Woman meets goal of getting college degree by 50

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ELKHART, Ind. — When Casey Lau was young, 50 was a long way off. There would be plenty of time for her to get her college degree.

But life happened between then and now, including a stint in the Army and raising her son, and the Elkhart resident will walk across the stage to accept her diploma July 1 — just five days before her 50th birthday.

“It was arbitrary,” Lau said of the goal age she picked. “At the time it seemed so far away. I thought I would be done long before then.”

She had been working at a Goshen-area business a little more than two years ago when she decided it was time for a change.

“I realized I was not going anywhere without a degree,” she said.

She had worked toward a college degree “in bits and pieces” over the years, but needed another 110 credits to finish, she said.

Lau, who lives in Elkhart, found a new job as support services coordinator for Goshen General Hospital and started at Kaplan University the very same day.

Kaplan is based in Davenport, Iowa, and offers enough online courses that Lau was able to complete her degree in two years.

Elkhart resident Casey Lau will graduate from Kaplan University July 1. She took online courses to complete her bachelor’s degree.

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She looked at local “brick and mortar” campuses, but driving and being away from work would have added time to her college experience.

“I didn’t want to be in school another four years,” she said.

So she turned to her computer and looked at a number of online programs before settling on Kaplan. The advisers were friendly and her professors accessible, more so than at any other community college she attended. The number of classes offered was impressive, so that she could take all of her classes at 10 p.m. or on Saturdays, she said.

Kaplan uses a quarter system for classes and Lau’s course load ranged from 12 to 17 credits each quarter. She had chat class two nights a week and at least 10-25 hours of homework with each class.

“I was working a 40-hour work week plus another 40 hours for school,” she said.

She would get home from work and go straight to her computer. Her husband, Bruce, got used to cooking his own dinner and watching TV in the family room so as not to disturb her. Before he went to bed, he would kiss her good-

night and leave her to her studies.

Her weekends were dominated by school work as well.

“My friends got used to not seeing me,” she said. “They just stopped calling.”

Lau’s persistence in her school work paid off — she has been inducted into two honor societies and is graduating Summa Cum Laude with a bachelor of science degree in management with a health care major.

She hopes to use her degree to advance her position with Goshen Health System.

“I’ve always wanted to be in medicine somehow,” she said. “I would like to eventually have a management position — to continue to make a contribution to the health system.”

Now that she has her free time back, Lau is enjoying leisure reading and playing cards with her friends. She and her husband own motorcycles and are members of the Elks and Moose.

She is getting back to a regular eating and sleeping schedule and will be ready to tackle some long-put-off house projects, but not until after the Laus enjoy her graduation ceremony in Chicago.

Despite all the work, Lau said she would go through the experience again.

“It’s never too late,” she said. “You’re never too old. It is so worth the effort.”

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