You can tell by her email address “Lovefirst,” that Mrs. Rita Amos believes in love.

The 64-year-old newlywed is Southwest’s most senior graduate candidate for 2013. She married her first boyfriend from when she was 12-years-old on September 17, 2011 (his birthday). The couple has known each other for 52 years, having met in 1961. They ran away at the age of 13 with plans to get married in Tijuana, Mexico, until their plans were foiled and they went their separate ways.

Fate reunited them in 2008, and they’ve been inseparable ever since.

“He’s my soul mate,” she gushes. “He is a real man. Somebody I can trust and look up to and respect. We are actually friends – we like each other. That’s what I want young ladies to know. [Love] has made all of the difference. It’s been a dream come true.”

Rita started at Southwest in the spring of 2009, having briefly attended the campus in the late 70s, but was unable to finish. She credits her husband for giving her “an extra push” to go back to school. She is part of the TRIO Scholars program and is a member of the student honor society Phi Beta Kappa.

The mother of five adult children: Adrienne, 48, Shelli, 47, Curtis, 46, Raymond, 45 and Erica, 41 is receiving an Associate of Arts degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. Rita also has 14 grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and is a transplant from Evanston, IL since 1960. She grew up in various places around Los Angeles, including Colden Avenue and Figueroa Street, and received her GED from Inglewood Adult School in 1979.

Since her return, Rita has received a lot of love from Southwest’s faculty.

“Seeing all of the very intelligent, educated, strong black women on campus – the professors with the PhDs specifically – really encouraged me and showed me what was possible. There are so many people [at Southwest] who helped me: Dr. Howard, Dr. Alfred, Dr. Wright, Professor Turner-Odon, Dr. Jenks. Dr. Jenks is like my perfect teacher. She sets high standards, but she helps you get there. She’s consistent. She’s organized. They’ve all been so awesome to me,” she said. (cont.)
Rita is transferring to California State University, Dominguez Hills to pursue an Anthropology degree. She plans to explore ways to address the needs of the youth and young women through Anthropology and African Studies to benefit the community.

Rita loves her experience at Southwest.

“I’ve gotten a lot from being here [Southwest]. I suffer from major depression, and was in therapy. My husband, who was my first boyfriend when I was 12, came into my life in 2008. I look at therapy, coming back to school and the relationship with my husband as being a positive perfect storm because everything I needed came together for me, and I feel that going here [Southwest], gave me my voice. Now, I have the words to express myself. It [Southwest] gave me courage to stand up for myself. It’s just been a total life changing experience for me.”

On recalling her proudest moments, Rita says:

“I’m most proud of my children. I have learned so much from them. They have taught me so much about relationships, about love and patience, about acceptance.”

And to her husband Lionel Amos she says: “Thank you for giving me the support and courage to pursue my dream. I’ve wanted to go to school for so many years, but I never finished. You gave me the courage and support to finish and to keep going.”