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Paladin pride

Will Thompson '74

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Furman philanthropy

Paladin pride

Confessions of an unrepentant Furman cheerleader

Back in the early 1970s, I was a Furman cheerleader for three years (I was in England in the fall of 1973, so I wasn't able to be on the squad my senior year). And although I graduated and went on with my life, I have a confession to make: I never retired as a Furman cheerleader!

Since no one told me to turn in my megaphone at Commencement, I assumed that my role as a cheerleader was a life position. Now, 30 years later, my handstands may be a little rusty, but my enthusiasm for my alma mater has only grown stronger.

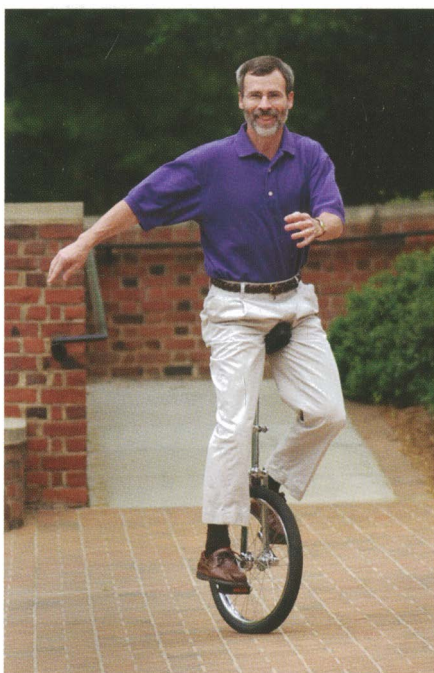
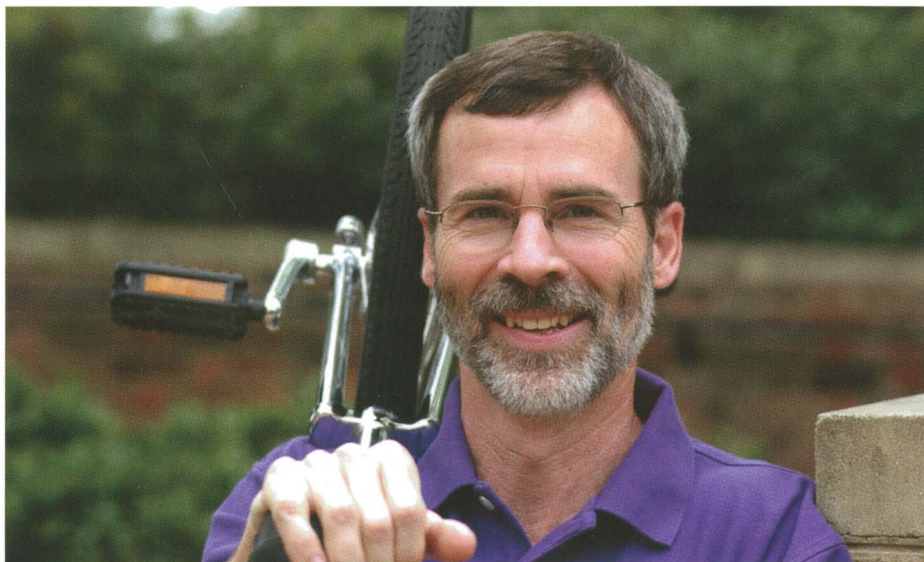
I started out as a "normal" alum, attending Class of '74 reunions every five years. It was great to stay in touch with old friends and share with each other how our lives had unfolded.

I would come home from those reunions feeling blessed and amazed — and believing, as I suppose most people believe about their classes, that the Class of '74 is the greatest ever assembled at Furman, or anywhere else. And as the years have passed, it has been impressive to see how gifted and dedicated my classmates are — some in very quiet ways, others in very visible ways. Some who helped me throw friends in the lake on their birthdays and fill up the fountains with bubble bath at midnight have even gone on to become productive members of society as doctors, teachers and healers.

For the past five years I have been a class agent, which means that I am one of those who calls my classmates every year to ask them to pledge money to Furman. It has become an annual ritual for me to catch up with friends and acquaintances, and the pledging is almost an afterthought. I would never have imagined that I would still have ongoing contact with my college friends after 30 years!

Then, last year, Wayne King, director of annual giving at Furman, asked me to serve on the Annual Giving Council and represent the perspectives of alumni from the decade of the '70s. My immediate thought was, "I wouldn't be caught dead on such a boring committee!" But upon further thought, I decided that because Furman had given so much to me, agreeing to serve was the least I could do.

I attended our first meeting last fall, expecting to meet some pretty boring and drab people who had nothing better to do than sit around and talk about money,



Thirty years after entertaining fans at Paladin games with his unicycling skills, Will Thompson shows he hasn't lost his touch.

strategic plans and fund raising. Instead, I was amazed to find a group of staff, alumni and trustees who were just as enthusiastic as I was in their love of Furman. Their hopes and dreams for the university filled me with awe and gratitude — whether the

focus was on new graduates who make a \$10 pledge or on those who, as members of the Richard Furman Society, donate \$10,000 or more each year.

I used to think that fund raising was a "necessary evil," and I would run the other way when such matters were mentioned. But as we sat around that table on a Saturday morning, I heard stories, reports and presentations about programs and initiatives that quietly build and strengthen the university's financial base. I see now that, if it weren't for these ongoing efforts, Furman would not have the prominence and impact that it now enjoys.

Furman's progress through the years hasn't happened through magic, but through the persistent efforts of ordinary folks who believe in the power of education and the fundamental importance of growth and learning. I am proud to be a part of the Furman family, and I will continue to use my megaphone with gusto!

— Will Thompson '74

The author lives in Greenville with his wife, Nicki Pisacano '76 Thompson, and her two children, T.J. and Anna Marie. He is the interim priest at St. Michael's Episcopal Church and operates his own business as "Coach Will," in which he works with businesses and individuals on the value and "transformative power of play and possibility." See his Web site, www.coachwill.com.