

Reflections of the Class of 1975

By Randy Wilcox

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times..." *A Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens

This, the beginning of Charles Dickens' novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, set in the year 1775, two hundred years prior to our auspicious graduation, as London and Paris were in the throes of economic and political turmoil that would soon lead to the American Revolution followed not long after by the French, perhaps strikes a tone vaguely familiar to some of us as we look back 35 years ago. We launched out on our own after graduation at a time of economic recession fueled by the oil embargo of 1973 - 1974 and political turmoil still simmering from Watergate and the collapse of our efforts in Vietnam--culminating with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975.

I would dare to say that many of us were much less political than our older brothers and sisters of the late 1960s. Yet, we couldn't quite escape the dread of the economic and political realities swirling around us. In the fall of 1971, with 2-S college deferments a thing of the past, most 18 year old freshmen males gathered in the college cafeteria around what I recall being something like a ticker tape machine spewing out draft lottery dates. As the machine identified numbers corresponding to the 365 days of the year, sighs of relief and gloom alternated as we found out our fates based on our date of birth. Rumor had it that a number over 50 eliminated any chance of getting drafted and going to Vietnam, so most were sighs of relief. As I saw my birth date come up, I prepared to rejoice as most were doing until it was designated as the number 12. But that's a story for another time.

Most of us probably remember some of the rough outline of what happened in Vietnam, such as the huge build up of US military forces, the Tet Offensive of 1968, the release of the US prisoners of war from the Hanoi Hilton and then the fall of Saigon right before we graduated. But I would venture that many of us do not remember other events including things like the estimated one million Vietnamese who voted with their feet to flee North Vietnam prior to the US involvement, with virtually none going the other way

Looking back, however, for most of us, it was most definitely the best of times. Shielded from the reality around us, we faced our life at F&M with a sense of an unabashed and unapologetic search for adventure. As in the words of America's 1972 hit, *A Horse with no Name*, "On the first part of the journey I was looking at all the life." Despite the significant work load and stress of exams and presentations (at times these were the worst of times), by and large my sense is that we would agree it was of all times, some of the best.

What follows are some vignettes from classmates giving a flavor of what we experienced in these best of times.