

# Mother gets degree

## Temporary blindness overcome to reach goal

By Peter Geigen-Miller  
of The Free Press

It took Donna Rollins a long time to get her bachelor of arts degree, but not because she's a slow learner.

Rollins began her studies at the University of Western Ontario in 1959 and finished with an A average during the past summer — just in time to receive her degree during UWO's fall convocation. In between, there was a long gap while she raised a family.

Her A average is no small accomplishment considering she juggled homemaking with part-time studies, taking courses at night and during the summer. She also had to surmount temporary blindness during the latter stage of her studies but regained her sight, thanks to cataract surgery.

Rollins was one of 654 students eligible to graduate Friday during

the second and final day of Western's annual fall convocation. Friday's graduates were from the faculties of arts and social sciences.

Rollins grew up in London and attended Tecumseh Public School, South Secondary School and London Teacher's College before entering Western in the winter of 1959 as a part-time student. Her first course, she remembers, was French 20, then a requirement for a BA.

She took two more courses in the summer of 1960 but broke off her studies after becoming engaged to her husband Vaughan, now principal of Nicholas Wilson Public School in London.

"After we were married, there just wasn't money to educate both of us." So for more than 20 years, Rollins put her university education on hold while she raised her family and, in recent years, worked part-time as a teacher. Her interest in a university education was rekindled after she took a couple of teaching courses through the university.

"Then I looked at my pay and noticed that if I took three more university courses I could move up a category in the pay schedule."

That was enough incentive to send her back to Western in the winter of 1981-82 and she completed the three additional credits by the end of the following summer. By then she'd caught the learning bug and found it was "kind of fun. I was teaching half-time so I had time available and thought I could pick up another course."

She added that credit and then got extra incentive when she discovered she was eligible for a continuing scholarship if she maintained an A average. The only catch was that she had to take three courses a year to qualify for the scholarship. "I got down to the nitty gritty at that point. I started working pretty hard."

She continued to pile up the credits, taking as many as four courses a year. She finished her BA requirements by taking two courses last winter and two more during the summer.

While taking a computer science course in 1983, however, she discovered she was going blind with cataracts. UWO officials gave lots of help.

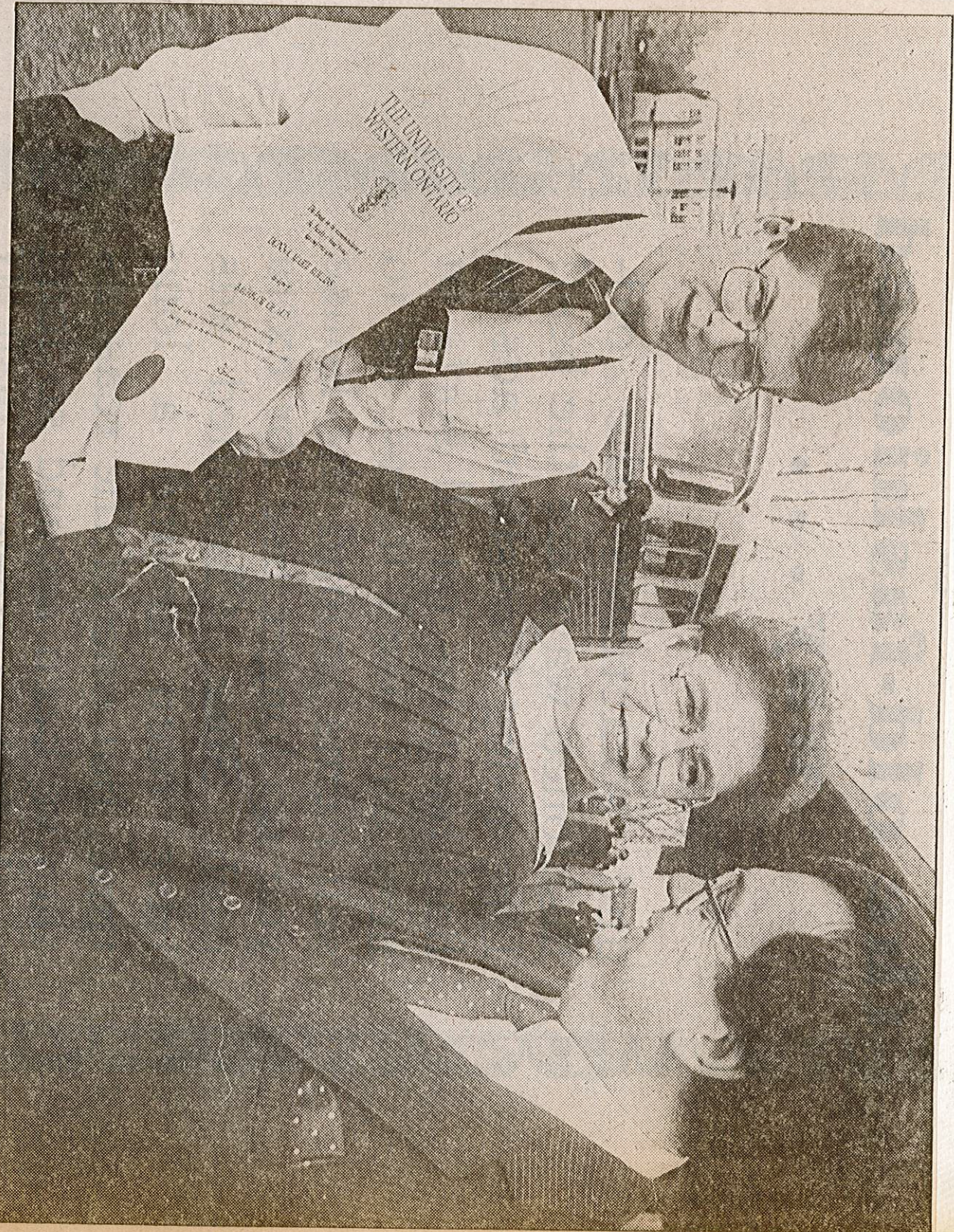
"By the time it came to the final examination it was getting pretty rough. I couldn't see much of anything at all. I was no longer able to read my notes I'd written at the start of the course." She was allowed extra time to finish the exam, which was given on tape. "I could see when I wrote with felt pen on paper and used magnifying glasses. So that was how I finished the final."

She has three children, Debra, 22, a graduate of Queen's University in Kingston, Mark, 19, who is studying electrical engineering at Queen's, and David, 16, a Grade 11 student at Westminster Secondary School.

Rollins now is doing some reading for a blind UWO law student, and she plans to take a course next summer in Brantford to qualify as a teacher of the visually handicapped. Meantime, she works half-time teaching kindergarten at Byron Southwood Public School.

# after timeout for family

Donna Rollins of London shows her bachelor of arts degree to son David, 16, and husband Vaughan after convocation Friday at the University of Western Ontario.



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Morris Lamont of The Free Press