

Homecoming 2007

Unveiling

Friday, October 12, 2007



A huge tent and the sounds of Queen's piper, Cheryl Pulling (BNSc '82) announced the start of a heartwarming ceremony on Friday, October 12th, when, as part of Homecoming 2007, the Ban Righ Centre hosted the unveiling of a plaque recognizing the role of the Queen's University Alumnae Association in the creation in 1974 of the Ban Righ Foundation for Continuing University Education and its Centre at 32 Bader Lane.



The plaque was the gift of Helen Bracken Anderson (Arts '46) who was instrumental in the Foundation's conception and continues to be both its advocate and supporter.



Sheila Murray (BNSc '59, MPA '91) was Mistress of Ceremonies, Karen R. Hitchcock (PhD) Queen's Principal and Vice-Chancellor spoke about the importance of the Centre to mature women students and to the Queen's Community. She received a rousing cheer when introduced by Sheila as the first woman Principal of Queen's. Helen Bracken Anderson told the story of the Centre's founding and two students, Mary Caesar who is in an MA program and Melissa Dunnett, in her third year undergraduate, spoke about the importance of the Centre to students and thanked all those who support the Centre with their volunteer time and their donations.

Principal Hitchcock, Helen Anderson, and Barbara Schlafer, Director of the Foundation did the honours of unveiling the plaque, which has been mounted to the left of the entrance to the Ban Righ Centre.



The ceremony was followed by an Open House and refreshments.



Sheila Murray, Helen Anderson, Margaret Hoey and Helen Mathers

THE FOLLOWING ARE EXERPTS FROM SPEECHES GIVEN AT A RECENT STUDENT AFFAIR'S TOWN HALL MEETING WITH A FOCUS ON THE BAN RIGH CENTRE

"In the fall of 1983 I took up a postdoctoral fellowship in the history department at Queen's. The move from Montreal had been something of a culture shock. I had been immersed in the women's movement in Montreal, had a history of involvement with the black community, had written an MA thesis that was part of the exploding world of feminist scholarship. Queen's was lovely, I liked the buildings; people were friendly; but the homogeneity of person and thought was striking. I did feel like a fish out of water.

What first brought me to the BRC? I believe an invitation to do one of the noon time talks. I worried about sounding too radical, trimmed my sails a bit.

I had not realized that I was walking into another world. I had known nothing about the history or the daily life of the centre. But I found out fast. My talk sparked great discussion; and it became clear that here I could be myself, no sail trimming necessary here--lest I be thought to be out of touch with the real dilemmas of women, and particularly those trying to combine work, children, and education. I felt at home. Queen's started to look different to me. If this institution could have a BRC in the middle of campus, then perhaps it wasn't as reactionary and staid as I had feared.

In the ensuing years I had many occasions to come to the BRC, and to support it in several ways. But I also ended up with a very scholarly connection to the centre. In 1995 my MA student, Marion Campbell, herself a mature student, wrote a thesis entitled "***Separation or Integration, A Case Study: The Ban Righ Board of Queen's University.***" Together with the research for my book, a biography of Jean Royce, registrar of Queen's University from 1933 to 1968, this thesis gave me a wonderful understanding of the role that Queen's women played in building the first residence turning a surplus, and then having the surplus used to found the Ban Righ Centre. Make no mistake: this involved a serious political struggle that pitted the Alumnae against the Board of Trustees who wanted the surplus deposited in general university accounts. Jean Royce, by now retired and an elected member of the B of T played a key role because she understood the politics of the university and because she shared the perspective of women like Helen Anderson that mature women returning to the university needed a special place where they could come together to get and give support for their great adventures in returning to university. Whenever the BRC has been at risk, I recall all those early days, and realize that complacency better have no place in our consciousness or strategies.

Unlike many urban universities that attract students of all ages, stages, and ethnicities, and who are therefore prepared to ensure that they have what they need to be successful in their studies and keep their lives on track, Queen's has

a smaller catchment area from which to attract returning students. If love is better the second time round, many returning students certainly think that education is better the second time round. Experienced, clear about their goals, disciplined, accustomed to juggling, they are ready to climb any mountain, ford any stream. But their few numbers can mean that they feel as I did when I first came to Queen's - surrounded as they are by bright, keen, party going 18 years olds. Can they fit in? Can they navigate the hoops regardless of their other commitments - like earning a living for instance, or raising children? These older - mature - students - few as they are made a huge difference in our classes. One year I taught introductory sociology and there were a lot of nurses in my class. They were required to take sociology and they weren't all happy about it. Also in the class was the retired director of Nursing at KGH. She certainly set them straight about what they would need in their nursing careers. One year I had a woman from Guatemala whom I knew was a regular at Ban Righ. She wrote an essay - I called it a sociological autobiography --about her experience leaving her country after her husband was murdered by state soldiers, fleeing to Canada with her young son as a refugee. I asked here if she would let me read it to the class. Never have my four hundred students been that quiet. She needed alot of help writing coherent English which was of course her second language. But her presence made the kind of difference in my class that I could never hope to produce on my own. One year in the Sociology of the Family I had Janet H. The students found much of the material on violence against women, divorce, and single mothers somewhat trying, so far out of most of their ken. But in my class that year was Janet xxx - who participated actively in the discussion, who made my job - encouraging my students to open their minds - so much more possible.

Queen's is a wonderful university. But as we know it has its limitations because it fails to draw a critical mass of students differently located. Attracting mature women students is one way of making the place less homogeneous, more open ot the challenges faced by those not born with the proverbial silver spoon. They are willing to share their experience with their younger class mates; they bring passion, humour, different perspectives, and what Barack Obama has called **The Audacity of Hope** to their discussions. The classroom is a richer place for their presence. They also bring a great deal to the faculty who want and need diverse classrooms, essays that reflect seasoned thought, and reminders that education is indeed a life long process. To the extent that Queen's becomes a really good place for mature students facing all of their challenges, it will be a better place for all students. When students come to me with the problems that they face in getting assignments done - it can be the death of a parent or sibling, health problems, the end of a love affair - they always want to imagine that they can do everything on the same time schedule as others who are not afflicted. I tell them: life does get in the way, and that's alright - it means we are fully human. Mature students understand this; their situations do sometimes mean that they can't walk lock step to the scheduling assignments. If we are honest we'll admit that this happens to us all. We don't live cookie cutter lives: our mature students especially both remind us of this and show us how they continue to go round, through, below and on top of the hurdles that they

face. Sometimes they need more time; they might need to take fewer courses, they might need to drop a course and take it in the summer; they might need a big long extension. Why are faculty and administrators here? Not just to show what good bureaucrats we can be, that's for sure. The staff, ethos and students at the BRC help us to avoid that fate. On the eve of my retirement from Queen's, I want to thank Barbara Schlafer and the staff for giving me the opportunity to talk about their wonderful Centre this morning."

Professor Roberta Hamilton
B.A.(Carleton), M.A., Ph.D., (Concordia)

"Flattered to be asked to contribute to this presentation by a group that does so much for mature students.

The Ban Righ Centre asked me to speak about what I have noticed about the needs of mature students in my position as a Career and Recruitment Advisor at the Faculty of Education. Perhaps they have also asked me to speak because I have been completing a Master of Education program in Post-Secondary Education (not here!) throughout which I have focused a lot of my research on mature students - and perhaps because I am myself a mature student. I think some context might be helpful here to situate my comments - that a little about what I do in my job with these wonderful people, what I have discovered through my research, and through my own experiences will be helpful to you in your own interactions with, and efforts to support, mature students.

For 10is years I have been working very closely with Bachelor of Education students on their job search - this happens mostly in one-on-one interviews, and inevitably leads to getting to the know the students very well. In our discussions, the students' aspirations, their hopes, their worries and anxieties usually become part of the process so the students can address them, clarify them and move ahead to get that elusive job. I began to notice that mature students had many commonalities that separate them from the rest of the traditionally-aged students - these similarities usually manifested in common challenges - or rather....**barriers** to their attendance in the program. I felt a great connection to them and these worries, mostly because I felt them myself. Additionally, I believed that to do my job to the best of my ability as a Student Services worker meant that I had to better understand their collective situation. So I started paying attention to what I heard ... and eventually enrolled at MUN to learn and discover more. What I did find out was that the barriers I recognized in our students were shared in many, many other post-secondary institutions.

The first common barrier I recognized in our students was **isolation and alienation**. In our program we have normally 700 students - I estimate that around 12-15% of our students are older than average - our admission process doesn't offer a mature student category so I don't know how many Mature students are enrolled.

So.....amid a sea of younger students who are in their 4th or 5th year - within the techno-savvy culture of the **like, totally awesome savvy mainstream student** who understands how to navigate within a university, 85 arrive bewildered much the same as first year students, in that they want to fit in and to connect - and then they find that they are in the minority - - and perhaps **don't quite understand what the heck is going on, and like, what the heck the students, like,** are even saying! Some may even have children the same age as their educational cohorts. I once spoke to a student who had NEVER even sent an email until he had applied for admission! So this means that the knowledge of being in university, and of negotiating their education using technology is a challenge to many mature students - but most of them learn it and excel at it.

For this reason, I decided many years ago to start a mature student group, knowing that the Ban Righ Centre has been so helpful to many, so matures students could see that they were not alone, and to offer to them an opportunity to connect and support each other - keeping in mind that research says that **failing to connect in a personal way often leaves a student ambivalent at best, and more often, alienated or detached - and that this is counterintuitive to academic** - which is of course our goal. This I begin on the first day of school - gather them all together so they know that they are not alone. I also lobbied the Ed Stu Society to add a Mature Student rep- so the mature students would have a voice within the Faculty of Ed. Through this effort we were able to add to the usual list of student social activities, ESS sponsored and funded activities specifically designed for mature student interests. Also, through persistence - by making myself visible and accessible, I made it known that my office was there for them - that I always had a cup of tea, a Kleenex if necessary, advice when required and an ear whenever it was needed. I endeavour to be their advocate when they need it. I try to be in constant communication with the administrators in the faculty to keep them abreast of what's up with the mature students....to keep them visible to the university.

In reference to technology -- interestingly, a younger mature student decided to set up a Mature Student Facebook site for discussion and connection - it has not been as successful as we had hoped, for many mature students have said that they are somewhat intimidated by the prospect, and that they did not have the time to spend typing and interacting on a computer. I assume that your experience is that it is SOOO different than what the traditionally aged student does!!!! It's important to understand that some mature students have dated expectations of what it means to attend university, and that they may have been absent from formal learning environments for long periods of time.

Time - not having time - is another barrier I have seen in mature students - and I know that this complaint is not exactly unique to this age group. We are all pressed for time....however, when you consider that mature students have to organize their lives around a university's schedule, one that is geared to the full-

time traditional student, and somehow blend it all in with their family responsibilities, it becomes a pressure cooker. Attending university does not suddenly relieve them of their profound and prior responsibilities - these responsibilities remain important and have to be managed. I think that this is different to what many traditionally aged students experience and...I think we who have children and outside the home responsibilities can understand this.

In addition, some of our mature students commute - hours - so they can continue to manage their competing responsibilities of home and family, and school. I know of one who came from Ottawa every day!! There's a time challenge for you!

All this leads to a sometimes debilitating sense of **guilt**. I see this in both mothers and fathers, who feel that they are neglecting their responsibilities as a parent. It doesn't matter if you and I instinctively know that the education they are pursuing will make their lives and themselves better, which in turn will benefit their families. To them, in the immediate here and now, they feel like they are falling down on their family job. This affects their ability within the program and in their learning. Inevitably, each year, a few students will come to me to tell me that a spouse or partner, or worse, one of their kids is terribly ill...or ever so sadly, one of the mature students themselves is ill. Unbelievably - it continually astounds me - most of the student persevere and make it work and finish the program.

A changing identity is another challenge that I see in mature students. Many have gone from being bread winners and have had an identity as an employed "this or that", to gut-wrenchingly tossing it away, and starting to redefine themselves. A HUGE challenge - even if they know that it will mean being more prosperous, or becoming more of who they really are...it still is a terribly enormous challenge shared by mature students. Yes, many traditionally aged students are going through the same process, but part of being a mature student means a tearing away of who they are - have been for a few decades! - so they can endeavour to be who they believe they can be. This may leave them isolated from their families and friends - people who may not understand just how darn hard the whole process is. How hard it is to say NO I cannot go out tonight and kick my heels up, **because I have homework**, ...or, I can't because I have to juggle home and family and sometimes a part-time job and schools and....shucks I just don't have the time. But more...they may not be understood by their friends and family, that because they are learning new, fascinating, and there are agonizing, exciting things to contemplate - that their former identities don't have the same cachet. My observations and research tell me that this is so hard to live...especially at an age where it might not be an expected challenge.

To reiterate...mature students have enormous time management challenges, monumental competing responsibilities, may have dated expectations of what to expect at university, and may be intimidated by the ubiquitous and pervasive use

of technology in admissions and throughout the university. Also there are financial concerns that match or surpass those of any university student...and a fear of failure - something that can be utterly embarrassing to an adult. Mature students also have challenges that are reminiscent of the traditionally aged student, but many of these challenges are ramped up because they have much at stake. For...many do not have the luxury of saying - OH well, if I mess this up I can try again in a few years.

I must also acknowledge one of the strongest commonalities I see among mature students. It is not a barrier, but it is a powerful attribute. **Courage.** For a moment, I would like to ask you, as gainfully employed people...to consider that you need to change course, that you have a driving need to learn and grow and...become you. So you decide, that even though you have a mortgage, bills, hockey fees for your kids, and kids' piano lessons that you have to manage to get the kids to, and your kids' school plays to see, and a spouse who works crazy hours, and aging parents that need your attention, and you decide that you are going to give up your salary - your pension contributions! ...your income, your livelihood for 3 or 4 years...and you have a family depending on you. Everything is going to change. It scares the heck out of me when I contemplate this. And yet, the students I work with and admire do just that, and face seemingly indomitable barriers. This is courage. This is tenacity. And this offers to us a profound reason to understand and support mature students as Student Services workers whose mandate is student success. It's important because mature students are a growing cohort in Canadian universities: mature students make up nearly a third of the students we work for. It's important that we are mindful of their challenges, barriers and needs. They need to connect, they need support, such as what the Ban Righ Centre offers, and they need our awareness so we can do our best to support them."

Elsbeth Morgan
Career and Recruitment Advisor
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