Last October during Alumni and Reunion weekend, Temple Grandin ’70 accepted the Leader of Conscience Award for her work in the humane treatment of animals. Grandin is one of the country’s leading experts on animal behavior and an advocate for the Autism movement.

She reminisced on what Franklin Pierce was like back then. “I remember Mr. Dion, the math teacher. He really helped me. I had lots of problems with math and I would come up to Mr. Dion’s office after class and he would do the whole lecture over again with me. I am really, really grateful to Mr. Dion for that. You know, I had some good teachers here.”

After earning her B.A. in Psychology at Franklin Pierce, Grandin went on to a big university, Arizona State. “I saw 500 students in freshman English,” said Grandin. “I thought “I’m glad I wasn’t in that.” My English class here had 20 students and one thing I’ve learned is that when you go to a small school you get a really good education.” Grandin went on to get her Ph.D. in Animal Science at the University of Illinois.

Grandin has the amazing ability of tuning into what animals are feeling and developing ways to help them relax. She credits this to being a visual thinker. “Animals don’t think in language,” said Grandin. “They’re sensory-based thinkers. They store information in their brains as pictures, sounds, smell and touch sensations. You’ve got to get away from language if you want to understand animals.”

She talks about this in her book, Animals and Translation (2005). In her latest book, Animals Make Us Human (2009), she talks about the core emotional systems in animal and human brains. “We all feel fear, anger, panic and separation anxiety,” said Grandin.

Grandin shared a vivid memory of her time here at Franklin Pierce when her friend, Henry Ellis ’69, helped pull together a Janis Joplin concert. “We had Janice Joplin here and 3,000 people jammed into the field house,” said Grandin. “I had to ask him, Henry, now, you’re old, I’m old, you got to fess up and tell me how you actually managed to pull that one off.”

Grandin lives in Fort Collins, Colorado where she is a faculty member at Colorado State University teaching a livestock handling class. She is the subject of a semi-autobiographical HBO movie that will air this spring.