Generations: Creating an FHSU Legacy

by Kassidy Knowles

The word generation is defined as “a group of individuals, most of whom are the same approximate age, having similar ideas, problems, attitudes, etc.” However, when it comes to Fort Hays State University, the word generation means so much more. It means that legacy builders who began at FHSU over 100 years ago are still making an impact today, especially on their families who have graced FHSU over the years.

Kristin Tardiff’s grandparents first settled in Hays around 1902. After relocating from Lindsborg, her grandpa established the first printing shop at the Fort Hays Kansas Normal School in 1920, and her grandma was the director of the Social Building, the ‘Memorial Union’ of its era. Their time on campus was spent doing the one thing they loved the most, interacting with faculty and students. “My grandparents always had someone to talk to, and people would go to the print shop or the Social Building just to talk to them,” Kristin said. Tardiff’s grandmother, in particular, acted as somewhat of a counselor to hundreds of people and loved helping others whenever she could. “Once, I remember a man came up to our family and said ‘your grandmother saved my life’ and we realized then how much of an impact they made on the University.” However, her grandparents were only beginning their legacy at Fort Hays because, in time, their family would produce five more attendees to the University. Kristin’s parents met their senior year at Hays High School, and her mother received a degree in English at Fort Hays Kansas State College while her dad worked as a drilling superintendent in the Hays area. Additionally, Kristin’s three brothers, Bob, Benny, and John, all attended Fort Hays at one time, as well as her Aunt Marjorie.

After graduating from FHSU with a Geology degree, Kristin has now come back to pursue a Masters in Leadership. For many years, Tardiff worked for the Nestle Corporation in Switzerland and relocated to places like New York City and Maine with the company. “I moved around a lot and sometimes felt like I never really had a home per se. I feel like that’s the reason I came to FHSU because it is the only home I ever really knew,” Kristin said. Tardiff’s daughter also plans to get a masters degree at Fort Hays which would add a 4th generation to their family legacy.

For Dr. Jeff Curtis, Fort Hays has been a large part of his family for years. Jeff’s mother, Marge, grew up in Hays but his dad, Rex, came from Wellington, Kansas, where he was a basketball player under Cade Suran. Suran, who became a FHSU legend, was asked to coach for Fort Hays in 1946 and recruited Jeff’s dad to play for him. “If Suran would not have taken the job at Fort Hays, I’m not certain my dad would have come, and

my parents would have never met,” Jeff said. His parents did meet at Fort Hays Kansas State College and were married on the same day they graduated in 1950, a memory that will last forever within the Curtis family. To continue in their parents’ footsteps, Jeff and his brother John both decided to attend FHSU. They received their undergraduate degrees from FHSU and eventually received doctorates from other universities—Jeff in Cardiology and John in Animal Science. “There were eight people in my pre-med class and seven made it into medical school. I think this shows that the education FHSU provides is top notch and that you don’t have to get your undergraduate at the bigger named schools to be successful in your career,” Jeff said.

Jeff is now married with three children, and two of them, Cathryn and Carter, are 4th generation Fort Hays students.
who are currently attending. His oldest son, Christian, attended Fort Hays but graduated from the University of Kansas. Although Jeff also attended KU, Fort Hays holds the top spot in his heart, and he serves on the Board of Trustees for the Fort Hays State University Foundation. “I support KU too, but I feel like FHSU has played such a pivotal role in my life that it is important for me to give back as much as possible. Giving to a smaller university like FHSU makes me feel like I am impacting the students and faculty on a more intimate level than bigger schools.”

If family trees were covered in painted leaves, Dorothy Sprenkel’s family tree would be black and gold. Her deep connection to Fort Hays State University began with her grandparents in the early 1900’s. Lewis and Anna Galloway were very influential in western Kansas as one of the first families that pioneered Trego County, and Anna decided to get her education there as well, by attending the newly created Western Branch of the Kansas State Normal School. The Galloways were only the beginning of a great FHSU legacy that was building in their family. Their children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren have all attended Fort Hays, with only a couple going astray to other colleges, totaling five generations and eight graduates. Specifically, three of Dorothy’s children, Annie, Michael and David, attended FHSU. Although her other daughter Mary did not attend Fort Hays, she married FHSU President Edward Hammond and serves as the University’s First Lady, which creates her own special tie to the University. Currently, Dorothy’s granddaughter, Cassie Sprenkel, is attending FHSU, becoming the 5th generation in her family to do so. Dorothy expressed how she believes her family’s legacy has made an impression on Fort Hays, “I have often walked through the quad and imagined the countless students who have hurried to class under those tree branches. I like to think that our family has claimed one of those trees as our own to represent our FHSU Family Tree. Cassie is the newest branch on our FHSU tree and we expect that more of our family in the future will help her occupy the higher regions which began with her great-grandmother, Phemie, over a century ago.”

Recently a 3rd Generation Fort Hays graduate, Tina Anguish fondly remembered her family ties to Fort Hays State University at the passing of her father Jerry Kaempfe. “We have had ten family members graduate from FHSU – my brother Victor and I are 3rd Generation Tigers,” she stated at her father’s funeral. “I attended my first homecoming game in 1962. Somewhere there is a picture of me appearing pretty tired. If you knew my parents, they would attend every possible Homecoming event so I went along with them,” she continued. “In the picture, you can see my Daddy’s hand holding mine. He was the epitome of faith (that FHSU would win the game), hope (that we wouldn’t have to sit in another snowstorm watching them play), and love (for a campus that has given our family so much.)” Tina’s parents, Jerry and Viola, were both graduates of Fort Hays Kansas State College and were very passionate about the University they cherished deeply. Jerry was an active alumni member as well as a substantial donor and attended numerous FHSU events until his death in the fall of 2011.

Like the definition of generation states, it is a “group of individuals who have similar ideas,” and to people who have attended FHSU, there is one idea that reigns supreme: Fort Hays State University feels like an additional member of the family. Fort Hays has always stayed true to its western Kansas roots and values and continues to provide exceptional education while building on the traditions and history that have helped shape it for decades, resembling the families that have adorned the campus for many generations.