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Most Honorable Romance

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Most Honorable Romance
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There is a lot more happening in the Honors Program than just writing theses, winning at Quiz Bowl, and excelling in Honors seminars and petitioned classes. Meeting the love of one’s life seems to be a commonplace occurrence, except, there is nothing commonplace about falling in love and fulfilling God’s plan as a couple instead of two singles.

Our president is very fond of telling the story about Becki Tilley of Chapel Hill who came to Liberty University for her MRS degree, and now she is Mrs. Falwell.

Although we scholars in the Honors Program do hope that the main reason people enroll at Liberty is to earn an academic degree, it is an excellent place to find a spouse. After all, we are warned not to be unequally yoked, so being immersed in a sea of eligible bachelors and bachelorettes who are born-again Christians who have devoted their lives to serving Christ is a near-perfect place to find God’s helpmate.

It is really exciting to those of us who run the Honors Office to see how God uses situations that we create for academic purposes that result in romance, marriage, and then children. It’s like the cream cheese frosting on top of carrot cake.

Mrs. Kline (the Honors Office Manager) and I were sitting in McAlister’s (a new deli across from Logan’s), when a young woman came to my table and said those proverbial words, “Dr. Ayres, do you remember me?” She told me that she had taken a Victorian literature class from me many years ago when I gave extra credit for those who would attend a Celtic concert at my church. We were studying British religions as reflected in Victorian literature, and my early British literature class was also studying the Celts, so both classes were invited to come. At my church, New Generation (now defunct), Elizabeth met Nathan from my other class.

They have been married for eight years now, and she still calls him her “Extra Credit.”

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I would like to think that God has used me to help thousands of people through the years serve Him through their jobs and careers owing to their degrees, but to hear that He used me to bring together two people who would serve him better than one, and that they brought children into this world who would not exist (maybe—depending on your theology) if I had not extended my class beyond the classroom walls, it all makes me feel as if I had been part of special kinds of miracles.

Many years ago I started the Victorian Society, and Brandi Hatfield—a lovely and extremely talented and hard-working Honors student who was majoring
in History—became its student president. One event in which we were very engaged was the annual Civil War seminar, which I also helped to coordinate. At the time, Dan Marchant, another Honors student, was taking Honors British Literature II from me, and we had a special bond because he was from my home town, he graduated from my high school, his mom worked with my sister-in-law, and he worked for my family’s favorite homemade ice cream place. Dan was also a very talented violin player, so I asked him if he would play some of the Civil War tunes at our Civil War banquet, which he did. That’s where and when he met the woman who would change his life.

Their’s was an indescribably beautiful wedding at historic St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Forest, especially meaningful to me because of Brandi’s dad in his kilt and in the Hatfield tartan, for, they were the Kentucky Hatfields.

Brandi earned her Master’s in history at LU and became the curator for the Lynchburg Museum at the Old Court House. Dan works in Analytics and Decision Support at Liberty with the intentions of pursuing a degree in the Seminary. Imagine my delight when I received a post card announcing the birth of Patrick Daniel on August 6, 2015.

A couple who took the aisle this summer was Daniel & Laura Adams. Daniel was a computer science major, and they are living in Richmond.

Dr. Gadomski, who is also an assistant director in Honors has her own favorite story. She beams when she talks about Seth Lewis and Jessica Smelser who met in her Honors PSYC 210 class. They are now married, are missionaries in Ireland, and have three children.
Doug and Mack (as she liked to be called) were married in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania, before beginning their graduate programs at James Madison University in the Fall of 2015.

I distinctly remember Mack when she was “fresh off the boat” and in my Freshman Orientation class. She was so personable and confident as she walked forward to introduce herself to me, something hardly any student does. Then she came to the Freshman Honors Picnic and wanted to help me serve. When I think of Mack, I think “servant’s heart.” Whereas Dr. Nutter bonded with Doug with his work with the Quiz Bowl, I bonded with Mack. I will never forget the Honors convocation when she and her brother sang for us. Later Mack helped me edit The Kabod, the Honors journal. Multitalented, she was also very generous in sharing her gifts, and Dr. Nutter still brags on Doug’s performance in Quiz Bowl. In fact there is a plaque to Doug outside Dr. Nutter’s office.

Mack was a regular in the Honors lounge, and a group of them were always enthusiastically debating something. But it is Dr. Nutter who takes credit for their romance. He recalls, “Doug and Mack actually met in the Honors office, and I was there to witness it. Mack was a sophomore, and Doug was a brand new freshman sitting in there reading a book. Mack saw him, knew that he was a stranger, and introduced herself to him.”

And the rest, as they say, is history.

History was made again a few years ago with Honors students David Ortiz and Sarah Ashley. They were both biology majors and married between their junior and senior years. David is now an M.D., and Sarah Ashley is a stay-at-home mom.

Above, Left: Doug Stephens IV and Kathryn McCracken, 2014 Graduates
Above, Right: Dr. and Mrs. David Ortiz
Left: Mr. and Mrs. Doug Stephens IV on July 18, 2015
Another Honors couple is Matthew Henry and his wife Jessica. He was pre-med and she was a nursing major. Jessica and her mom sat in the back of our little Honors lounge in DeMoss and planned the wedding.

We will never forget Jonathan and Thea Davis. They were on the same racquet ball team at LU and are now pursing doctoral degrees—his is a Ph.D. in geography and hers is a nurse practitioner.

If you found your one true love while at Liberty as an Honors student, we would love to tell your story. Simply email bayres@liberty.edu, and attached pictures if you have some.

Stay tune—we suspect more than a fall breeze in the air here in Lynchburg, Virginia, and no doubt will have some brand new tales to tell, as well as some golden oldies.

Above: Dr. and Mrs. Matthew Henry
Below: Jonathan David and Thea Beaty were united on May 24, 2015 in Wisconsin