

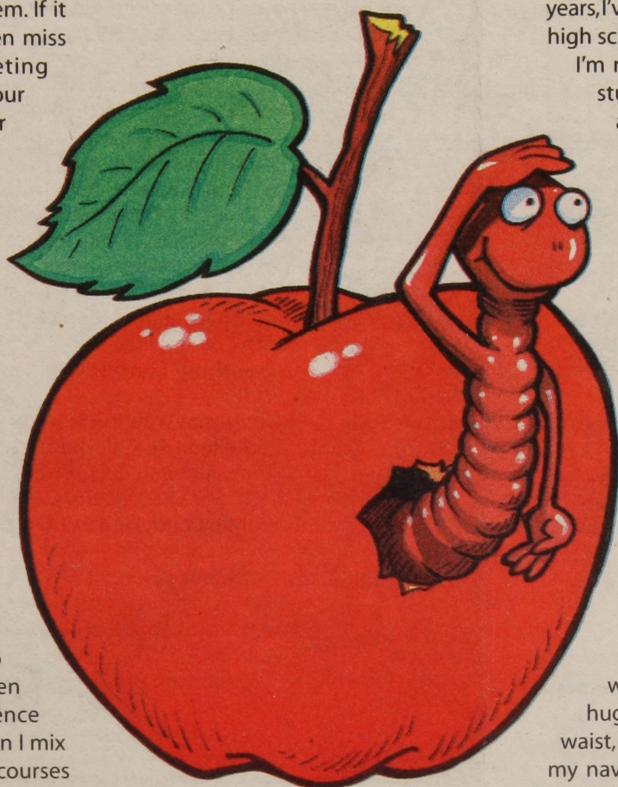
IN MY OPINION**Caroline Porter**

Where are those big, shiny apples?

...because I'm going to need them. If it weren't for the fact that I can't even miss a county board committee meeting without hitting the front page of our daily newspaper, you might wonder if I'd died and gone to... well, whatever. I'm going to school. That's right, in my late sixties, (very late, in fact, as late you can get); I'm attending Western Illinois University to work on my Master's Degree in Political Science, something I intended to do about 30 years ago.

I'm older than the other students, the professors, the administrators, the staff — just about everyone on campus, but I don't feel it. I've never worked so hard in my life, taking three graduate level courses, two of them "core" courses, which have to be part of my curriculum to get the degree. Everyone has been wonderful to me and the experience is invigorating and fun. Not only can I mix with young people, in my two core courses are students from other countries who are studying international relations. There are students from Japan, Turkmenistan, Chad, Turkey, Croatia, Mexico, and what a nice group of people they are. In my third course, some of the students are seniors, so they are even younger. I think they are a bit startled when I refer to some part of my life in the 1950's but they are getting used to me, and I, them.

How many of us get to go to graduate school the same time as our grandchildren? My granddaughter is in the graduate



program for Social Work at Loyola University. We expect to graduate the same time, about spring of 2007. Her goal is to do well and continue her career in crisis counseling and management. My goal is to do well and live long enough to finish and maybe teach about government and politics at the community college level. Because I've been active in politics and government for 45 years, I think my experience, combined with more education, might be valuable to young people. Over the

years, I've spoken to students in colleges and high schools and for some strange reason, I'm not cynical about the subject. The students have reacted with interest and enthusiasm. In fact, some still keep in touch and tell me about their internships in Washington, D.C., for example, or some other interesting project.

I've been convinced for years that if students really understood the reality of our rather laborious and inefficient system of representative democracy, they might not be so shocked and negative when they reach voting age and beyond. It's also healthy to listen to someone who's had practical experience and lived to tell about it with some enthusiasm.

When my granddaughter and I were discussing school, I told her I would have to buy a backpack, hip-huggers, tank tops (that don't reach the waist, of course) and get some jewelry in my navel before I hit campus. She didn't seem worried. The most amazing sight on campus is a group of students walking together, but talking on their cell phones to someone else instead of each other.

I'm thankful every waking minute that I forced myself to learn to use a computer in the early 1990s. As a commuting student, I can download reading assignments from the Western Illinois University website, order parking permits and accomplish a lot of other student business. Then, of course, there are the papers. I have three 20 page research papers to complete and final



exams in the next two weeks. And when I say research, I mean RESEARCH! I've already received one first draft back with so much writing on it I may have to start over. I never thought at this late stage I would get so excited about hypotheses, dependent and independent variables and operationalizing my concepts. Yeah, I thought I knew what those words meant too.

For years when people asked me "Whaddya know?" I would answer, "Less every day." Now I can answer, "More than I ever dreamed, thank you."

Boy, am I going to need those apples.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer who can be reached at cporter@galesburg.net. Other columns are online at www.thezephyr.com.