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A Winding Love Story

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LaTisha Mitchell '12 was lugging her belongings into Judson Hall before the start of her first year just as Sterling Johnson '11 and his friends were leaving. When the men didn't stop to assist, LaTisha's mother, who was helping her daughter move in, was quick to voice her displeasure.

"My mom is very outspoken. She saw these big guys walking out of the dorm. She expected them to stop and help," LaTisha says. "When she said something, I was really embarrassed."

When LaTisha and Sterling saw each other again later that day, Sterling explained why they had not stopped to help the women. They were members of the Paladins football team on their way to practice. And they couldn't be late.

"Although we're gentlemen and wanted to stop, we knew we couldn't. We would have been late, and football coaches don't appreciate that," says Sterling, who majored in sociology.

That move-in day encounter was their first meeting as Furman students. But their very first meeting had occurred during a Furman Diversity Connection event LaTisha had attended as a prospective student. Sterling was there as a Furman student to speak about what it was like to be a Paladin.

After his move-in day apology, Sterling and LaTisha, who created her own major in youth development, continued to say hello.

"She was really shy," he says. "I thought she didn't like me."

The pair spent more time with each other and began dating. But the relationship was off and on. Both moved



A WINDING LOVE STORY



LaTisha Mitchell-Johnson '12 and Sterling Johnson '11

BY CINDY LANDRUM

to Atlanta after graduation. Sterling earned a master's in public administration with a concentration in planning and economic development from Georgia State University's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies. LaTisha earned a master's in higher education leadership from Mercer University and then worked in Atlanta before moving to

take a job at the University of San Francisco.

They would see each other again at Sterling's sister's wedding.

"My sister and LaTisha were close, and my sister wanted to invite LaTisha to her wedding," Sterling says. "LaTisha and I had been off and on, and I felt like that time had come and gone. I was trying to be accom-

modating to my sister. It was her day, and I told her whoever she wanted to invite, I was OK with that."

At the wedding, LaTisha and Sterling rekindled the relationship.

They were engaged on the day after his birthday in November 2017. LaTisha had planned a birthday gathering, and Sterling's friends and former teammates were coming into town to celebrate.

Sterling, however, was secretly coordinating the proposal with her family. He hired a photographer to capture it, telling her they would take couples photos.

Three days after they got engaged, LaTisha got a job offer in Atlanta. They married in December of 2018.

Sterling is the Just Opportunity Program Manager for the Partnership for Southern Equity; LaTisha serves as the assistant director of external relations at Georgia State University, Honors College.

Working as a Saturday college tutor and a summer counselor for Furman's Bridges to a Brighter Future influenced her career choice. Bridges is an educational outreach program designed to help students overcome barriers, graduate from high school and enroll in college.

"Working for the Bridges program allowed me to discover where I wanted to be in life," she says.

Sterling says Furman also played a crucial role in his life. "For me, Furman was the place where I experienced a lot of growth. It was a place of challenge. But ultimately, those challenges helped create a better me." ♦