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Source of Pride

June 25, 2008 ¦ Tara Maxwell

A great sense of humor, unceasing patience and steadfast faith are essential tools to any great college Resident Assistant, and it's these same qualities that have aided Pastor Larry Covington in his life-long service to God.

In 1980 Covington became Liberty University's (then Liberty Baptist College) first African-American RA.

Covington, along with roommate Malcolm Myers, was in charge of the fourth floor, home to 80 male students at the Stewart Arms Hotel located on the corner of Eighth and Church streets in downtown Lynchburg, Va. (Liberty had dorms both on-campus and at the hotel until 1981 when the entire student body moved onto main campus.)

"It was a challenge being a peer as well as being over these guys, and it gave me an opportunity to use my counseling skills and of course pray with them," he said. "Some of them I've kept up with through the years."

Covington was born and raised in Danville, Va. He attended Danville Community College and planned to attend Virginia Union University in Richmond in 1979.

"It's one of those unique mysteries and miracles how I ended up at Liberty. I believe I saw Thomas Road on TV and I was interested in getting an education, but I wanted to make sure I did it in a Christian environment. One thing led to another and I landed in Lynchburg."

Covington, who graduated in 1981 with a B.A. in psychology, said he was able to build a solid foundation at Liberty University.

"It was probably two of the most exciting years of my life. It was a different culture. I found my learning experience was excellent. It was exciting being around Dr. Falwell. He was a man of tremendous courage, conviction, value and vision."

Covington said Falwell was thought of as a jokester by the students who knew him well.

“He kept you laughing and you never knew what he was going to do next.”

The youngest of five sons born to Johnny and Edna Covington, Larry was the first in his family to attend college.

“My mother was very supportive. I’m the only one in my family to go to college, and it was a moment of pride for her. She went through great sacrifice the first year and when I became an RA it eased up things financially.”

Covington, who said he always felt a calling to ministry, left Liberty after graduation as part of a church planting team in Tennessee where he founded a church in inner-city Nashville.

After leaving Tennessee, Covington became assistant pastor of a church in Corsicana, Texas, and then pastored in Bermuda at Emmanuel Baptist Church for nearly six years. From Emmanuel Baptist, Covington moved to Miami, Fla., before moving to Greensboro, N.C., and eventually settling in Burlington, N.C., as pastor of Ebenezer United Church of Christ in 1996.

“Getting into God’s word is key for me,” Covington said. “Then trying to minister holistically, help people with social problems as well as the Great Commission, has really kept me balanced and moving forward.”

After graduating from Liberty, Covington went on to receive a master’s in Theology from Jacksonville Baptist Theological Seminary and a D.Min. from East Carolina Christian College.

Covington currently lives in Graham, N.C., with his wife of 14 years, Caroline. The couple has two children, Joshua Covington of Duluth, Ga., and Jodi Covington Lewis of Jacksonville, Fla., and a 3-year-old granddaughter.

Covington tries to visit Liberty a few times a year to catch up with old friends and attend conferences. Liberty University’s Vice President of Student Affairs, Mark Hine, was Resident Director at the Stewart Arms when Covington was an acting RA. The two share fond memories of their experiences together.

“The hotel made a good situation for really building community,” Hine said. “ … The cafeteria was off the grand lobby and all our meals were there. It really was like a huge family.”

There were 10 RAs at the hotel, two per floor. The dorm rooms varied in size from two students per single room up to eight in double suites.

Hine, who had five freshman roommates his junior year, said he used to hang out in Covington’s room frequently.

“Malcolm and Larry made a great team. They really had the spiritual interest of their guys at heart. They encouraged them in every way — academically, socially, spiritually. They really were the whole package and a lot of fun. Larry was an excellent pick, an excellent leader.”