

Age no barrier to education

One senior is thrilled she graduated from Western but admits it wasn't easy.

It all hit home for Florence Warren when she bumped into her niece on campus one day.

"I think I shocked her. She stood there with her mouth open because she didn't know I was going to Western," says Warren with a laugh.

It's the kind of chance meeting that's more likely these days than ever before as universities shift away from being mainly the turf of the young.

Warren, a senior citizen, completed her bachelor degree after nine years of study and will don the gown at this spring's convocation at Western.

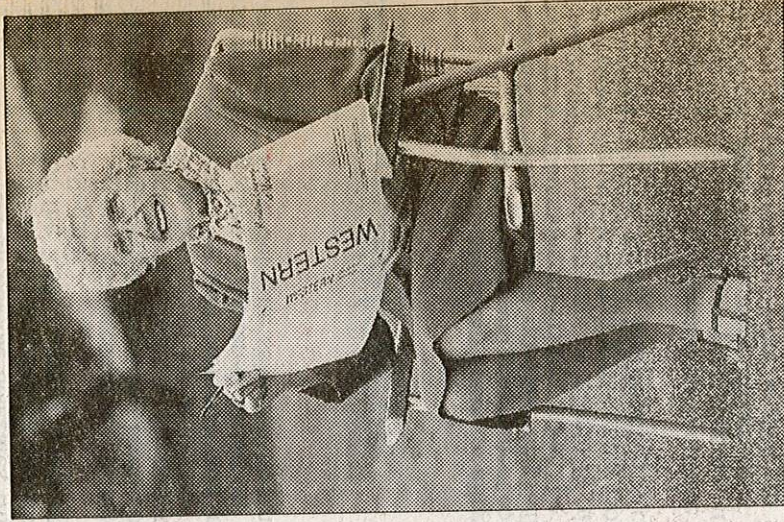
"I wasn't going to go through the convocation. Because of my age, I felt that's a little ridiculous, but I talked it over with my family and a couple of professors at Western, and the professors especially swayed my opinion because they said people have the wrong idea about older people. They think that they're sitting in rocking chairs falling asleep."

Warren, who grew up during the Depression years of the 1930s, was forced to leave school early. She finished high school at night at her own expense while holding down a day job.

Her daughter, who graduated from Western in 1983, encouraged Warren to take a course. She ended up in an introductory English class.

"At first, I felt ill at ease. But that was my own doing. It had nothing to do with the students at all. The students accepted me just as if I was their own age. . . . (but) I was very self-conscious. I wouldn't open my mouth at first."

Her confidence grew. She wasn't thinking degree when she started, but after completing seven courses she thought, why not?



Senior citizen Florence Warren graduates Tuesday after nine years of study.

Highlights of her time at Western included getting the chance to address her women-in-history class about social conditions during the Depression.

But don't get the impression it was a cinch, says Warren.

"Many times I wondered, what in the world am I doing this for? My garden was neglected, my sewing was neglected, my house was neglected. But I'm just thrilled to think I did it."



Bill Huitema, 42, has been a drop-out, a laborer and a production supervisor. Now he's back at school, at the University of Western Ontario, with the goal of becoming a teacher.

**Stories by Stephen Northfield
Photos by Sue Reeve and Boris Minkevich**