Lois Merritt Mikawa spent 10 years as a student at Nevada, receiving her master’s degree in counseling in 1980, an educational specialist certificate in school psychology in 1984, and a doctorate in education in 1987.

Prior to coming to Nevada from Hawaii in 1977, she traveled the country with her then-husband and her son as an Army wife. Her vocation has been in the helping professions, and her avocation has always been vocal music. Since she was a child, she has sung with various musical groups throughout the country, including the Honolulu Opera Company, Nevada Opera, and presently, the Reno Philharmonic Chorus.

In 1987, Lois married Jim Mikawa, who was a clinical psychology professor at Nevada. Upon his death in 1993, she established the Jim Mikawa Graduate Assistantship in Psychology with the University of Nevada, Reno Foundation. Since then, she has also created through her estate plan the James K. and Lois Merritt Mikawa Distinguished Professorship, also with the foundation.

Lois retired from the Washoe County School District in 2000, after 23 years working as a special education teacher, school counselor and school psychologist. During this time, she also taught various classes in the counseling department at the University, and was able to mentor many students seeking to find careers in the counseling field.

In 1995, she was honored as the School Psychologist of the Year by the Nevada Association of School Psychologists. In 2005, she was awarded the Paul McReynolds Foundation Psychological Services Award for her outstanding services to the ethnic minority doctoral students in the University’s clinical psychology program.

Today, Lois enjoys everyday life in Reno with her partner, Larry McMullan, and their standard poodle, Soda. She is training Soda for the therapy dog program at Renown Regional Medical Center, where she volunteers her time and talents with the Renown Institute for Cancer. She continues to support the University’s clinical psychology program.

What is your fondest memory from your days at Nevada?

When I entered the counseling program at Nevada (now known as CEP) in 1977, I had a bachelor of science degree in elementary and special education, obtained after attending six different colleges as I traveled around the country in nomadic fashion as an Army wife.

One of my fondest memories of the 10 years I spent as a student at the University of Nevada, Reno is of the camaraderie among colleagues and that it was possible to develop and sustain this feeling. We supported one another through thick and thin, through laughter and tears. Most of us went on to work in the community, where we continued to enjoy productive, and in many instances, collaborative relationships. Many of these people have remained my dearest friends to this day.

What have you done that you are the most proud of?

I am most proud of taking control of my life at age 40 and making the decision to strike out on my own, go back to school and follow my dreams. I moved from Hawaii to Reno, luckily found a teaching job with the school district, and enrolled at Nevada to pursue my master’s degree in counseling. I worked some nights at La Piñata to help pay my tuition, and went to school on other nights. I loved what I was doing so much that I continued working days, going to school nights, and finally finishing in 1987 with my doctorate. Everything eventually came together for me, but not without some sacrifice and hard work.

What advice would you give someone just starting out after college?

Don’t expect to start at the top. Be patient, figure out what you have to do to get where you want to go, and keep your goals in sight. Don’t give up! But also, don’t be afraid to switch directions if you feel that you are in the wrong place. Never allow yourself to think that you are “too old” to pursue your dreams.

I remember saying to (former College of Education dean) Dr. Frank Meyers, who was interviewing me for admission into the counseling program: “It’ll take me four years to become a school psychologist?” He replied, “What will you be doing in four years if you don’t enter the program?” I have never forgotten that!

Lois Merritt Mikawa ‘80M.Ed.,’87Ed.D.