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Hair got shorter. Skirts got longer.

Jim Stewart
Furman University

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Hair got shorter. Skirts got longer.

Send us your six-word memoirs!

In November of 2006 the editors of *SMITH* Magazine, an on-line publication devoted to “story-telling, with a focus on personal narrative,” came up with an inspired idea: have readers submit six-word memoirs.

In essence, they challenged their readers to pen their life stories in text-message format. Communication, minimalist style; modern American haiku. After all, they reasoned, brevity in writing is a good thing, isn't it? And let's face it — attention spans ain't what they used to be.

So the *SMITH* braintrust threw the idea out there, asking readers to be insightful, pithy, direct and biographical. All in six words. No more, no less.

The memoirs poured in — as many as 500 a day — from the famous (Joan Rivers, Stephen Colbert) and the obscure. Many were poignant: “I still make coffee for two.” “Wife died young; on the mend.” Others were suggestive: “Catholic school backfired. Sin is in!” Some had a celebratory bent: “Brought it to a boil, often.” Others were political: “Liberal at 18. Conservative by 40.” Plenty of light-hearted ones: “God, grant me patience. Right now.” “The psychic said I'd be richer.” And then you had the pragmatically philosophical: “Worse fates have befallen better men.”

SMITH received so many memoirs that the editors decided to share their riches with a broader audience. In September 2007 they published a book of their favorites, using one of them as the title: *Not Quite What I Was Planning*.

Big hit. Big sales. Sequels forthcoming.

I was given a copy of the book earlier this year. I devoured it in 30 minutes. (220 pages. Six words. Easy read.)

And then I started to wonder. Would this work in *Furman* magazine? Would alumni be willing to submit six-word memoirs about their college experiences?

Try it yourself first, I thought. Delve into those ancient memory banks. (So long ago. Seems like yesterday.)

Inspiration did not strike right away. But after jotting down various ideas and word combinations, I hit on one I considered decent: “Hair got shorter. Skirts got longer.” Then, remembering spring term sophomore year: “Wish I'd gone bowling more often.”

Wait — wasn't it all about education? After a while, I came up with “Thank goodness for Individualized Curriculum Program.”

Well, maybe not so great. The exercise was definitely fun, though. And each memoir captures something that “stuck” with me through the years.

But would the idea appeal to alumni and work as a magazine piece? This spring we tested it on the Young Alumni Council and Alumni Board — and received two supportive thumbs-up. Go for it, they said enthusiastically.

So we decided to extend the offer to alumni everywhere. Send your six-word Furman memoirs to jim.stewart@furman.edu or alumni@furman.edu, or to Jim Stewart, Marketing and Public Relations, Furman University, Greenville, S.C. 29613.

The guidelines are simple and few.

Keep it clean. Hyphenated words may count as one or two, as needed. Include your name and class year; you must stand by your memoir. Don't libel anyone, get personal or try to avenge a perceived slight. Rather than saying “All A's except for Dr. Blowhard,” go with “All A's except for English 11.” You'll make your point.

The plan, assuming the response is good, will be to publish selected submissions in a future issue — maybe in two. We'll also post them on the magazine Web page at www.furman.edu/fumag.

We hope you'll enjoy doing this — and we look forward to including your memoirs in the magazine. For inspiration, or just for fun, visit www.smithmag.net and scroll through their ever growing list of six-word projects.

— JIM STEWART '76, Editor