

AGE-DEFYING MAKE UP

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Joan LaFlamme was accepted at Rivier when she was 17. Though she had intended to go to college right after high school, her plans changed when she got married. This May, she celebrated her 60th wedding anniversary—and earned her bachelor's degree. At Rivier's 72nd Commencement ceremony, Joan became the oldest undergraduate in the College's history.



Joan clearly remembers the day she decided to start her college degree, more than ten years ago. Dr. Joseph Allard, then Dean of the Undergraduate Evening School, was the first person she met at Rivier. “I came over during lunch and said ‘I want to go to school—do you think I’m too old?’ and he said, ‘Of course not!’”

“I didn’t even know what a syllabus was,” Joan says. She started her college education with an English class taught by Dr. Patsy Roberts. “On all my papers, she wrote that I was on my way to writing a book,” Joan says. It’s something she’s considering, though she’s not sure what she wants to take on next.

Many people have asked Joan why she decided to start her studies at age 67. “I wanted to learn. When I was in high school, my mother told me that your education is something no one can take away from you,” she says. Joan’s children and grandchildren also inspired her with their college degrees and career choices—ask about her family and she proudly shares stories about doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses. “They’ve all done so well,” she says.

Joan’s sister Pat earned her degree at Rivier in 1946. “When I told her I was thinking about going to Rivier, she said that was a big step,” Joan says. But it was something she wanted to do. Retired, with her eight children grown, she finally had the time to pursue her degree.

After Joan retired, her husband, Albert, tried to get her to golf. “It was nice to know he wanted me with him, but it was frustrating,” she says. “Finally, I told him, ‘I like going out on the golf course and I love walking, but this isn’t for me—I’m going to see what’s going on at Rivier.’”

Once Joan started taking classes, her family supported her in a variety of ways. “I knew nothing about the computer,” she says. But her husband bought her one, and a grandson set it up. When Joan had questions, her children had answers.

Now she regularly uses e-mail and the internet—she even took several online courses to finish her degree requirements.

In spring 2007, Joan took Karen Cooper’s Communications and Public Information course online. Joan participated in online chats and discussion forums, and delivered all her assignments digitally using the course management software. Cooper says Joan also brought a unique perspective to the class, sharing details of floods and other disasters that occurred in the city of Nashua as far back as the 1940s.



[PHOTOS BY KATHY MACKAY]

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Cooper was impressed by Joan’s willingness to take on the challenge of learning an entirely new format of instruction. “She had never used the Blackboard™ course management system before and had not taken classes in the 8-week format, but she invested the time and energy to learn and wasn’t afraid to ask for assistance along the way,” she says.

Joan got plenty of encouragement from people at Rivier. Judith Stanford and Leslie Van Wagner praised her writing. Lois Reynolds was willing to help when she got hung up on the computer. Regina Shearer served as Joan’s advisor and a voice of confidence. “If I was discouraged, she’d guide me through,” Joan says.

Other students also made an important contribution to Joan’s college experience. “It was so important to me to be in a group of people and learn, learn, learn,” she says. “I saw people of all different walks of life, and it was enlightening to me.” When she began taking classes in the evening program, age wasn’t really an issue. But when she switched to day classes, the difference was striking. “One girl told me I reminded her of her grandmother,” Joan says.

Even though she started her studies later in life, Joan says that earning her degree has helped her grow up. “I have gained confidence and feel I can express myself better,” she says. Her family enjoyed watching her become more independent.

“I’m so grateful for the opportunity to reach my goal in life,” Joan says. She has completed her bachelor’s degree, but it’s clear that Joan LaFlamme will never stop learning. ■

Top: Regina Shearer, Joan’s advisor, applauds. *Middle:* Joan recalls Dr. Joseph Allard was the first person she met at Rivier. *Bottom:* Joan with her husband, Albert, and grandson, Jonathan Sticca.

* **JENNIFER LISKOW** works as a Public Relations and Web Writer in the Office of Marketing and Communications and teaches in Rivier’s Professional Communications program. Jenn earned her bachelor’s in English and communications from Notre Dame College in Manchester, N.H. in 1996. In 2002, she completed her master’s in writing and literature at Rivier. She began writing in junior high school; since then, she has had poems, short stories, features, and essays published. In her free time, Jenn enjoys practicing yoga, ten-pin bowling, and listening to live music with her husband, Tim.