Education shaped him into 'the person I prefer to be'

BY ADELA TALBOT

FOR THE LAST 43 years, life simply got in the way for Victor Young, 71, growing up in Ireland, he left high school – Kilkenney College, a school that counts Jonathan Swift and George Berkeley among its alumni – at 16. "Technically, he is a high school drop-out," Young said.

"My father managed a farm and my future would have been as a clerk in a hardware store or grocery store. But at age 11, I set this exam and got a full scholarship to go to Kilkenney. I've always done well in school and I had four years there," he said.

"At 18, my parents thought, ‘You've had more education than anyone in our family ever had. Now, it's time to get a job.' I didn't fight it. I had gained another scholarship to do more studies, but I turned it down and got a job.

Young worked for an insurance company in Dublin until he got married in 1961. With his wife, he then came to Canada – on the day of their wedding. By 1972, he had completed his insurance exams and moved from Toronto to Montreal, and finally, to London. While he started his post-secondary studies with two calculus courses at Western.

"I made my mark in the insurance business, with a company called Commercial Union, today Aviva. I left them in 1978, to start my own brokerage business here and I did it for 30 years, to the day. I sold my business and retired 17 years ago, and started taking more courses," Young said.

For decades, his dominant focus had been providing for his family and ensuring his three sons were on stable footing, able to pursue their own studies. He travelled with his wife for a bit following retirement, but the desire to return to the classroom was too strong to ignore.

"At 65, I thought, 'I have these credits and I'm either going to just forget about them or go on.' I went to U of T and did a lot of work, and I discovered I had a talent for philosophy. And I went on to get a Bachelor of Arts, and I've been in school ever since. I just love it. I'm still doing it now," Young said.

Having taken time to focus on family and his career, Victor Young, 71, took 43 years to complete his degree. He will graduate June 16 with a Bachelor of Arts. "It's a little bit weird. My life has been upside down, in terms of education, I'm doing my university degree when it's absolutely no use to me at all. But I think I'm a different person as a result," Young said.

"I've learned a lot, I've learned about different people, different cultures, I've learned how to think. I think I'm a different person as a result," he added.

"I think I might have been, perhaps narrower minded, being in business. I might have been extremely right wing. But I'm not now, as a result of my studies. It has softened me and made me the person I prefer to be now."