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Herald Magazine
March 2, 1982

BREAKING THE MOLD

A look at ‘non-traditional’ students
THE BRYANTS
They met in a Western classroom in 1979.
Now they attend classes as a married couple.

RENEE FULWOOD
She's taking notes in college classes while
her high school friends are going home.

TOM WALLACE
He's getting a journalism degree in his
third time in college.

BRADLEY FRAMES
He's juggling books and fatherhood as a
male nursing student.

JEANETTE CONNER
She's back in Bemis Lawrence at age 47.

Staff
Cyndi Mitchell, Robert W. Pillow, Wilma Norton, Erica Smith,
Linda Dono, Carol Sheets, Kitty Baker

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'Nontraditional' students aren't hard to find

Men are found more often than not in nursing classes, and more upperclasswomen are wearing the olive drab and camouflaged uniform of ROTC.'

By Robert W. Pillow

It's getting harder to find the traditional student.

Married students with or without children aren't such a rarity. And it's no longer the women who are putting their husbands through school; sometimes it's the other way around.

And a lot of classes have students who don't look like they've graduated from high school in the last four or five years. A few of them graduated about 20 years ago, according to the registrar's office. That's more proof that we're never too old to learn.

Western's undergraduate academic offerings are impeding the search for the traditional student.

The era of specialization has helped create many programs and enough incentive that students don't always come to Western to learn how to teach. Figures from the Registrar's office show that there are about 10 programs with enrollment comparable to the 7% in elementary education.

Men are found more often than not in nursing classes, and more upperclasswomen are wearing the olive drab and camouflaged fatigue uniform in ROTC. This lack of tradition hasn't come without creating friction for some.

The strain on married students with or without children exists, but college life under that condition can still be enriching, according to Dr. Delbert Hayden of the home economics and family living department.

"Sometimes I'm aware of the differential growth problem," he said. "One party is becoming turned on to new ideas, and the other person is feeling estranged. They are living in two different worlds."

"When one party goes to school and one doesn't, the partners must make that extra effort to communicate and maintain a sense of involvement in each other's lives," he said. "I would encourage the non-student to try and take at least an occasional course at the same institution. This gives the couple some common ground."

"If you decide to take advantage of the whole spectrum of college," Hayden said, "and say I'm going to bring my whole family into this world, the family's life can be enhanced."

Sometimes the marriage makes students pragmatic, he said. "You have to cut out extra-curricular experiences that would be enriching because you have a divided loyalty - a concern for family matters and a concern for your own individual development."

Hayden said the same difficulties and advantages exist for students with children, and that children can get more from being in a family with a parent in school.

Parents who attend class provide good role modeling for their children, he said. "It induces them to want to achieve in the academic world."

"Another good effect on the family - if the children are old enough - is that the children's sense of responsibility is enhanced when a parent is in school," he said.

Being around college students improves the child's "cognitive environment - you get these kids around people who talk about ideas," Hayden said.

"It's not just the little kids who are getting around people who talk about ideas. It's the older kids, too."

Last fall, 2,317 adults over 30 were enrolled. We might not have trusted these older students in the '60s had we been at Western then. Perhaps youth is becoming tolerant.

Some upperclass students are divorces trying make a career for themselves; others are adults who have reached a point in their careers where they can't get any higher without more education, according to Dr. Richard Mason, a home economics and family living teacher.

Older single people returning to college or starting the first time are much like freshmen when they first get there, Mason said.

"When they first start they feel inadequate and they don't know how to study, but those feelings quickly diminish after they do well on a couple of tests," said Mason, who coordinates the Single Again Fellowship of the First Christian Church. Mason estimates that at least 70 people in the fellowship are college students.

These students "have to retool; they have to adjust," he said. "They might have to learn to study but because they are motivated and mature, they learn to study quickly."

Mason said he dropped out of school for a while and came to Western when he was 23. "To me it was an exciting time; I liked every single course," he said, "but I felt my older underclassmen had a different perspective on life." A typical undergraduate wants to get out in the real world. A typical older undergraduate has already seen it."

And to them, college is a "job, but not in the sense of drudgery," he said. "They are here for study, not to be collegiate, to go to parties and basketball games - but they will come out for lectures."

"They're not to imply the usual undergraduate should do those things," he said. "The older student just wants other things more at 36 or older."

And even though older students don't engage in the same kind of activities as the "usual undergraduate," they still associate with younger students, he said.

"It seems like the 19-year-olds would become older students when they have questions," he said. Younger students "look up to older students because they've made better grades and look older."

More than likely, the students will be seeking advice from others rather than the younger sibling, who is seeking the wisdom of the older. The days of when the traditional student was 18 to have begun to slip away. Of the 13,174 students who enrolled at Western last fall, only 90 were 18.

There were 8,972 students 19 to 25 years old.

The mold is breaking after all.
They’re a couple of students

By Michele Wood

They were separated by the width of the classroom – and much more. A briefcase sat by his desk, and his coat and tie signaled “businessman” among the blue-jean-clad students. She seemed at home in the “typical” student role as she dutifully took notes on the lecture.

The class was Western civilization. He was auditing it “for the fun of it.” She was taking it “because she had to.”

The teacher, Dr. Carol Crowe-Carr, looked across the room and smiled. “Mr. Republican,” she said, “meet Miss Democrat.”

Thus Ronnie and Jane Bryant met in 1979. A year later, after the steps of Cherry Hall, he proposed. They were married last November.

When Ronnie Bryant walks into a class, the students assume he’s the teacher, he said, sounding slightly annoyed. “I guess I look like the absent-minded professor.” He furrowed his eyebrows behind his dark rimmed glasses making the reason obvious.

Yet nobody seems to notice that Jane Bryant is different from her classmates, she said. “Students seem willing to disagree and agree with me like anybody else.”

But neither Bryant fits the mold of “typical” college student. Both are in their late 30s. They’ve done a lot of things since high school and those extra years have given school a different meaning.

“You have different values” from younger students, she said. “Your interests are different. You’re more serious about going to school. You are there specifically to learn. The time element is important to you.”

And, Bryant admits, there is a “gap” between himself and other students. “I don’t have that much in common with them. Students come to me for advice – even on degree programs. You automatically feel big brotherish because you feel more experienced. It isn’t jealousy of their youth. It’s just a difference.”

In 1979 Bryant was a farm and associate editor of a weekly newspaper in Tompkinsville, but he felt stagnant. “Without exposure to college you can be some-dimensional,” he said.

He wanted to teach, especially history. College and graduate school seemed the natural answer. He’s rushing through school – taking 25-hour semesters after testing out of 42 hours of classes.

Mrs. Bryant has been working through school since 1969 – balancing six-hour semesters with a full time job. “There were so many things I wanted to know,” she said. “Ronnie wanted to change his vocation. I started just to learn.” She’s a sociology major, with an emphasis on writing. As a trainer for several Headstart programs across the state, she teaches classes to greater dimensions. Both plan to earn doctorates.

While in school they’ve taken four classes together. They sit next to each other in the super-natural folklore class they have together this semester, often...
nts — even at home

sharing a book.

"We make a concerted effort to present a unified front in class," she said. "If we were having an argument, the average bear wouldn't know it."

He added, "We could sit here and glare at each other and waste the entire class. When we have a class together, we're students."

She's likely to ask questions or make a comment; he doesn't say much as he rests his chin in the palm of his hand.

But history classes are a different story.

The volumes of historical novels he reads at home have given him a broad background. Teachers refer questions to him.

Teachers expect more from an older student, he said. "They have to treat you differently. Neither one of us can turn on an average term paper. We'd be crucified."

School goes with the Bryants to their home in Bowling Green. They discuss classes at dinner and review assignments in the car on the way to class. Their marriage has helped them with school. "The other one respects and understands what the other one is doing," Mrs. Bryant said.

"I think if I was just working, I wouldn't understand as well. Like now ... I'd never say next Ronnie, 'Don't study. Let's go to the show."

Being older, they aren't strained financially as most 18- and 19-year-olds are, she said. And their age eases other strains, she said.

"There's a lot of pressure on students when they come straight from home and structured high school settings," she said. "Not all students are prepared." — True," he echoed.

"I don't know if they have the self-discipline," she finished. "I don't know if they appreciate it at that age," he added.

Sometimes, she admitted, the older student feels he should be doing "what you think people your age are supposed to be doing."

But, he said quickly, "I wouldn't go to school at 17 or 18."

FOR RENT

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She climbs the Hill after mornings in high school

By Barry L. Rose

When her classmates race from the doors of Bowling Green High at 2:10 today, Renee Fulwood will not be among them. About the time they are settling down in front of the television to watch reruns and eat an afternoon snack, she will be easing behind an Army issue .22 caliber rifle for her 2 p.m. marksmanship class.

Fulwood is a college freshman — full-time, but at the end of May, she'll wear the gold cap and gown of a Bowling Green High School graduate.

Although she's near the top of her high school class, she's not at Western because she's exhausted her high school curriculum. And she's not here because her friends are or because it's a popular thing to do.

In fact, compared to some of her classmates — who are taking 200 level courses the high school can't offer, Fulwood's schedule, which includes classes in music appreciation, marksmanship, sociology, jazz dance and a psychology seminar, doesn't seem that demanding.

She attended college for money, about $6,000 of it.

Her father died of cancer in 1970 when Fulwood was 10 years old. The death has drawn her closer to her mother and forced her to mature beyond her 17 years. The death also entitled her to Social Security benefits as long as she stayed in school.

But President Reagan's budget ax fell on parts of the Social Security program, and Fulwood would have lost those benefits had she not enrolled full-time in college before May.

So she is taking 12 hours at Western and two classes at Bowling Green High.

When most college students are preparing to walk up the hill on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Fulwood is sitting in her room. At 8:15, she walks up the stairs to her mechanical drafting class.

Although she and her mother live in an apartment just behind the high school, she drives her-Honda Prelude to class so she can leave high school immediately for her 10:25 music appreciation class on the hill.

After that, she "does a two-minute mile" to the top of the parking structure, the only parking place usually available, and races back to high school for an English class at 11:30.

After the class, she drives back to campus for her marksmanship class, followed by a 3:10 sociology class.

She finishes the day with a jazz dance class at 7:45.

"When Mom says, "What did you do at school today?" I can let her have it at the door.

"It wasn't easy for her mother to convince me to give up my last semester of "goofing off" in high school and try her hand at college."

"I thought it was going to take everyone waking minute of the day and I was gonna have dark circles under my eyes."

"I've heard, such horror stories. I was expecting chains and whips and dueling at night, that's not what I found. I was really pleased."

"It didn't hurt at all."

She tries not to act any differently in her classes at Bowling Green High than she does at Western. "I don't go in (and say), 'Okay, step out of the senior body and step into the freshman body, here we go.' But there probably is a difference in the way people act toward me... It just depends on the company you're in as to the kind of attitude you project."

Coming to Western wasn't the shock it could have been because Fulwood already had someone very close to her on campus. Her mother, Dr. Betty Fulwood, is an assistant professor in the home economics and family living department.

And besides showing her around campus, Dr. Fulwood guided her daughter through what is probably the most frightening part of beginning college — registration.

"She was working registration and I had my cards. I didn't know what to do with them. The first thing I did was run down to Mama: 'What do I do with these?' Every time I got confused, I went running back to Mama."

But mothers can't teach their children everything. Mothers, even when they're professors, can't take up for their children in class. And they can't make them study.

"At Western, you do your work because you know you have to do it. There's nobody to sit there and make you, give you class time to read your chapter, read your assignment or write your little essay or whatever."

"If it gets done, you have to find the time to do it yourself."

"I wish I would have learned to study earlier because there are Mickey Mouse classes you can get by with. And a lot of things in high school — if you listen and take notes, you don't have to do anything but thumb through them, and I'm finding that I have to learn how to study and I have to make myself."

She said she got caught leaving high school at lunch last year, so she doesn't skip anymore. But she doesn't skip classes at Western either, even though nobody watches the parking lot.

"It would be easier, but there's no point in it: I signed up for the class."

"It's up to me to go. If I don't want to go, it's going to be my fault when I fail or get bopped out."

Fulwood speaks with an honesty and openness more characteristic of a high school student than that of a college student. It's also reflected in a carefree philosophy most college students gave up after they came to college — but probably wish they could have kept.

She lives in a dorm now.

"I'm not a big future planner. Of course, I'm looking forward to when I'm out on my own making a million dollars a day. But other than that, I can't tell you what I'll be doing next weekend. I kind of like to take things as they come, kind of ride the waves."

Fulwood has become an independent person. She's very close to her mother, but there's never been anyone at home to fix her an after-school snack or make her change into her playclothes.

"I've probably missed out on a lot of good times, but I'm a stronger person for it."
exercise with her jazz dance class. The exercise is designed to show the effect of dancing as a group.

"I want to be independent. I want to be able to carry my own weight before I try to get into any kind of permanent setting."

Socially, Fulwood has a lot of friends at Bowling Green High, but it frightened her at first to meet people at Western: "It's kind of scary. You go in (a class) and it's so big and you don't know anybody, and you just kind of have to sit there."

But in some respects she said she has found it easier to make friends at college.

"People at Western don't seem to be as divided as people (at Bowling Green High). Everybody in high school has their little clique. I suppose they're at Western, too, but it's not as pronounced -- no, it's because they're not all together in one big group."

Fulwood has what she calls a "love me, love my dog attitude" about her friends. If her high school friends like her, they should like her friends in college -- and the other way around.

"Like my friends to know each other, and maybe even like each other."

In high school it might be prestigious to be classed with college students, but Fulwood said no one has ever said, "There goes a Western woman," or anything like that. "I haven't encountered any green-eyed monsters."

When the subject of boyfriends comes up, Fulwood is put into an awkward position. She said she would be shot if she admitted preferring a college guy to a high school student (or the other way around) so she diplomatically said: "It's not the age I'm looking at, it's the quality of their personality."

She has a "long-distance" relationship going with a friend in Oxford, Miss., where she and her mother lived until Dr. Fulwood began teaching at Western in August 1980.

But she still dates both college and high school guys here; she said, "If you're going to both Western and high school, you've got your important dances (like her semi-prom). I'd feel guilty dragging them (college students) into something they just got out of."

But she said she doesn't want to get into any kind of serious relationship. "I'm too young. I guess, to be committed to one person. At least, that's what Mother tells me."

That independence is reflected throughout her life. She calls herself "a whole person. . . You have to learn to do this on your own."
He's balancing family and school

By Carol Sheets

Eight-year-old Dayla Frames stared, wide-eyed, as the woman spoke.

"Now, let's line up for our Happy Meal walk," said Phoebe Brown, activities director of McDonald's on the U.S. 31 HW By-Pass.

Dayla gasped and smiled as she jumped up out of her seat, her bright red-and-yellow Ronald McDonald hat bobbing unsteadily on her head.

She led the parade of six other youngsters to the counter for a yellow plastic spaceship-shaped container filled with burgers and fries.

"I can see it now," her mother said. "It'll be 'Mama, I want every meal served on my spaceship.'"

Diana Frauses and her husband, Bradley, laughed and proudly looked at their lively daughter.

Mrs. Frames said the party was the only thing Dayla wanted for her birthday.

"It seems to be the status thing among 7- and 8-year-olds," her husband said, laughing.

For the Frameses, birthday parties for their daughter are a must, but the expense is an extravagance. As a full-time nursing student at Western, 30-year-old Bradley Frames must watch finances carefully.

"I asked Dayla what she thought of the nice party and meal as we were leaving," Frames said, "and she said, 'That's what parents are supposed to do.' I said, 'No. They're not. Parents are supposed to love you and take care of you, not spend money on you.'"

A tight budget hasn't kept them from giving Dayla everything she needs, but, Frames said, "I don't think you have to buy kids a lot of things to take care of them — just love them, and let them know you love them."

He is in his first year in Western's nursing program and spends three or four hours a night studying just for his nursing class. And his study hours sometimes cut into the family's time together. "That was something I accepted and I think my wife has too," he said.

The evening meal is the only full-scale meal the Frameses have each day, and Frames, who worked as a short-order and grill cook "all day, usually cooks the meal.

"I can cook anything you want — I may sometimes cook out of a cookbook, but most of it is up here," he said, pointing to his balding head.

An amiable, soft-spoken man, he said he has a good family life. "I think I spend enough time with Dayla," he said. "Sometimes I yell at her, though, to be quiet while I'm studying.

So he tries to get most of his studying done before he leaves campus or before his family gets home.

Mrs. Frames, 30, has lived in Bowling Green most of her life and got a bachelor's degree in psychology in 1973. For the past eight years, she has worked with the Department of Education's Bureau of Rehabilitation, training the handicapped for jobs and helping them find employment.

But this is the first semester she has been the only member of the family with a job. Her husband worked as a nursing assistant at Fairview Health Care Center part-time for two years while going to school part-time.

Being the only one with an income "doesn't bother us," she said.

Her husband had his own opinion. "I sometimes have a problem with it, like when I have to ask her for money," he said, laughing.

But she said he is easy to be married to. "We share the cooking and cleaning. It's not a big women's lib thing, it's just fair. It's common sense."

Framess's education is "an investment," his wife said.

"It will give him more job opportunities and earning power — plus, he wants to do it . . . He's one of the few people I know who has a burning desire to do something."

Frame has a strong desire for learning because he's "getting old," he said.

"At 30, I'm 10 years closer to 50 than I was when I was 20," he said. "It doesn't bother me, but it bothers the system . . . . If I waited until I was 40, it would give me less time for a career.

"I think I'm more determined than many other students. It's not only my time I'm investing," he said. "When
Bradley Frames talks with his daughter Dayla while walking her home from daycare.

you're married and have a family, you're investing their time, too.'

There was a time, however, when Frames's attitude was far from domestic.

Though he was born in Bowling Green, he grew up in Milltown, Ind. He dropped out of high school at 17 to join the Marine Corps during the Vietnam war.

"They were not offering me what they had promised," he said. "It wasn't an 8-to-5 job; they were just teaching us to kill people."

He had been expecting the Marines to give him a fulfilling job, but realized "I was the only person who could do that."

He got an honorable discharge after a year and hitchhiked across the United States, drifting from job to job and working as a cook, a dishwasher, a bookstore clerk, a car washer and a factory worker.

But he wanted a job with more substance, so he got his General Education Diploma in 1974 at the age of 22.

"I was 27 when I decided to become a nurse," he said. "I'm glad I waited until then, because now I know what I want."

But sometimes memories of those roaming days return.

"Sometimes I get to daydreaming, and thinking of something else I could be doing, and then I just look at her (Dayla) and realize I'm doing the most important thing I could be doing."

"I'm happy," he said. "I feel loved, needed, wanted. If I accomplish no more in life than successfully raising Dayla, I'll consider myself successful."
After two tries, he's giving college 'one more shot'

Tom Wallace helps with play-by-play statistics during Western's basketball game with Northern.

By Kevin A. Francke

For the first time in his life, Tom Wallace has a direction. He has followed several paths in his 35 years, but now he says he has a "little bit of an idea" which one he wants to follow.

But finding that direction has taken several tries. He is in college again -- for the third time. He wants to become a sports reporter.

In 1964 Fred Thomas Wallace IV enrolled at the University of Kentucky. He flunked out a year later.

"I just wasn't mature enough for college," said Wallace, who doesn't remember what his major was. "I was a big movie buff and all I wanted to be was an actor. Oh sure, I studied, but I studied the things that interested me, like who won an Academy Award in 1966, not the stuff I should have been studying."

When he left UK, he worked at steel mills in East Chicago, Ill., and studied acting for a few months in New York.

But circumstance had other ideas for Wallace and he was drafted into the Army. Those three years -- including one at a supply depot in Qui Nhon, Vietnam -- matured Wallace, even though he was at war with the Army the whole time.

He considers the time he spent in Vietnam a "365-day night. It's something you never really get out of your head."

But Vietnam didn't leave him with psychological scars -- "just bad dreams," he said.

After his discharge in 1969, he was still uncertain what he wanted to do. "There was still a big part of me that wanted to be an actor, but I tried to put this out of my mind." His parents steered him away from the "thing" of acting and encouraged him to return to college. So he came to Western and majored in physical education, hoping to become a high school basketball coach.

Though he stayed here for the next three years, he was still restless. It was not uncommon for him to hit the road for a long trip -- to New York City or New Orleans in mid-semester.

Then in 1972, with 96 hours, he dropped out, went home to Central City and married a woman with three children.

But when that ended in divorce in 1980, he decided to give college one more shot. The divorce is something he would rather not discuss. Yet in a strange way, he considers it a good thing because it will allow him to finish his education.

Returning to school wasn't that difficult, he said, and he doesn't think he's much different from younger students.

"It was easier for me to come back to college than most older students," he said. "I didn't feel like an outsider just because of the age difference, because I've always been an outsider."

His black hair glistens with strands of gray, and that has misled some students about his role at the university. "Once I was mistaken for a teacher," he said. "A girl came into a classroom and asked me, 'Professor, do you know where?' But I don't believe many students took me as being that different."

Wallace thinks he looks and acts younger than he is. "Most people figure me to be about 27 or so." Being older hasn't put Wallace at a disadvantage with younger students, he said, and his age has helped him earn the respect of his teachers.

Older students are likely to be looked upon by teachers as "more serious, more mature and as being more interested in the material being taught," he said. "It is a help because the teachers feel -- because we are older -- we are likely to have learned from our mistakes; therefore, we have better study habits and we're not just there to waste our time."

Wallace has seen many changes over the years in college students. "Students now are less concerned about world problems and more concerned with personal problems," he said.

However, Wallace sees similarities between students of the early '60s and the students of today. But the students of the late '60s and early '70s were in a different category, he said.

"Those were the radical ones of the bunch, and they were more concerned with changing the world than going to college," Wallace said, referring to rallies and riots widespread on campuses across the nation then.

The stockily built Wallace works in Western's sports information office writing about Western's sports teams, the players and the games. "Sports writing, of all types of news writing, allows me the freedom to be creative, and although I consider myself to be more of a reflective and introspective writer, there is some
creativity there," he said. Away from work and class, Wallace spends his time reading and writing—a lot. "I have a love affair with words," he said, almost bragging.

"That love began while he was still in the Army," he said. "I started listening to the singer of that era, Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Arlo Guthrie and Judy Collins. Dylan had a profound influence on me, perhaps more than any person before me, even my parents." Wallace said.

Dylan's songs asked people to look beyond the obvious, for something deeper, he said. It was these thoughts that led him to read the classics, philosophy and poetry. It also led him to write poetry which he hopes to have published someday.

"He admits he may seem out of place to some, but he says being different has never been a problem for him. "I've always been pretty much a loner, and on the outside of the mainstream of things, so the fact that I didn't fit in really didn't bother me." Wallace said he has never been much of a partyer so that posed no problem in his return to college. "I've probably been to 10 parties in my whole life," he said.

"Cliqués, groups and fraternities have always turned me off. I've just strayed away from them; I don't know why." And dating hasn't been a major problem, Wallace said. "I don't really have much time to date anyway, with school and my job; and besides, I just don't have the finances for it." He admits, though, that opportunities are limited "because I am around girls who are half my age." But, he added quickly, "No, that's not really right."

"I guess you can say that I took one of a bad situation" by returning to college because of his divorce.

His journalistic pursuit has helped his scholastics, he said. "This is the first time that I ever studied anything that I really like and that makes a difference." And his grades in the 14 classes he has taken since he came back—13 A's and one B—"reflect that."

All in all, it seems Wallace has found some contentment in what he considers a chaotic life, but he said he still isn't really happy. "I don't think I could be really happy. I don't want to be."

"I just want to find a little bit of peace with myself."
She's in the dorm at age 47

By Cheryl Connor and Cyndi Mitchell

The walls of her Bemis Lawrence room are bare. The radio on the shelf is the only possible distraction in a room that is really only a place to study for Jeanette Conner.

At 47, Conner is back in school — and living back in a dorm — to get her teacher certification in learning disabilities and behavioral disorders.

Her home and her husband are 85 miles away in Campbellsville. And it's there that she spends her weekends.

But on the other five days each week, she takes graduate courses and studies and reads in her private room on a not-so-private floor.

As she moved into her room on the eighth floor three weeks ago, Conner said people asked her if she was helping her daughter move in.

"When I told them that I was moving in, they thought it was great," she said.

Conner often flashes a smile or laughs while talking about returning to school.

She's been catching up on her education since childhood, she said. It all started because she had to wait until she was 9 to start school since her family lived too far away for her to walk.

And it wasn't until she was 44 that she got a degree in elementary education from Campbellsville Community College.

One of her professors, Dr. Harry Robe in the psychology department, said Conner's enthusiasm for learning is apparent.

"She's caught the educational disease," Robe said. "She always sets out to get everything she can get out of a course."

Living with women 25 to 30 years younger is nothing new for Conner. In the summer of 1979, she lived in Central Hall while pursuing a master's degree in elementary education.

That summer, the girls on her floor came to her with boyfriend problems, marriage problems and family problems; she said. But she never really told them what to do.

"I was more a sounding board for them to get their feelings out. I don't believe in telling them what to do; I just tried to guide and support them," she said.

But she requested a private room this semester. "I knew I was going to be so busy, and would be older than the other girls. I would rather not be a hindrance to them," she said.

Stacey Key, a graduate student from Atlanta, Ga., was Conner's roommate for three weeks before the private room became available. Key said she didn't know Conner was going to move out until she was gone.

"I don't hold it against her for doing it. I just wondered why she did it," Key said.

The two didn't have very much in common. Key said. "My first reaction was 'is she really my roommate?' because of the age difference.

Another graduate student on the eighth floor, Trisha Kiesling, said she tried to get to know Conner right away because her husband lives in Chicago.

"It didn't make me feel so strange and out of place to know someone else would leave their roommate to go to school," said Kiesling, who is from Sebree.

Having so much in common made Kiesling feel at ease with Conner automatically — despite the age difference.

"I just talked to her like any other student on the floor," she said.

And the women living around Conner say they feel the same way.

When Conner moved to her private room, Peggy Childress, a Morgantown freshman, said everyone in the hall talking to Conner while she explained to them how she commutes to Campbellsville every weekend.

"People try to make her fit in and treat her like one of the girls," Childress said.

But that's not to say they weren't a little stunned at first.

Elaine Trautwein, a Louisville freshman, said she wondered how Conner would react to the girls on their floor.

"We thought it would be really weird to have her here," Trautwein said. "But it's not."

Although the women on her floor say they, as a rule, haven't changed their behavior because an "older woman" is around, Conner said she's noticed a few times when that might not have been the case.

One time, she said, she heard a neighbor telling a guest to watch their language "because there was a 'lady' living there."

"Another student approached Conner because her stereo was so loud," she said. "She told me she would have turned it down if she had known I was home," Conner said.

And her three-week roommate, Key, said Conner made remarks when her language got out of hand.

But Conner doesn't want people to change because of her — she'd rather be "just another student."

This may not be the last degree Conner pursues, either.

She said she may return some day to get a doctorate in curriculum and instruction.

"I'll probably be going to school until I'm hobbling with a cane."