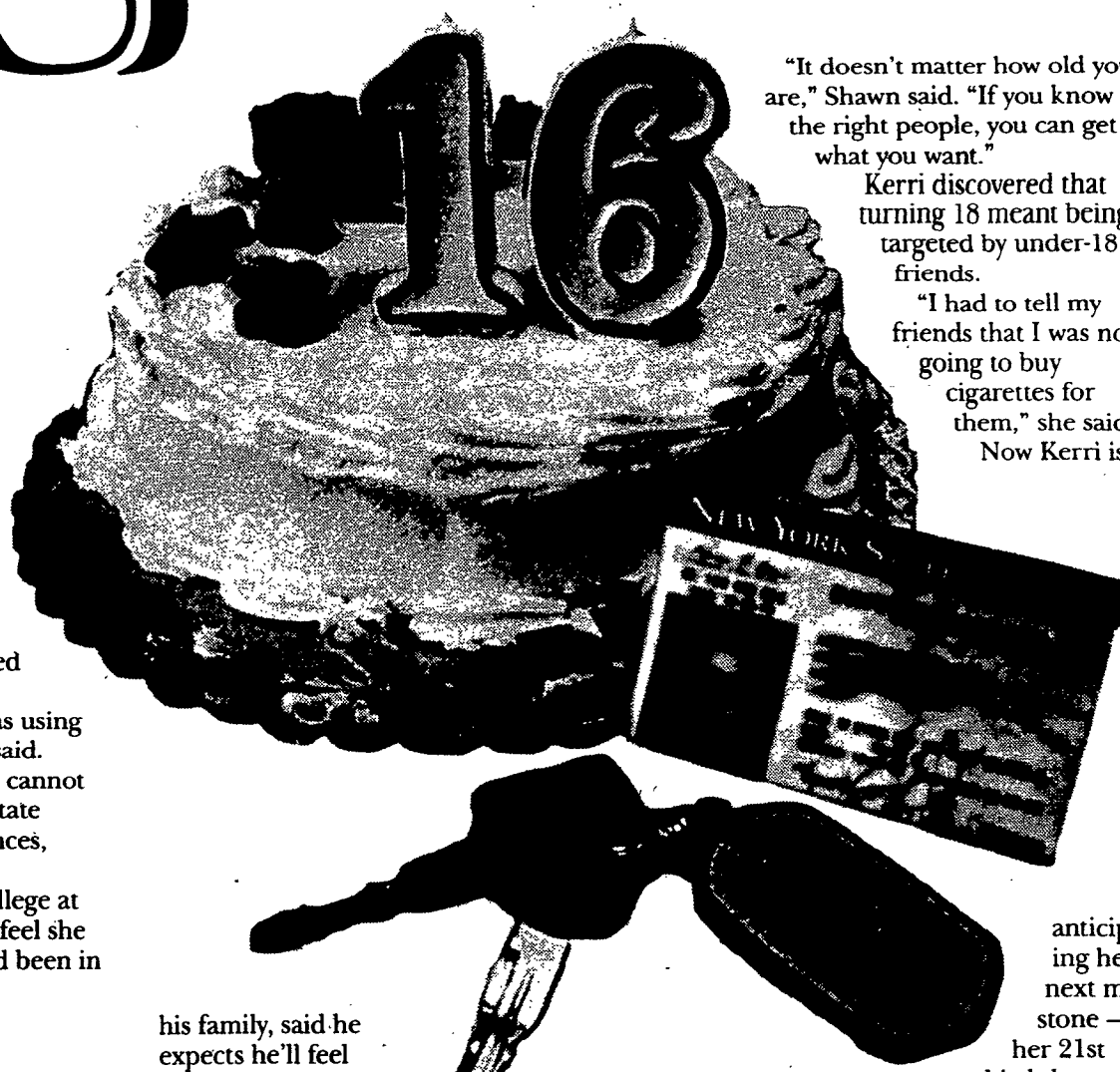


# Dining of age

Story by Mike Latona

Photo illustrations  
by Matthew Scott



"It doesn't matter how old you are," Shawn said. "If you know the right people, you can get what you want."

Kerri discovered that turning 18 meant being targeted by under-18 friends.

"I had to tell my friends that I was not going to buy cigarettes for them," she said. Now Kerri is

a car? I mean you're what — only a sophomore? That's young," Shannon remarked.

On the other hand, Shawn said he thinks more responsibly now that he's begun to drive.

"You have to watch out for everybody around you or with you, not only yourself," Shawn said. "I'm starting to feel more mature."

Ben likewise felt more mature when he exercised his right to vote last year. He believes that the minimum voting age of 18 is reasonable, saying that he didn't have a sufficient grasp of politics earlier in life.

"I don't think that before 18, you're interested in it that much," Ben said. "Once you start getting older, in the working world and the 'real world,' you start to become more aware of things."

Kerri ventured that adulthood may depend more on one's maturity level, rather than age. For example, she turned 18 three months

before her high-school graduation but didn't feel as if she was immediately transformed into an adult at that point.

"The only extra freedom I was using was that I drove after 9," Kerri said. Licensed drivers ages 16 and 17 cannot drive after 9 p.m. in New York state except under special circumstances, such as traveling from work.

Kerri, who attends SUNY College at Geneseo, added that she didn't feel she had entered adulthood "until I'd been in college a semester."

Ben, who still lives with

his family, said he expects he'll feel more like an adult "when I start paying for the college bills — when I start taking more responsibility for myself." "It depends on your personality and how responsible you are," Shawn added.

At the same time, Shawn realizes that lawmakers cannot be this flexible when defining age limits. "You can't individualize. There's too many people," he said.

Even after age limits are established, Shannon pointed out some restrictions are difficult to enforce.

"Kids are so determined; they like the challenge. They're going to go out and do what they want to do," she said.

When she visited a college town in downstate New York, for instance, Shannon said that underage people "got into the bars, no problem."

"They just become regulars; the owners become acquainted with them," Shannon said. She added that underage patrons were permitted to purchase alcohol with "no questions asked."

anticipating her next milestone — her 21st birthday next

March. Although she said she has never been in a bar, she is looking forward to the experience.

"I can't wait until I'm 21. It gives you more options of things to do," said Kerri, explaining that she is more eager to expand her social network than to drink alcohol legally.

Interestingly, Shannon has observed among older friends and family members that the desire to hang out at bars seemingly decreases once you become "legal."

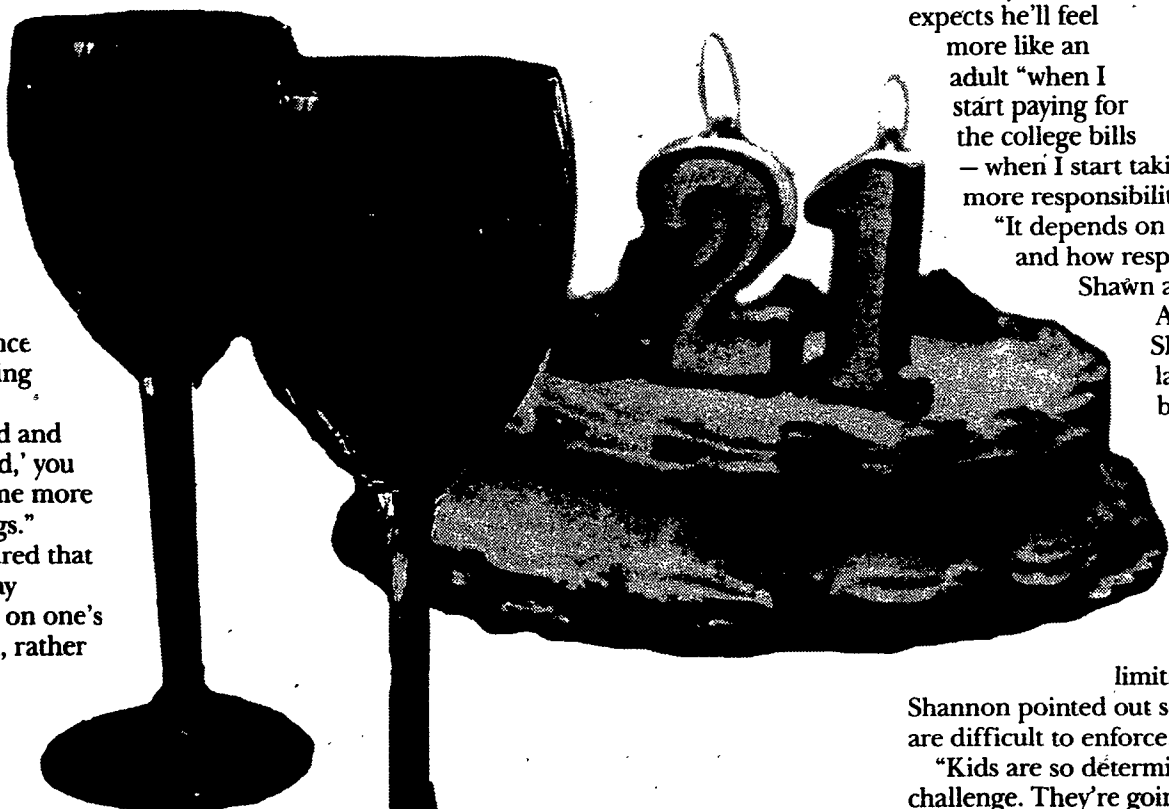
"After you turn 21, it takes the fun out of it," she commented.

Although Shannon will reach that milestone on March 17, 1998, she doesn't plan to observe her 21st birthday by hitting every St. Patrick's Day celebration in town.

"It doesn't mean you go out and get trashed. Some people think that's what you're supposed to do," she said.

Drinking, Kerri remarked, "is not something that 18-year-olds should be doing right away — and it's not something 21-year-olds need to be doing, either."

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