



Mon, Jun 09, 2008

CITIZEN HOME DELIVERY
 subscribe NOW and
SAVE 60%

Access
 Subscriptions | Customer Service

Classifieds Jobs Cars Real Estate Rentals Shop Health Travel Bridal SW Style Newcomers Obits PAST WEEK
 Home Local News UA Sports HS Sports Sports Business Nation/World Opinion Blogs Lifestyle Entertainment Food **Bedmart**
 Breaking N/W Nation/World Az/West Border Election Politics Sci/Tech U.S. at War Entertainment Weird News

66% off on Citizen Home Delivery weekender!

Published: 03.29.2008

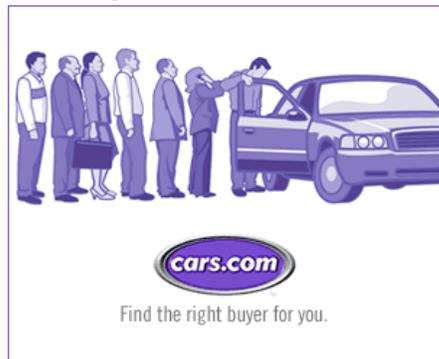
Pursuit of knowledge a rewarding chase

Tucson Citizen
 letters@tucsoncitizen.com

The phrase "back to school" conjures up different images for different people.

For some it's Rodney Dangerfield; for others, it's a time to buy new clothes for the kids.

For me and a growing number of others older than 24, it means going to college later in life to get that bachelor's degree.



It's not as hard as people think, though that's a hard sell when I tell people my experiences.

I was 32, had a 9-month-old baby and a 9-year-old daughter. We all survived on my husband's income.

A lot of people stop me right there and say, "How did you do it? I could never do that."

I disagree.

Plenty of older students do it.

In 2003, 21.5 percent of all students starting college for the first time were 24 or older, says a 2007 report from the National Center for Education

Statistics.

And 27.1 percent of all the undergraduates had dependents, another center report says.

A "nontraditional student" is someone who didn't go to college right out of high school, who attends part time or works full time while in school, is not dependent on parents, has his or her own dependents or lacks a high school diploma.

The key to my success was not thinking too hard about how difficult it was going to be.

I had plenty of strikes against me. Aside from having a baby who had yet to sleep through the night, there was income.

Neither my husband, Jim, nor I were made of money. When I started college, Jim was working as a cook in Flagstaff, making barely enough to cover rent, insurance and groceries.

After I got laid off twice in one year, I lost the will to keep working in go-nowhere jobs.

I needed to get a degree to get my dream job before my kids went off to college.

So while the baby napped, I did my homework or went to class online at Coconino Community College.

Sleep became a luxury. My husband changed his work hours so he could be there for the kids during the classes for which I had to put in a personal appearance.

Even today, Jim's schedule dovetails mine: He works evenings and weekends. I go to school during the day.

Until my youngest started kindergarten in August, we had a sometimes precarious system of timetables for picking up and dropping off our toddler. We managed it without using day care.

Still unconvinced, listeners say, "Well, I could never afford that."

Horsepuckey! Jim was making around \$20,000 a year - for a family of four - when I started school.

PHOTOS & IMAGES

CLICK PHOTO TO ENLARGE



It can be done. Grants and student loans can help you do it, and a new option at the University of Arizona starts this fall: the Arizona Assurance program to help income-eligible people get a four-year university education.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

TO LEARN MORE

- [Details on the Arizona Assurance program](#)
- [Free application for Federal Student Aid](#)
- [Financial aid at UA](#)
- [Frequently asked questions on grants at UA](#)
- [Pima Community College financial aid page](#)

QUICK FACTS IN 2003:

- 42.9 percent of all undergraduate students were 24 or older
- 25.9 percent were 30 or older
- 50.2 percent were classified as independent
- 27.1 percent had dependents
- 61.4 percent attended part time

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Digest of Education Statistics 2007

STORY TOOLS

I applied for federal student aid, listing income and household information, and the U.S. Department of Education sent me a letter with a number for the Expected Family Contribution, telling how much the government thought I should pay for my education.

My EFC has been zero for a few years now. I only had an EFC of any consequence for the first academic year because I had worked recently and my tax return showed that I had made enough to help pay for my education. I had no savings, so it was a stretch that first year.

I ended up with a Pell Grant, which is money I didn't have to repay. This grant paid for my tuition and books.

Pell Grants don't pay for all of the tuition at a university, but they do at the community college level.

It can be done. Grants and student loans can help you do it, and a new option at the University of Arizona starts this fall: the Arizona Assurance program to help income-eligible people get a four-year university education.

If I can do it, you can do it. I won't say it's easy, but it is worth it.

Jennifer Tramm, a mother of two, is a journalism major at the University of Arizona.

[Save Money! Subscribe to the Tucson Citizen.](#)

Comments on this Story

0 Total Comments — [See All Comments](#)

[Write a letter to the Editor](#)

Leave a Comment

You are logged in as **R Q (ritzqueen)** [Log Out](#)

[Formatting Help](#)