

Graduates demonstrate

Among the more than 5,000 black-gowned graduates at Spring Convocation were many remarkable and inspiring tales of determination.

Many of Western's newest alumni have demonstrated persistence in the face of challenge and creativity in the face of adversity. Their lives and their stories illustrate the incredible diversity and talent that students bring to and develop at Western.

Among this year's graduates were a 32-year-old former Easter Seals poster child who wants to pursue a writing career, a 71-year-old grandmother who is celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary this month, and a civil engineering student who graduated at the top of his class despite being paralyzed in an accident last summer.

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Malcolm MacDonald, 32, jokes that he knows the shortest route between any two points on campus. It's been a survival strategy for him. Born with cerebral palsy, he uses crutches to get around and it always takes time.

A former Easter Seals poster child, MacDonald first came to Western in 1983, right out of high school, because it was "the expected thing to do," he says, but it wasn't the right thing for him.

"I had to figure out what I was about before I could enjoy learning." After several years in the work force, he returned with a renewed enthusiasm for education. "I love books, I love words, I love language, I love stories," said MacDonald, who received his BA in English June 12.

MacDonald says his years at Western have been a time of considerable personal growth and he is grateful for the tremendous support he has received from people at the University. He hopes to use his skills to become a professional writer. "I wouldn't trade the experience for anything," said MacDonald.

New horizons opened

Marjorie Martin is marking two significant milestones in her life this month. At 71 years of age, she's receiving a university degree and celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary.

Martin came to Western in 1990 with what she describes as a great deal of "life experience." Born in London and married in 1946, Martin and her husband raised six children as they operated a small chain of bakeries.

Coming to Western in her 60s allowed Martin to tackle new challenges. University "opened new horizons for me," she says. "I just loved it!"

Initially apprehensive about sitting in classes with students 40 years her junior, Martin quickly got over it.

"I thought to myself: 'Well, I can do this,'" said Martin who expected some of her children and 10 grandchildren to be at Convocation June 11 to help her celebrate.

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Few individuals could ever match the astonishing determination of 23-year-old Roger Miltenburg. When the A-student was left paralyzed by a lawn tractor accident last July, he resolved to return to full-time studies at Western in September and maintain his impressive average.

Miltenburg's efforts have been a resounding success and he was awarded the Dr. James A. Vance Gold Medal in civil engineering as well as the Doris (Billie) Ransberry Memorial Medal at Convocation June 14.

Much of the credit for his continued success belongs to his mother, says Miltenburg.

She moved to London from their family farm in Dungannon, Ont. to assist him — driving him to and from classes and medical appointments. Together, they lived in a wheelchair accessible apartment in the University's Lambton Hall residence — driving home on weekends.

"After the accident, graduating was my biggest goal and I guess I achieved it," said Miltenburg. He will be back at Western in the fall to pursue graduate studies.