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Lessons learned

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Lessons learned



I enjoyed four wonderful years at that place called my alma mater. The time was full of learning and exploring, full of inquisitions that began and are still ongoing.

Furman taught me much, but a few things stand out:

■ I learned to accept others for who they are and to appreciate them as uniquely created individuals equal in stature to myself. Over time I have learned that you can either join yourself to those who are only like you — and preclude any interaction with diversity by setting yourself off on a proverbial island — or you can choose to open your mind and genuinely become heterogeneous in your thinking and interaction with others.

This was especially difficult for me; I resisted letting go of the notion that accepting other people for who they were meant that I had to accept their actions or views and beliefs as my own. But Furman taught me that respecting others and appreciating the uniqueness of created people does not necessitate the forgery of my own thoughts and feelings.

■ Furman taught me how to ask questions I had never asked before. I learned to think outside of the box, to stretch my mind — and to tolerate caffeine. I learned that life is not a series of “yes” and “no” or “true” and “false” answers. I learned that it is all right not to know the answer to the question I asked, or was asked by another. At Furman, you learn how to learn, to dig deeper for the real answer that may, at times, only lie within.

■ Furman taught me that change is good. I am not the same person today who entered Blackwell Hall as a rowdy freshman. My

personality, religious beliefs, social practices and tastes have been altered. I understand that I am free to be who I want to be. I can grow, change and mature at my own pace and to the beat of my own drummer. I can think what I wish, not fearing what conventional norms may dictate.

Furman provided a family-like atmosphere, for which I am forever thankful. From Mrs. Dodson in the infirmary, to James the maintenance man, to chaplains Jim Pitts and Vic Greene — all of them truly cared about me as a person first, then as a student.

I am filled with pride every time I visit the Furman Web site and each time I see a picture of a familiar face. In fact, I still remember the difficult time that I had at Commencement as I sang the alma mater, with tears streaming, feeling as if a dream had come and gone. It grieved me to leave.

The diploma that hangs before me reminds me of a place in my heart, one that time still holds dear, and one that I will never forget. There is a secret garden in my life, and it is called Furman.

— Jeffrey D. Wadley '99

The writer is an account executive with Lexmark International Group in Kenmore, Wash. This is an excerpt from a letter he sent to President Shi. He can be reached through e-mail at jwadley@lexmark.com.