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Graduates recall fond memories of Liberty

June 01, 2009 ¦ Eric Brown

In his parting notes to the Class of 2009, Chancellor Jerry Falwell, Jr. said he was surprised by how many students were "second-generation Liberty students, children of Liberty alumni."

He spoke of meeting two seniors at the annual Senior Picnic at his farm who told him "they were honored to be a part of the Class of 2009 because of the historic transition that occurred during their tenure here."

One of those students, Adam Schwenk (top photo, left), is a 2009 graduate whose mother attended LU in the mid 1970s. Schwenk says the Class of 2009 is unique because students were able to spend their first two years under Dr. Jerry Falwell, Sr. and the latter two under Jerry Falwell, Jr.

"We have seen the transformation of Campus North and the transition into a campus that is no longer in debt and can pursue things like a great law school and school of engineering," he said.

Schwenk's friend Joseph Cline (top photo, right), a biblical studies major, remembers meeting Falwell, Sr. at Thomas Road Baptist Church late one afternoon. While posing for a picture together, the alumnus said he received a playful punch in the stomach from LU's founder.

As a former member of Liberty's club hockey team, Cline can also recount the days before the completion of LU's LaHaye Ice Center, when the team travelled to Roanoke to practice and play games. The graduate noted the many changes that have taken place since he first arrived.

"Everything is flourishing," he said. "Dr. Falwell always said, 'Don't quit,' and the school demonstrated that. "Now, you can see the fruit of his perseverance."



Nathan Scharoff

Nathan Scharoff, a 2009 history graduate and a friend of Schwenk and Cline's, told Falwell at the picnic how he personally heard Dr. Falwell's words of wisdom regarding perseverance a week and a half before his death. Scharoff — on a dare from fellow classmates — flagged down Dr. Falwell's GMC Denali on campus and asked for a ride. Upon hopping into the vehicle, they struck up a conversation, one that the student is not likely to forget.

Pointing to various buildings on campus, Falwell, Sr. said, "I look back now and I realize this school could not have been here without God. If you apply that principle to your life, you'll succeed."

"It was a memory I'll take with me for the rest of my life," Scharoff said. "He was the meekest man I had ever met."

Falwell, Jr. said the Class of 2009 ushered in a new era, but the teachings of LU's first generation — the years under Falwell, Sr.'s leadership — will live on.

"Many seniors have commented to me that they were greatly encouraged by my father's constant admonition to them to never quit," he stated. "We continue to stress the importance of perseverance, but nobody could preach the 'Don't quit' sermon quite like my father could because he lived his entire life according to that principle."