

Reflections of the Class of 1997

By Elliot Weiler

We arrived on campus in station wagons and minivans packed full of stuff our family, friends and Orientation Advisors would eventually help us unload on a hot, humid August afternoon. Milk crates filled with hardbound copies of *The Celestine Prophecy*, cassettes and compact discs featuring Whitney Houston and Janet Jackson, and VHS copies of *Dazed and Confused* were carried up and down un-air conditioned hallways in residence halls, not College Houses. Our suitcases overflowed with ill-fitting Benetton rugby shirts and LL Bean flannels, turtlenecks, overalls, and pleated khakis. After our families said their farewells, procrastinators plugged in halogen torchiere floor lamps to finish reading Lorene Cary's "Black Ice." And later in our first week on campus, we would walk to the basement of the Science Library to pick up our \$2,000 Macintosh LCIII's or \$3,000 Powerbook 165s, and then connect them to the World Wide Web using Macweb and check our email with Eudora. These were the first memories of Franklin & Marshall College for the Class of 1997.

As we settled into life at the College, Hillary Rodham Clinton was working on a massive overhaul of the healthcare system, gays were finally allowed to serve in the military, as long as they didn't tell anyone they were gay, and David Letterman was shaking up late night by moving *Late Night* to CBS. In the fall, our hopes for a World Series championship were dashed when the Phillies lost to the Blue Jays in a six-game series; sighs and moans could be heard across the Quad.

The following year, as we were getting smarter, so was Stager; high-tech classrooms were added to the building, some with the ability to show LaserDiscs. We lost the ice rink with its trademark silhouettes of John and Ben, but we gained Ken Starr as the newly appointed prosecutor of the Whitewater investigation. Newt Gingrich became Speaker of the House as he led Republicans to a sweeping victory with the "Contract for America." And nothing could prepare us for what would eventually become known as "homegrown terror;" 168 bodies were pulled from the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995; six years later Timothy McVeigh would be executed for orchestrating the bombing.

Just as we finished our sophomore year, we learned of a horrific double-murder at Mezzaluna, a trendy restaurant in Brentwood, California. Five days later, on June 17, we joined the world in watching some of the most bizarre moments ever on live television: OJ Simpson, presumably with a gun to his head, was evading police in a white Ford Bronco driven by A.C. Cowlings. After hours of criss-crossing LA freeways, with fans cheering him on, Simpson eventually surrendered at his Rockingham estate and was later charged with killing his ex-wife Nicole and her friend Ron Goldman. Junior year was a lot more fun after Doc Holiday's opened in College Square with \$1 bottles of Honey Brown on Friday afternoons. Right next door, the Alumni Sports and Fitness Center also opened, though many of us found that name far too long, so we chose a suggestive and inappropriate abbreviation. In our spare time, we laughed at original episodes of *Seinfeld* and cried during *ER*. And OJ just wouldn't go away; long before reality TV, we had the never-ending, sometimes riveting Simpson trial on cable news and entertainment channels. On the

afternoon of October 4, 1995, we all found a TV to watch the Simpson verdict live. His acquittal would reignite a discussion of race relations on campus and across the country.

All that TV watching made us fat, so we tried a new weight-loss trend called the Atkins Diet; Fatty meats were your friends and carbohydrates were the enemy. As we lost weight, the College lost two landmarks: "George and Martha," the iconic, if obsolete, water towers behind Old Main were torn down. The Dips tore up the hardwood, making it to the Final Four, one of five visits for Coach Glenn Robinson. As the reality that our college careers were rapidly coming to an end, many of us began in earnest our job search in the summer of 1996 as the national unemployment stood at 5.6%.

As we began our senior year, a Pentagon employee named Linda Tripp began secretly recording conversations with a former White House intern named Monica Lewinsky. President Bill Clinton cruised into a second term, easily defeating Senator Bob Dole. Princess Diana began dating Dodi Al-Fayed, while Robin Givens was married and separated on the same day. And a cloned sheep named Dolly captured headlines, and the President's attention as he signed a bill banning human cloning.

The Class of '97 captured its own headlines on graduation day when local media covered our mad dash for a shelter. Few of us can remember the name of our commencement speaker, but none of us will forget the quick change in the weather, from sunny skies to torrential downpours, that forced our outdoor ceremony on Hartman Green indoors to the ASFC, which was not set-up for graduation. After an hour or so organized chaos, the ceremony resumed. We walked across the stage as drenched, but proud Dips, celebrating four years of hard work, and more importantly, four years of memories that will