Betty Amos inspires fellow students as she earns her PhD.

Betty Amos was born in 1948, the year the University of Kansas football team went to the Orange Bowl for the first time. In 1968, she was in the midst of her undergraduate years at KU when the team made it to the Orange Bowl again. Unfortunately, the Jayhawks lost both of those games.

Flash forward 40 years. Amos was back at KU, and the Jayhawks were headed to the Orange Bowl for a third time. Finally, 2008 would prove to be a good year for both. KU won the game, and Amos reached the Mount Everest of academia: the doctoral degree.

Amos first came to KU to pursue a teaching degree after deciding in third grade that she wanted to devote her life to education. She earned her bachelor’s in special education in 1970 and went on to a 30-year career in education, teaching in Grand Island, Neb., and Hoxie and Colby, Kan., and serving as principal in Marquette, Kan. In 1984, she was named Kansas Teacher of the Year, which she calls “a fabulous and humbling honor.”

For the past three years, Amos has been assistant director, then executive director of the Central Kansas Cooperative in Education in Salina, an organization that provides special education services and support for children in 12 school districts.

She was encouraged to go after a doctorate by her colleagues at the Associated Colleges of Central Kansas, a consortium of six private colleges in central Kansas, where Amos taught future special education teachers for five years. She chose to return to KU, home of the nation’s No. 1 ranked special education graduate program.

The road to her degree was a long one, literally and figuratively. She began her studies in 2002 while living in a rural area between Lindsborg and Marquette, about 200 miles from KU’s Edwards Campus in Overland Park, where most of her classes were held. She passed the three-hour trips by listening to her textbooks on tape, recording ideas for papers and coursework, and planning her daily schedule for home and work.

“I drove hundreds of miles,” Amos said. “Every one was worth it.”

On top of hectic schedule that included school and her full-time job in Salina, life dealt her a seismic blow. Her husband, Bruce, found out he had colon cancer in January 2007.

Amos, who had completed her comprehensive exams and was embarking on dissertation research, dropped everything to be with him. After several rounds of chemotherapy and two surgeries, Bruce Amos is now cancer free. Back at school, Betty Amos turned 60 just a few days before successfully defending her dissertation.

“I figured if he could conquer cancer, I could handle a dissertation,” she said.
Incoming KU students invited to welcome picnic

Incoming University of Kansas students and their parents from Harvey, Marion, McPherson and Rice counties will be welcomed into the KU family at the Jayhawk Generations Welcome Picnic at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, June 5, in McPherson.

The KU Alumni Association and its Santa Fe Trail chapter will greet the new Jayhawks at the Lakeside Cabin, 1101 E. Euclid. Area alumni, new students, students interested in learning more about KU and parents are invited to attend and enjoy complimentary food and beverages. Each new Jayhawk will also receive a free T-shirt.

Larry Chaney of McPherson, Santa Fe Trail chapter president, and Heath Peterson, director of Kansas programs for the alumni association, are coordinating the event. Alumni association staff will arrive with the signature KU trailer full of grills, burgers and brats for the festivities. Current KU students, alumni and university representatives will mix and mingle with students to answer questions and offer advice.

For more information or to make reservations, visit www.kualumni.org, call the KU Alumni Association at (800) 584-2957 or e-mail kualumni@kualumni.org.

The alumni association invited incoming students whose enrollment deposits were received by the Office of Admissions and Scholarships by May 1. The guests from Lindsborg include: Amy Dauer, Braden Krinhop, Britney Scott, Eric Hawk, Mariah Spellman and Sara Nelson.
KU to welcome new students June 5

Incoming University of Kansas students and parents will be welcomed at a picnic June 5 in McPherson.

Marion County students include Lauren Helmer and Zachary Helmstead, Marion, and Benjamin Eldridge, Peabody.
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KU student overcomes personal demons to finish college degree

Jonathan Kealing
Lawrence Journal-World

LAWRENCE (AP) — Thor Nystrom looked the Lawrence police officer in the eye on Oct. 10, 2003, nodded toward his gun and made the simplest of requests.

“Shoot me in the head. No one has to know.”

It was those 10 words — none longer than five letters — that started Nystrom’s yearlong descent into multiple prescription drugs, suicide attempts and a four-month stint in the Minnesota mental health system.

“From that second forward, it was a steep decline,” Nystrom said. But they’re also the 10 words that launched Nystrom to his current position: peering down Kansas University’s Campanile Hill.

The problems started with an innocuous step. Shortly before Nystrom left his home in Baxter, Minn., to come to KU, his psychiatrist placed him on the antidepressant Paxil because of possible side effects from the Adderall he’d taken for a number of years to treat attention-deficit disorder.

Mix that with the substantial amount of alcohol many college freshmen consume, and Nystrom was taking a toxic cocktail that was causing his brain to process things differently from ever before. As soon as the police officer heard the comment, he took him to Stormont-Vail Hospital in Topeka. A doctor there diagnosed Nystrom with schizophrenia and placed him on a powerful anti-psychotic drug, Geodon.

“My mind was not right after I got back from that clinic in Topeka,” he said.

Three disorders and countless prescriptions later, Nystrom finally emerged on the other side. But not before being committed by the state of Minnesota to mental hospitals for four months.

“It really blew my mind that someone made the decision I needed to be locked up,” Nystrom said. “They didn’t talk to me like a real person. They didn’t treat me like a real person.”

Nystrom was committed because of one of his suicide attempts. On the night of his sister’s high school graduation, Nystrom went out to his Jeep in the garage — after taking 10 times the recommended dose of sleeping pills — and stuffed rags in the exhaust pipe. He taped the rags in place, turned the ignition and shut all the doors. And waited to die.

“That was a high point, if you can believe it,” Nystrom said. “Up until that time, from October until May, I’d just go along with what the doctors said. When I attempted suicide, I felt like I was taking control.”

The tape came loose and the rag fell out. His sister, Quinn, came home early that morning from graduations and found her brother in the garage.

She may have saved his life. He began intensive outpatient therapy. Three weeks later, he was committed.

“That first night he was in the hospital, it was the first good night’s sleep we’d had in nine months,” said his mother, Rachel Nystrom. “After the suicide attempts, I was just glad someone was watching him.”

It was in the hospital where Thor believes someone made the decision that changed his life. His diagnosis was changed from one requiring medication to one requiring therapy. The old Thor began to return.

Patrick Freeman, a childhood friend, was one of the few non-family members who visited Thor regularly.

“It was pretty unbelievable,” he said recently from his home in Denver. “It was shocking; he was always such an outgoing, boisterous kid.”

In November 2004, Nystrom was discharged. His parents allowed him to return to Kansas in time to start classes at Johnson County Community College in 2005.

“He committed to us he would follow up with the clinic in Lawrence and take the medication,” his mom said. “That was an absolute promise. We sent him off with a lot of trepidation and a lot of prayers.”

It was back in Kansas where he made the decision he credits with keeping his life on track.

He quit taking all prescription, mood-altering drugs.

Needless to say, Rachel Nystrom was shocked. But her son was clever with how he told her of his decision.

“He was already on the other side of it when he told me,” she said. “If he’d told me, ‘Tomorrow I’m going off my medication,’ by the time he’d finished his sentence I would have been in the car heading south.”

But now, three years later, the story has a happy ending. After spending three semesters at Johnson County, Nystrom transferred back to KU.

“This is how the story was to go,” Rachel Nystrom said. “He’s a bright guy with a talent for writing. He’s committed to it. The fact that he’s graduating from KU with a degree is so much sweeter now because of what he’s been through.”
Area students to take part in Duke TIP recognition ceremony June 1 at KU

LAWRENCE — The University of Kansas will host a state recognition program at 1:30 p.m. Sunday, June 1, at the Lied Center for about 400 academically talented seventh-grade students selected for the 2008 Duke University Talent Identification Program.

Carter Royce Waite, a KU senior majoring in theatre from Falmouth, Maine, will be host. Simran Sethi, the Lacy C. Haynes visiting professional chair in journalism, will deliver a special address to the students and their families and guests. Julie Bennington, seventh-grade talent search coordinator for Duke TIP, will present the awards.

Selection to Duke TIP is based on college entrance exam scores that are in the top 5 percent while the students are in middle school. Students participate by taking either the SAT or ACT national achievement tests. Working with host academic institutions such as KU, Duke-TIP sponsors 35 ceremonies in its 16-state talent search region.

Each Duke TIP student receives a medallion. The state recognition ceremonies honor seventh graders who have earned scores above the average scores of college-bound high school seniors. Of more than 74,000 applicants this year, 21,115 students qualified and have been invited to state recognition events, including 876 students being recognized at KU.

The Duke program is in its 28th year, and this is the 10th year KU has hosted the Kansas recognition program.

Area students invited to the KU event are:

Chanute — Alexis M. Ethridge, Jordan A. Haynes, Conner A. Lair.

Erie — Dalton L. Noakes.
Pittsburg State scholarships, honors

Leah Angleton, Chanute, Accounting major at Pittsburg State University, has received the $1,000 BKD scholarship and the $2,000 Doyle W. Gorton Scholarship. She is a member of Beta Gamma Sigma, the international honor society recognizing business excellence. She is the daughter of Doyle and Kathy Angleton.

Amy Moyer, Thayer, was initiated into Omicron Delta Epsilon, one of the world’s largest academic honor societies. A senior Accounting/Finance major, she is the daughter of LaVerne and Glenda Smedley, Thayer.

Amy Johnson, a native of Erie, was initiated into Phi Kappa Phi honor society, founded in 1897 at the University of Maine. Johnson, the daughter of James and Patsy Aylward, is a graduate student in special education teaching. She graduated from Andale High School and earned a B.S. in Elementary Education from Kansas State University.

Cadet Justin Dillow, Buffalo, was a winner in the KU Best Buddy Challenge. He is a sophomore majoring in History with a minor in Military Science. He is the son of Ted and Loretta Dillow, Buffalo.
Student completes Global Awareness Program

LAWRENCE — More than 110 students from 30 departments completed the Global Awareness Program at the University of Kansas this spring.

The program recognizes students for studying abroad, taking courses with an international focus, learning foreign languages and being involved in international co-curricular activities. All undergraduates are eligible to participate. To receive certification, students are required to complete two of three requirements. This semester, 10 students completed all three requirements.

"Educating students in the context of an interconnected world gives them a much needed advantage as they set out to work in a global economy," said Jane Irungu, program coordinator.

The newest organization to be affiliated with the Global Awareness Program is Students for Global Awareness, which was formed by program ambassadors to reach out to more students on campus and to allow graduate students and other interested students to participate in related forums and volunteer activities.

Launched by International Programs in fall 2004, the Global Awareness Program has recognized more than 600 students in the past three years. Students earn certification on their KU transcripts and are honored at a luncheon in the spring. More than 1,200 students are currently participating.

Participating was Andrew Stark, Yates Center, son of Ronald and Judith Stark, a graduating senior in East Asian Languages and Cultures.

Stark was more than 165 members from the Class of 2008 recognized as top scholars during commencement at the University of Kansas on Sunday, May 18.

Each year, KU awards its most prized four-year scholarships to students whose academic records and other qualifications make them eligible for selection.
Anderson finishes Global Awareness Program at KU

LAWRENCE — RaeAnn E. Anderson, a graduate of Jackson Heights High School attending the University of Kansas, has completed KU’s Global Awareness Program at KU this spring.

Anderson is among more than 110 students from 30 departments who completed the program, which recognizes students for studying abroad, taking courses with an international focus, learning foreign languages and being involved in international co-curricular activities. She is the daughter of David and Sara Anderson of Circleville and is a senior at KU, majoring in psychology.

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Alesha Miller

Takes 1st at

State Journalism

D. West junior Alesha Miller has received first place in 1A/2A headline writing at state journalism contest—for the second consecutive year. In this contest which is prepared before the day of state, participants are given three stories for which to write and then design computer-generated headlines. State competition was at the University of Kansas on Saturday, May 3. Miller is pictured holding her winning headline entry and certificate of recognition.