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The Boys of '83

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The Boys of '83

Twenty-two years after their first day on campus, 18 years after graduation and 13 years after they began an annual summer reunion, six men from Furman's Class of 1983 maintain a tight, ongoing bond forged during their college days and strengthened through the passage of time.

"The boys," as the fast friends often refer to themselves, are J.R. Goodwin, Bill Holt, Malcolm McComb, Kent Simmons, Steve Smith and Will Yowell. While they're far from the only alumni group that holds an annual reunion, their story is a shining example of how the Furman experience can have an impact that extends far beyond one's four years on campus.

Four of them lived on Poteat 300 their first year, and the full group came together when all six pledged The Knights Eternal (TKE) as freshmen. As "fraternity" brothers they nurtured their relationships, but Malcolm points to their senior year as the foundation for their ongoing friendships.

In those days, most seniors lived off campus in nearby apartments. Steve, Will, Kent and Malcolm lived together in Woodwinds 86 — a number that Malcolm says is "permanently etched" in his mind. "The relationships really began to gel during that year and during a trip that immediately followed our graduation," he says. "The trip really cemented things."

After graduation, five of the six headed to Smith Mountain Lake in Virginia. This wasn't a grand blowout before they entered the real world; instead, they enjoyed a mellow outing, which was not typical of the TKEs of their era (or of today). They read, cooked, water-skied and talked.

Little did they know that a few years later, a health crisis would serve as the catalyst for them to re-ignite their commitment to each other.

In early 1988, Malcolm, at 26, was diagnosed with cancer — just 10 months after his marriage to Lee. He began six months of chemotherapy in Atlanta in February 1988. On hand to provide support during his first treatment were Kent, Steve and his wife (Shelly Brown '83) and Will and his wife (Kim Godshall '84).

When the treatments ended successfully, Malcolm decided to celebrate by re-creating



A recent gathering of "the boys" and their wives. Kneeling: J.R. and Tommi Goodwin. Back row, from left: Malcolm and Lee McComb; Will and Kim Godshall Yowell; Steve and Shelly Brown Smith; Bill and Tamara Holt; Kent Simmons, whose wife Laura Brown Simmons missed the reunion but vowed to be on hand for the next one.

the magic of Smith Mountain Lake. Much as he had during the post-graduation trip five years before, he was seeing life from a new perspective. This time, though, he also had a greater appreciation for the people who were important to him.

So it was that in August of 1988 the boys, four of whom were now married, gathered with their wives at Georgia's Lake Burton. The group had so much fun that they quickly decided to make the outing an annual affair.

They haven't missed a summer since. All are now married and have produced a combined total of 14 children. Matthew Smith, born in 1988, is the oldest; 2-year-old Luke Simmons, son of Kent and Laura Brown '84, is the newest addition.

But the group made a rule early on: these would be adults-only outings. Says Malcolm, "We didn't want our time together to be all about babysitting instead of reconnecting."

The couples take turns planning each year's trip. When they reach their destination, husbands and wives initially go their separate ways, with the boys usually engaging in some physical activity and the women, in Malcolm's words, "talking and sharing everything that has occurred during the last year."

The boys have maintained a penchant for good-natured competition, but one such activity actually led to a hospital visit. During a hotly contested basketball game, J.R., the group's only physician, stepped on a nail. Trying to keep his composure and to remember

his medical training, he yelled, "Don't pull it out!" — just as Malcolm dutifully jerked the nail out of his foot. Despite the mishap, the two remain blood brothers.

The group also has its serious moments. One memorable evening, Tamara Holt posed the question, "What are you struggling with?" This led to a discussion of coping with such issues as aging parents, prosperity vs. excessive materialism, and other concerns many young couples face.

Although nine of the 12 graduated from Furman, Lee McComb, who has degrees from Tennessee and Vanderbilt, says the Furman graduates don't spend a lot of time recalling their college days. "We live in the present and talk about the present," she says, which makes the trip just as meaningful for the non-Furman wives (Lee, Tamara Holt and Tommi Goodwin). The gatherings, Lee says, are "like going to camp with the same people each year — and it's worth the effort." She even admits that she would love for her children to attend Furman.

Today two of the group's offspring, Clare Holt and Morgan Smith, sit side-by-side in the same fifth-grade class in Charlotte, N.C. Maybe they're already anticipating their first day at Furman in 2009, 30 years after their dads arrived.

When they say good-bye to their moms and "the boys," I anticipate many tears.

— **Wayne King**
Associate Director, Furman Fund

and **Ashley Rayl '01 Bright**, a son, James Monroe IV, June 7. Ashley teaches fourth grade at Bethel Elementary School in Greenville.

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Next reunion in 2006

Amy Adkisson lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., and is a graduate student in art therapy at the Pratt

Institute. ■ **Veronica Colvard** lives in Macon, Ga., where she is a first-year student at the Mercer University School of Law. ■ **Meg Flannagan** is employed by the Presbyterian Church USA in Belfast, Northern Ireland, where she works with a church and faith-based community center. ■ **Lori Helms** works in the human

resources department of Westvaco, a paper mill in Charleston, S.C. ■ **Chad Marsar**, a student at Dickinson College School of Law, spent the summer studying abroad. He participated in law study seminars in Florence, Rome and Sienna, focusing on international and comparative family law and comparative constitutional law.

■ **Bridgette Martin** is one of 13 students nationally to be awarded an Omicron Delta Kappa Foundation Scholarship for graduate study. ODK is a national leadership organization that recognizes student leadership of exceptional quality and versatility. Bridgette is using the award to support her work toward a doctorate in