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## Silently they share the music of love

Lyn Riddle

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at Chapel Hill High School and is pursuing his master's degree in counseling. Dana is a grant manager in the medical school at Duke University and is studying for an MBA through East Carolina University.

**Jennifer Watson and Carter Barfield** '07, June 26. Carter is a graduate assistant football coach at the University of Kentucky, and Jenny is an elementary school teacher. They live in Lexington.

## 09

**Matt DeLaney** graduated from the Simon School of Business at the University of Rochester in June with a Master of Science degree in finance.

**Patrick Morgan**, a graduate student at Appalachian State University and former middle-distance runner at Furman, won the Bluegrass 10K race held July 3 in Lexington, Ky.

**MARRIAGES:** **Claire Carlton** and Patrick Gibson, June 10. They live in Nashville, Tenn., where Claire works with Teach for America.

**Kristen Confer and Joseph Tenini**, May 22. They are graduate students at the University of Georgia in Athens, Kristen in the Master of Social Work program and Joe in the mathematics Ph.D. program.

**Arthur Wesley Holtzclaw and Deborah Roos**, August 7. They live in Charlottesville, Va.

**Alexander Pinson and Ellen Lightsey** '08, June 26. Ellen has completed a master's degree in international relations and religion at Boston University, where she received the prize for excellence in international relations. Alexander enrolled this fall at the Charleston (S.C.) School of Law.

## SILENTLY THEY SHARE THE MUSIC OF LOVE

### PRISCILLA SOFEY HARRIS IS A MUSICIAN.

She sings. She plays the clarinet. She directs the choir for 5-year-olds at First Baptist Church of Greenville, where she also coordinates the children's choir programs.

Music was one of her majors at Furman, from which she graduated in 1992.

Clearly, music has shaped her life, perhaps as profoundly as the fact that both of her parents are deaf. Her mother was born deaf, and her father lost his hearing at eight months during a bout with spinal meningitis and a 105-degree fever.

They've never been able to hear their daughter sing or play. And yet Billy and Suzanne Sofey always attended her performances.

"I try not to think too much about them not being able to hear me," Harris says. "They've always been so supportive."

Harris started playing the piano when she was in the first grade. She came home one day and there it was in the living room, a gift from her grandmother, a Cable upright, the same one Harris plays now.

When Harris practiced, her mother would stand beside her and rest her hand on the top to feel the vibration. "I get my musical ability from my mother," she says. "People think that's strange."

But her mother was a majorette at the Mississippi School for the Deaf, where her parents met, and can dance better than half of the hearing people Harris knows.

"She signs music beautifully," Harris says.



Her mother signed "The Lord's Prayer" at Harris' wedding, and through the sunroof of the church came a beam of light that fell right on her. "It was like God was sending sunrays to light her up like an angel," Harris says.

Her mother hadn't known whether she could do it on such an emotional day. But there she was, once again sharing music with her daughter.

Harris' father had a surprise of his own during the wedding festivities. At the rehearsal dinner, he played a tape of his daughter as a small child singing "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."

"I didn't remember my dad had this," she says. "The fact he wanted to record me as a child and he couldn't even hear it was amazing to me."

She considers having deaf parents a blessing. They showed her people can overcome anything if they work at it. Once a fellow student expressed

surprise that Harris was not embarrassed by her parents, and Harris' grandmother said, "It's all in the way you perceive it."

Harris thought she wanted to teach, but not music — math, her other major at Furman. She taught for three years before realizing it wasn't right for her.

She and her husband, John Harris '91, a Furman math professor, have a daughter, Sophie, and a son, Will. She taught both children to sign as babies, long before they could talk. Will could sign 60 words on his first birthday.

"The brain is ready to communicate, but the vocal chords are not," she says.

Over time, Harris began serving as an interpreter for various organizations, Furman students, and patients in the Greenville Hospital System. Sometimes she signs for PTA meetings or parent conferences with the Greenville County Schools. "I feel good when I'm doing it, to give back and help people," she says. "Deaf people don't take that for granted."

And Harris doesn't take for granted the undying support her parents have offered her through the years. She holds onto something her mother is fond of saying: "One day when I'm in heaven, I'll be able to hear you."

— LYN RIDDLE

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