by Jim Battles.

6 Our cover story on John Carpenter, the filmmaker from Bowling Green who made it big with low-budget horror movies, begins on page 6. Friends and relatives tell how he went from making primitive movies with his playmates to directing successful Hollywood films such as "Halloween."

Story by Sharon Wright.
Photos courtesy of Universal Studios, Howard and Jean Carpenter, and Tony Kirves.
Cover illustration by John Vaughan.

10 Two Western students spend about 70 hours of their week at the Barren River Area Safe Space helping abused women and their children get their lives back together. It's a job that's physically and emotionally draining, but one that both say can be very rewarding.

Story by Linda Lyly. Illustration by Carolyn Allen.

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INDEPENDENTLY DEPENDENT

We're different. We're GDIs, and they're greeks.

Story by Barry Rose
Photos by Jim Battles

Independents are everywhere—they're just hard to identify as a species.

They can't be spotted by their jerseys. They don't live in a house with a huge sign in the front yard, and all of them seldom do things as a group.

You don't have to be in a group to be independent—that's the nice part about independents. But there are groups. And even though they may go by different names, they are the greeks' counterparts. Instead of strange-looking greek symbols, they select sometimes stranger names to designate themselves. Names like the Geeks, the Wild Hares, Beast of the East, the Augrocks, Russell County, Minimum Wage, the Pubers and Pubettes, Zug Zug—the list is practically endless.

They stick together, like brothers—whether it's at an intramural football game, a concert, a Western athletic event or just a night around the television. They may be on a different social plane. Whether it's higher or lower is open to debate—but not here. As one put it, "We're different. We're GDIs, and they're greeks."

They don't have to live together, pay dues, be friendly at rush parties or study together. No university officials watch their every move and monitor their GPAs. There are no organized efforts to drive them out of town or onto university property away from residential areas.

But with those freedoms come some disadvantages. Their organizations were probably not here 10 years ago, and will probably disappear soon after the members graduate—most have yet to form alumni organizations.

And there's little publicity. The independent "fraternities" can be hard to find, but they exist at places where the groups congregate.

As a member of one of the groups said, "It's time the independents had their say."

The Coca-Cola clock on the wall reads midnight; the party begins to pick up. A keg of Sterling beer sits in the kitchen of the apartment, and Chuck Berry finishes his act on cable TV. In contrast to Berry's rock and roll, country music comes from a radio on a metal shelf supported by two reflectorized legs of a Department of Transportation sawhorse.
INDEPENDENTLY DEPENDENT

continued

Russell County formed a team. They did, and their social clique — Russell County — was born with 11 Russell County natives and six others from that area.

As might be expected, football helps keep the group together. The team is in third place in its class, with an outside chance at a spot in the playoffs.

They have rivals — they say Zog Zog is their finest. But it’s a party as soon as the final whistle blows.

“We don’t like to lose,” Bess Haynes said, “but we do like to drink.” After losing their first game, they drank a keg of beer.

“We’re partying all the time,” Haynes said. “If we’re not, we can always start one.”

“We welcome all males and females, as long as they’re female,” he said, laughing.

Whistle said, “I think we’re just a lot more down-home, a lot more friendly — more personable.”

Karen Pearson was sitting in an upside-down chair at a Russell County gathering just before the Eastern-Western game on Oct. 23.

“I think they’re real nice guys,” Pearson said. She said she had been to Western Greek parties but didn’t like them very much.

“I like fraternities at home,” the sophomore from Newburgh, Ind., said. “At home they’ll come up and give you a hug.”

But she said she hates the sororities. “They’re two-faced. They tell you too much what to do.”

Jane Shoemaker, a Fort Wayne, Ind., freshman, was enjoying her second party with the Russell Countians.

“I like them because they do their own thing,” she said. “They don’t worry about what anyone else is doing. I think at an independent party, you can find people who are themselves. They’re not fakes.”

Tim “Buzzard” Brockman, a Jamestown sophomore, said he is not in a fraternity because of the cost. He knows and likes many fraternity members but enjoys being independent. He compared Russell County to a fraternity in that both value brotherhood, meeting people and free beer.

“We’re a brotherhood, but we’ve got the unity,” Brockman said.

He said he didn’t like being recruited and being hit with good impressions until the time to sign a check for dues and rent.

“They put on a front to impress you at pledge time,” he said. “I wouldn’t put on a front to impress somebody.”

The Russell Countians believe independents are different from Greeks; on a different level. “We’re not on the outside looking in,” said Buddy Ge, a Jamestown junior. “Our-cliques, we like spread out, get to know everybody.”

There’s a touch of jealousy when the Russell Countians talk about women. They believe women are attracted by greek-letter jerseys.

“But they reason that no girl who just wants a jersey is worth the trouble.”

The scene people from my high school...
school who join a fraternity here and they've never had a date in high school," Whittle said. "But they come here, join a fraternity and are out all the time."

One of the independent groups has its own jerseys and proudly displays them at ball games and other social events. It even has its own cheering section at games. They are the Greeks.

The dictionary defines a "geek" as a performer of grotesque or depraved acts such as biting off the head of a live chicken.

Who came up with that name? "I don't know," said Jim DeSpain, a Louisville senior. "A lot of us guys were running around together. The name just stuck with us."

They say they were born Greeks, that when they meet another, they can sense it.

The only "requirements" for being a Geek are "just to be friends and hang around together," Jeff Kinsey, an Evansville, Ind., junior, said at a party after the Eastern-Western game.

About 100 people milled around a house on Greason Street, striking up conversations in groups in the yard. The center of attraction — of course — was a beer keg on the carport.

The Greeks are tightly knit. Kinsey said they have a "clan" Tuesday at Greek night at a downtown bar, and the group even has its own house — the "210 Club" on East 11th Street.

If people are out messing around, they'll drop by to see if anything's happening," DeSpain said.

Fred Turnbull, a Danville senior, said Western's Greek "chapter" started about four years ago.

The group had about 40 members its second year and has about 60 today.

"A lot of us met in dorms, and some of us met at parties we went to," he said. "And then we always pick up a few new ones a year."

DeSpain said he remembered Greeks from visits to Western when he was in high school.

"They were probably the wildest people on campus. Their inner feelings came together. I just don't know how to say it — everything just came together," he said emphatically.

Tim Jackson, a Cadiz junior, is Greek but also attends Geek functions.

"I think they're great," Jackson, a member of Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, said of the Greeks. "We've known these guys since I got here. All of these guys are my friends. Everybody has a great heart, and it doesn't matter if you're Greek — as long as you're a Geek."

"There are some geeks that are Geeks," DeSpain said. "The Greeks are welcome at our parties. And if it's an open party, we feel welcome at theirs."

"I don't have anything against geeks," he said. "I don't like to think of Geeks as an anti-greek thing. We're just different."

Jeff Durham, a Crestwood sophomore, was another Lambda Chi member at the Greek party. "I love these guys," he said. "Man, they're great. Geeks can get by with more things. Greeks can't."

Several women were at the party. Some of them Greek "little sisters" who call themselves Riprocks.

"We all love each other and take care of each other," Heather Hold, a Hendersonville, Tenn., junior said as she leaned on the hood of a car at the party.

Kathy Manford, a Louisville senior, said, "We support them in intramurals, we throw parties for them and we support them all around."

The Riprocks think sororities are too structured, she said.

"I have fun being what I am," Manford said. "I don't have to pay to have friends."

Doug Rountree, a Hendersonville, Tenn., senior, was a Greek his freshman year, then pledged a fraternity his sophomore year. But in his junior year, he returned to the Greeks.

"I dropped out. I didn't have the grades. They [his fraternity brothers] asked me back [when his grades improved]," he said. "No, I'll stick it out where I'm at."

There were Greeks here before he came to Western, but DeSpain doubts they will be the same in 10 years — if there are any at all.

"That could be the end of us, but you never know. I'd like to come back in 10 years and find Greeks.

"More or less, we're just guys who know each other."
Bowling Green in late October is the place horror stories are born.

The town takes on that crisp, ripened quality it gets just before turning winter. Its red and orange leaves burn through a chilled smoke screen, and it's like the color of blood in a nightmare — it's the only color you remember.

It's that kind of Bowling Green October that makes a town turn reflective, making people look at things dying and wonder if maybe they're entering a cocoon from which there's no emerging.

It's the mood from which the notion of Halloween — the notion that sinister things can happen that time of year — is perpetuated.

It's the kind of mood that is John Carpenter.

Carpenter — whose career as a movie director has escalated in the last half decade in the wake of his success with "Halloween," a low-budget horror film credited as the highest-grossing independently produced picture in movie history — grew up with that kind of October.

Carpenter was born 34 years ago in upper New York state but grew up in Bowling Green and attended Western for two years before enrolling in 1968 in film school at the University of Southern California.

As a student at USC, Carpenter directed "The Resurrection of Bronco Billy," the first student film to win an Academy Award.

He also made "Dark Star," a science fiction satire that cost about $6,000 and was later expanded into a feature film that received limited commercial distribution.

Carpenter's third film, "Assault on Precinct 13," was ignored in the United States but was well received at a London film festival. A producer who saw the movie in London asked Carpenter to expand on an idea for a movie about murdered babysitters. In collaboration with Debra Hill, he emerged with "Halloween," a story about a young man who kills his sister and her lover on Halloween night and returns 15 years later to begin another bloody rampage.

That's what Carpenter's movies are made of — raw emotions.

They're based on the same, reflex that causes people to run their fingers over a wound to make sure it still hurts. They're the kind of movies with scenes that gel fluid at the spine and send currents through the muscles so that nerve endings singe the skin like the frayed ends of electrical wires.

But it's not so much the immediate physiological reaction; that part passes. It's the recollection later of those frozen pictures of horror that bothers you.

They were the stories that grew from Bowling Green in October — the place where horror stories, and, for John Carpenter, success stories, are made.

In 1953, Howard Carpenter was finishing his doctorate at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, N.Y.

When he graduated that summer, the only job he could find was one in Western's music department, teaching music history and theory. Reluctant to leave New York, Carpenter accepted the job with intentions of looking for something better within a year.

A native of Carthage, N.Y., Carpenter moved to Bowling Green with his wife, Jean, and their son, John, then 6. The family was assigned living quarters — a log cabin on the grounds of the Kentucky Museum — which they rented for what Carpenter now calls "some ridiculous sum. Like $30 a month."

In early photographs, John is slender and pale, his clean face revealing a humor, a relaxed demeanor inconsistent with an unouchable source of depth behind the eyes. His hair was darker and shorter than it was later — when the Beatles came along and inspired him to grow his hair long.

He still appears thin in the recent pictures, almost gaunt, the skin stretched slightly tighter across his face. His hair is relatively long, and he sports a well-groomed mustache. The camera still captures the humor, and that depth inside the eyes is still there.

The Carpenters reveled in music and the arts. Classical records were always on hand, and Howard Carpenter made frequent trips to Nashville to work as a studio musician.

"I was always one to spend a lot of time at home," Mrs. Carpenter said recently. "He liked music and creative writing. And he loved movies. I started taking him to the movies very young. The first movie I took him to was "The African Queen," in New York when he was 3 years old.

"Carpenter's parents sat in their home on Chestnut Street, its living room walls a collage of the glass-covered movie posters they keep the way other parents save report cards."

"He always had a way with words," his father said, "a feel for writing. He liked science fiction films — he would think up a story and type it on the typewriter by the hunt-and-peck method."

When the Carpenters arrived, Bowling Green was placid and small.

Activity at Western centered on the top of the Hill, and the campus was relatively untouched except for the annual haunted house and the annual haunted house.

Then there was the annual haunted house and the annual haunted house.

The cabin was something of a rustic tribute to the time when such buildings thrived, in what was then, a part of the campus used for agriculture.

John, his parents said, received a cast of his playmates to act in primitive movies he recorded with an inexpensive camera borrowed from his father.

When the Carpenters visited New York, John's father said, "He would get his cousin. They'd be playing cowboys and Indians, and John would be filming it."

As Carpenter told. The New Yorker magazine in a 1980 interview, "When I was a kid, I'd go to the Southern Kentucky Fair and pay 25 cents to go into the Haunted House... I went again and again to learn how it worked. "Halloween" was maybe a way of being young again and scared, and innocent in that way."

"I got my friends from school together, and we made a movie called "Gorgon the Space Monster,"" he said. "It had a lot of special effects — toy tanks running in animation, things like that. I'm just beginning to realize how much of what I do goes right back to Kentucky. I'm still doing that kind of work."

"I want to do is to get back to the log cabin, but do it for a living, and be successful."
Theater. Minutes into the movie, Carpenter's soundtrack throbs as his supernatural maniac begins a spree of creatively gruesome killings.

A couple of students wander in and stand at the back of the theater, mesmerized by the mounting tension on the screen. One looks as though he is drawn to the screen, his mouth drooping open slightly as a young woman's throat is slit and dark blood shoots up to dapple her cheeks.

"God, I hate these kind of movies," he said.

"I know," his companion answers. "Come on. Let's find a seat."

The suspense that breeds a kind of blood-pumping fright is the thread that runs through Carpenter's movies.

His soundtracks move like roller coasters — high-pitched notes in a stimulated tempo over a mechanically, thudding bass. It's with the sound, which Carpenter composes and conducts, that he manipulates his audience in a way many filmmakers haven't discovered.

Some say it's that blend of sound and a sense of humor that sets Carpenter's movies apart.

Except for "Halloween," Carpenter's movies — he has also made "The Fog," "Escape From New York" and "The Thing," as well as the made-for-television version of "Elvis" — have been only moderately successful. He tries to avoid the stereotype assigned to a director of suspense movies, though none of the subsequent films has matched "Halloween's" record at the box office.

"Halloween" made money. And that, Carpenter has told interviewers, is how one is judged in the industry.

"He was always so serious about writing," Mrs. Carpenter said. "He would beat at the typewriter, pounding things out with his fingers. People would come over and they would say, "Well, John's so serious." But there's a sense of humor that comes out in John."

Carpenter's sense of humor is apparent in his work. His movies

By Sharon Wright
Adrienne Barbeau and John Carpenter were married in Bowling Green in 1979. The private ceremony was held at his parents' home on Chestnut Street.

John Carpenter
continued

are set in cities with streets named for those in Bowling Green, and the names of Carpenter's friends here have turned up in his screenplays. The references creep up subtly, like an inside joke, a nudge in the ribs to those who live here.

When Carpenter started school at Western in fall 1966, following his graduation from high school, he enrolled in Joe Boggs' creative writing class.

Because Boggs taught the class on a one-to-one basis, and because he saw potential in Carpenter's writing, he became something of a mentor for Carpenter.

"We both had 8mm cameras," said Boggs, an assistant professor of English. "We'd go out and shoot some. It was just kind of playing around at the time."

Boggs said Carpenter's social life was "pretty well balanced. He wasn't a loner, but there was that side of his personality that allowed him to lock himself away and write."

"I think John got where he is by being more conscious of what things cost than a lot of film directors," Boggs said. "When you can write, direct, edit and do the music -- and also get by with unknown actors -- you're cutting costs all over the place."

Boggs said a factor in Carpen-

ter's success is what Carpenter has called "unnatural motivation."

"I would say we've had better writers go through here ... but they didn't have the kind of motivation John had," Boggs said. "I think John's a case of if you want it badly enough, you put everything you've got into it."

"It's a big-risk business. The pressure increases on someone like John. He made it big on Halloween. Now they expect everything he does to be a Halloween."

In Carpenter's second year at Western, his instincts were leading him closer to the pursuit of a career in directing.

"I realized John was not getting anywhere here," Boggs said. "He said he wanted to make movies, and I said, 'You need to get away from here, then. Get to where it's being done.'"

But, Boggs recalled, "I told him a long time ago he shouldn't forget who he is and where he comes from."

Thirty years ago, Western's training school and College High School housed grades one through 12 in what is now the Science and Technology Hall. The classes were small, and many of the students were children of Western faculty members.

When John Carpenter enrolled in elementary school in 1953, he was in Gertrude Bale's music class.

Mrs. Bale said Carpenter "didn't like the songs we sang. He wasn't interested in the little rhyming songs most children like. It wasn't until about fourth grade, when we started playing the serious stuff, that he liked it. He liked it when I played symphonies."

"He was used to hearing string quartets at home," Mrs. Bale said. "When you're brought up hearing good music -- not making trashy music -- it makes a difference in a child."

A classmate of Carpenter's, Steve Todd, remembers visiting Carpenter at the cabin. "There used to be a creek 'bed' there," he said. "He used his father's movie camera and would make movies. I remember the plastic dinosaurs, and he would blow them up. He was interested in that stuff for years."

"I'd go over there after school or on Saturdays," said Todd, now a Bowling Green lawyer. "We would find rocks and tie them to tree branches or sticks to make spears and make dinosaur movies."

He said the theater in town "would have double or triple features on Saturday. He was interested in it from a very early age."

Especially science fiction and space movies. We were just having fun then."

When the two enrolled at Western, Todd said, they "kind of lost contact. You know, you change as you get older. You grow up, you make other friends."

He didn't see Carpenter from 1968 until their class reunion in 1978. A year later, when Carpenter and actress Adrienne Barbeau were married here in a private ceremony, Carpenter telephoned Todd.

"I remember a judge was marrying them," Todd said. "He was wondering what would be an appropriate gift for a judge."

F
As a student at the University of Southern California, left, Carpenter produced "Dark Star," a science fiction satire. The Carpenters visited their son in Hollywood in 1978, below, prior to the release of "Halloween," the low-budget thriller that secured his success.

"Yeah," the old man sighs. "Sure does."

An almost imperceptible remorse underwrites the pride with which Jean and Howard Carpenter speak of their son.

They say they have considered moving to the Hollywood area to be near him. And when asked whether they envision a closer relationship, Carpenter will smile and say, "Jean does."

"Well," Mrs. Carpenter said, "for that reason, but not for John. He's happy. He's doing what he wants to do."

The cabin in which Carpenter grew up is visible from a spot on Kentucky Street, its horizontal stripes of light and dark wood and white lattices on the windows running like a watercolor into the rest of the picture.

Flanked by stone chimneys and surrounded by a shallow fortress of stones and a primitive fence, it's a childish structure being swallowed by blankets of ivy and cords that resemble red seaweed.

It's as if Bowling Green's native son grew up and nobody noticed. As if the boy who made movies in the cabin's back lot could still have been there if he hadn't started making money.

But it's like the cycle of seasons that isn't complete until it's gone full circle — the same way Bowling Green Octobers eventually mature into winter.

It was the thing that carried John Carpenter away from borrowed cameras, from raw innocence, away from Bowling Green.
At the spouse abuse center, two students are spending their days and nights MENDING THE HURT
Outside the house, a cool fall wind blows through the trees and stings noses and unglod hands.

The children can no longer play in the back yard without their jackets; they opt to play indoors instead.

Warmth radiates from room to room. But periodically a cool breeze from the kitchen window sends a chill through the house.

Outwardly, the two-story house looks typical, but its residents are not the typical American family with 2.4 children, three television sets and a playful living room.

The adults who live there are women who share a problem: They have all been abused by their husbands. They have come to BRASS - Barren River Area Safe Space - to try to get their lives and the lives of their children back to normal.

Two Western students majoring in social work - Cathy Porter, a Central City Junior, and Sheri Elliott, a Bowling Green Junior - are being paid to help them.

Porter started working at the shelter last November as a volunteer and became a staff counselor in March. In April, she was made a night counselor.

Elliott approached BRASS in July, also interested in volunteer work. Shortly afterward, she was offered a full-time job as a night counselor.

They spend 60 to 70 hours, nearly half of their week, working alternate nights as counselors. They also work 24-hour shifts on weekends.

Three counselors work during the day, and occasionally volunteers drop by to take the children out or to talk to the abused women. As many as 20 people have stayed at BRASS at one time; other times the shelter has been empty.

At 5 p.m., when most students are trying to decide whether they want to eat at Wendy's or Pizza Hut, Porter or Elliott is lugging a load of books and a change of clothes into BRASS for the start of a 15-hour shift.

The work at BRASS includes everything from chores like changing diapers and setting the dinner table to providing a shoulder to cry on.

Most days when Porter starts her shift, the women are in the kitchen preparing a meal. She asks them how their day went and then goes into the living room to give the children a hug.

The 20-year-old woman still has a few childlike qualities herself. Brown hair falls past her shoulders and wispy bangs rest on her forehead. Her skin is fair and unblemished, her eyes hidden by glasses she sometimes wears.

"You know what?" a curly-haired 3-year-old asks Porter, his brown eyes shining like pennies.

"What?" Porter asks, bending her slightly stocky 5-foot-6-inch frame toward the mischievous boy.

Every few minutes he asks her the same question and she listens to him with bubbling interest.

The children need counseling as much as the women do, Porter said. They don't understand what is going on between their parents, and they need someone to talk to when their mothers are depressed.

"I do anything to keep the kids off the street. Their fathers are as good to the children," Porter said.

"And if the children don't know, it's hard for them to understand why Mommy's leaving Daddy."

And counseling to Porter means listening - not telling the women what to do. She said almost every phase of her job involves it.

"I have my own way of counseling," she said. "I mash the potatoes and ask them how their day was."

Sometimes she suggests what television programs to watch, or she reprimands the women for breaking a house rule. Women have required chores and the counselors make sure that they do them.

"I do a lot of counseling in the kitchen and on the couch," she said. "I supervise too formal, she said, and keeps the women from talking freely.

Much of the counseling is done late at night; women who need to talk will linger around the kitchen after everyone else has gone to bed.

The women can stay at the shelter no longer than one month. After counseling, some of the women return to their husbands.

Porter said she had trouble understanding why some women return to their husbands.

"You have to adjust to the women going back home. That's their choice," she said, shaking her head.

"All you can do is say, That's your decision. You've been abused before and you probably be abused again if you go home before your husband's had a chance to have counseling."

Forty percent to 55 percent of the women go back to their husbands, and about half of those women's marriages work, a BRASS spokesman said. The rest will end up at BRASS again, or go to live with relatives.

She said a fourth of those who leave BRASS find jobs and housing through counselors at the shelter. Another fourth stay in the shelter with relatives, and many of those eventually find jobs.

At first, Porter said she felt helpless. She couldn't understand why the women who came to BRASS didn't want to be there.

"I finally had to say, There's a reason for this, and God will take care of it," she said, her voice trembling.

It's hard not to get involved in the residents' lives, but both Porter and Elliott said they realize they shouldn't.

When Elliott started working at BRASS in July, she worried about the women even after she went home. Although she didn't discuss them with her roommates, they noticed a change in her usually effervescent personality.

"They told me later, 'I think I should be getting so involved,' she said.

She wanted all the women to recover emotionally from the abuse. And when they didn't, Elliott said she couldn't bear to watch them suffer.

Her brown eyes half close, she shook her head and said she had brown hair. She said her hair swayed as she talked about it.

Constantly getting involved in other people's problems was physically draining, she said. She learned her lesson the hard way.

"I try to leave BRASS behind when I leave that door," she says now.

However, Elliott said that occasionally the long periods of time she has to spend at the shelter start to drive her crazy.

When she reaches her "burnout point," she escapes by taking the children to a movie or by going for a long walk by herself.

"It's really good to be alone," she said.

But the counselors seldom have time to themselves. When they aren't comforting a child whose mother is too upset to play with him or advising a woman on what to do if she has to go for a job interview, the telephone is ringing.

Every time the phone rings, Porter and Elliott must be prepared for a crisis.

Porter has gotten more than one "crisis call" at a time and has been faced with a difficult decision: Which does she put on hold?

"You don't tell someone who is really whacked to hold," she said.

Women who can't usually need help badly - their husbands have just beaten them, and they have to get away.

Women who call during the day - usually in the morning after their husbands have gone - have thought out their problems.

After Porter and Elliott calm the women, they meet them in a public place and take them back to the shelter. His location and the women's names are kept confidential for their protection.

When Elliott, 21, started working at the shelter she was overwhelmed by being responsible for the safety of so many people.

"At first I was scared," she said with a nervous laugh. "Because of the stigma connected with a spouse abuse center, I slept with my fingers crossed, turned on the police button and I kept jumping up to look out the window."

"Her initial apprehension is gone," and Elliott now sleeps long after her alarm clock buzzes. Residents often have to pound on her door to wake her up.

The ages and backgrounds of the women who come to BRASS.

Story by Linda Lyly
Illustration by Carolyn Allen
MENDING THE HURT
continued

vary. Denise, a woman in her mid-40s, came to BRASS with her two children — Darryl, 16, and Dennis, 9 — after 25 years of marriage.

Martha, a student majoring in electrical engineering at Western, is staying there with her 4-month-old son, Benjamin.

And Karen, a woman in her 20s, isn't from Bowling Green, but came to BRASS because the spouse abuse shelter for her town was too close to the house she shared with her husband.

She and her two children — Mary, 4 months, and Tim, 3 — left the shelter last week after staying there a month to live with some friends in a nearby town.

Most of the time, Porter and Elliott get along well with the women who come to the shelter, but sometimes their youth poses problems. Residents ask whether they have been married or had children — which neither has. Because of that, some abused women don't think Porter or Elliott can understand their problems.

"Sometimes the clients take out their frustrations on the counselor because there's no one else to lash out at, no one else to blame, and I'm here," Elliott said. "But that's OK. I made a commitment. Some nights when I go to sleep, I tell myself, 'God, I can't die tomorrow. I've got to come to BRASS.'" Elliott said in a determined voice.

Because Elliott and Porter are dedicated to their jobs, they have to miss many activities other students take for granted.

"When you work at BRASS, you don't have a social life or grades," Porter said. "You come to work when others go to quarter beer night. And you're at work Saturday when everyone else is at the ball game."

Since they started working at the shelter, both women, who are still full-time students, have seen their grades decline. Porter's grades have dropped, Elliott wouldn't say how far hers have fallen.

"It seems like every time I have a test, there's a crisis," Elliott said.

Porter, too, has stayed up late many nights and neglected schoolwork to comfort an abused woman who needed someone to listen to her problems. She once rushed a sick baby to the hospital when she should have been taking a test in her 9:10 class.

And even if everything is under control, the two must be ready if someone needs them. Porter sometimes locks herself in the office and buries herself in her books — even though she doesn't think she should.

"When I close the door, I'm shutting them out from me and that's not fair," she said.

Working with the women who come to the shelter can be trying. It takes a lot out of the two, but they say they've learned to handle it. And both Porter and Elliott see it as valuable experience for their careers.

"This job is going to make me or break me," Elliott said confidently. Through it, she says, she will be able to determine whether a career in social work is for her. But Porter already knows.

"Ever since I was a little girl I said I wanted to be a counselor. And now I'm doing what I want to do. I'm not preparing for it, I'm doing it."