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After the Aisle: Message on a Notecard

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Mark Allen '90 first spotted Susan Crowell '91 during her freshman year at Furman, and after learning that Crowell worked part time at the university bookstore, he spent a lot of time perusing the shelves. But Allen never bought a book, and he never got the nerve to introduce himself to Crowell.

Instead, he took to pen and paper, writing Crowell secret admirer notes and leaving them in her school mailbox.

"I thought they were a joke," recalls Crowell. "I thought some girls on my hall wrote them, so I just tossed them in the trash and didn't think twice about them."

"I kept waiting for her to realize they were from me and instantly fall in love with me," laughs Allen. "That didn't happen."

Eventually, a friend set up the couple for Homecoming. And they finally had a conversation.

"It was so easy," says Crowell. "We just talked and talked late into the night."

The relationship grew, Allen graduated, and he began to pursue a career in business. Crowell, on the other hand, found her path pointing toward the church, a decision influenced by her work with Collegiate Educational Service Corps—now Heller Service Corps—as well as an internship with a hospice program.

"And," Allen says, "that's when we hit our first real-world snag. I didn't go to church at all growing up; I had no idea what life in the church was like."

"And," Crowell remembers, "I thought to myself, 'If I can't convert my husband, then there's no way I can



Message on a Notecard

*Mark Allen '90 and Susan Crowell '91
stay grounded in their written words.*

By Lindsay Niedringhaus '07

ever convert anyone!' It was a definite time of pause in our relationship."

But instead of sending mail-order Bibles to Allen, who at the time was in business school at the University of South Carolina, Crowell gave him space.

"To me, it was simple. If he couldn't love God, then I couldn't love him," explains Crowell.

For Allen, it was simple, too. He didn't want to lose Crowell. So, if that meant serving as a pastor's husband, he'd jump right in. They were married July 30, 1994. Soon

after, Crowell accepted a position as the associate pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church in downtown Greenville.

"I was pleasantly surprised, actually, at how much I ended up enjoying serving as a pastor's husband," says Allen. "I'd never experienced that sort of church community."

Allen did, however, like to remind Crowell of what a dedicated new church member he was. So, he returned to pen and paper, beginning what is now a Christmas gift tradition: He writes out an index card listing the number of times Allen attended worship,

number of volunteer hours he spent at the church, and any other "good churchly duties" he'd completed that year.

"It was half-joke, half-reminder to Susan that I was completely in support of her ... just in case she ever forgot!" he laughs.

But Crowell would never forget, because soon after, Allen committed to another big change for their family. He would quit his job in the restaurant business and be a stay-at-home father for their new daughter, Elizabeth, who now attends Furman.

There were adjustments for Crowell as well: "I would come home from work and think that the house would be clean and dinner would be on the table. Instead, the dining room would be full of every type of soft thing we owned in our house—pillows, bedspreads, blankets—and Mark and Elizabeth would be jumping on pillow mountains. I would think, 'What the heck?' But then Elizabeth would say, 'I had the best day ever with Daddy,' and it would confirm every decision we made about Mark staying at home."

Family time, to the Allens, is dinner around the table, weekends in the mountains and trips to Furman to watch their daughter in the marching band. It's a check-in of the soul ... many times, not complete without putting pen to paper.

"On my 40th birthday, Elizabeth and Mark gave me a list of '40 Reasons Why We Love You.' It was the best gift ever," says Crowell. "This is us, and we love it this way. We've built a really beautiful life together—a sanctuary of our own." ●