



Sharon Beard, Dean of Students, with her now husband Alan Beard, University Regent, on July 4, 1993.

While my memories of most Independence Day celebrations have faded, I can describe July 4, 1993 in great detail. I was a student in the Pepperdine Florence program, and that is the only year in my life I have not been in the U.S. on Independence Day. I remember exploring Florence that day feeling a little homesick and missing the traditions I never knew I would miss: Smelling slightly charred burgers cooking on the grill, swimming with neighborhood friends in above-ground pools, eating blue and red

Jell-O mold salads and other thematic desserts, and listening (and singing along) to the same three classic songs about America as fireworks exploded above our beach chair seats in a mall parking lot or a grassy field. And, above all, the best part was the fellowship with longtime friends and family that went on from early in the day until the fireworks grand finale.

So imagine my delight when the Florence program director and our faculty family surprised us that night with a festive cookout celebration that included grilled burgers, orange Fanta, and sparklers! With those sparklers we "wrote" our names in cursive in the night sky and snapped Instagram-worthy pictures before our individual sparklers extinguished (I even got a picture with my crush who later became my husband...). We all laughed for hours and enjoyed that same fellowship I had been missing.

After the last two years of loss and division in our nation, there is much work to be done before healing can begin, but as we approach this upcoming Independence Day, my prayer is for this community to have a day of respite and relaxation that involves fellowship with others and a reinstatement of Fourth of July traditions that bring you joy.

"Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:10).

Sharon Beard
Dean of Students
