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## Finding love at Liberty

February 01, 2009 | Teresa Dunham

Most students earn a B.A. at Liberty University, but a few end up pursuing their “Mr.” or “Mrs.” as well. This issue of “Liberty Journal” features Christian couples brought together on Liberty Mountain.

At the helm of the university is alumni couple Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. ('84) and his wife, Becki, who attended LU the year after Jerry Jr. graduated. They met when Becki was only 13 and officially started dating the summer before she came to LU. Some alumni recall a speech class in which Becki revealed her life's goal. “We were supposed to do a speech on our career, and so I came in and I took my shoes off, and I had a pillow under my shirt,” Becki said. She wanted to be a wife and mother.

### **FROZEN TREATS BRING COUPLE TOGETHER**



Kristen and Dustin Rife

*What's in the middle of an Eskimo pie?* This question eventually led to marriage for LU alumni couple Dustin and Kristen Rife. LU played an important role in their love story.

Born in a small coal-mining town in Virginia, Dustin Rife left home for the first time at age 15 to attend Eagle Eyrie church camp in Lynchburg eight years ago. The number of campers rivaled the total residents of his hometown — and his country accent made him the target of jokes — so he compensated by putting gel in his hair to impress the girls.

One night, hundreds of campers gathered for a high-stakes game of “Who Wants to Be a Missionary?” The grand prize: a missions trip. Lucking into a question about cars, Dustin led his group to a crucial round of competition that required him to stand in front of everyone — and he started to panic under the bright stage lights. That’s when the game host posed his question to Dustin: “What’s in the middle of an Eskimo Pie?”

“I had never even heard of an Eskimo Pie,” he said recently.

Dustin sweated profusely as he answered, “Eskimo.” Astounded, the host asked Dustin if he was sure about his answer.

“Next thing I know, the whole place is in pandemonium. People are going crazy, hollering ‘hillbilly, redneck.’ They pretty much cancelled the night after that,” he said.

As he walked back to his cabin, Dustin passed other cabins where he could still hear people laughing at him for not knowing that ice cream is in the middle of an Eskimo Pie. One girl didn’t laugh though. She said: “I’m not going to make fun of you. I just wanted to tell you how good you did on the other questions, and I’m going to be praying for you this week. My name is Kristen.”

Dustin clung to Kristen's encouragement for the rest of that week. When it was time to leave, he thanked her again for her kindness and asked her to pray for him.

"She wrote me a letter, which I still have in my wallet to this day," he said.

Dustin wrote her some letters, too — and they kept writing until they saw each other at camp again the next year.

"I remember jokingly telling her the last day of camp, 'Who knows, maybe we'll end up married one day,'" he said.

Instead, they went their separate ways for two years. Dustin started attending a community college and dating another girl back home — but the Lord was calling him into the ministry. The day he finally surrendered to God's calling, he phoned Kristen to ask her about Liberty University. He knew she'd been studying psychology there for two years, and he thought it might be the right place for him, too.

She told him to come to LU's College For A Weekend, and he was hooked. He applied to LU, excited that he was pursuing a Christian woman, and started working on his degree in religion.

"When he got to Liberty, we saw each other for a few minutes and conversation was very short. It was hard to pick up from where we were at four years ago at camp," Kristen said, who believes the Lord was using that time to make Dustin focus on Christ first.

One September night in 2005, Dustin called Kristen and said they needed to talk. They met on the lawn in front of her dorm, and he started pulling out every letter she'd written him as ammunition. Kristen ran to her dorm and brought back all the letters he'd ever written her. One of the letters said he wished they could live on the same sidewalk — and now their dorms really were on the same sidewalk.

They immediately started dating and promised to remain pure until their wedding day on June 10, 2006. Now Dustin ('06) is a Resident Director for LU, and Kristen ('05) is an office administrator for the women's basketball team.

"It's neat to see how God has written our love story for us," Kristen said.