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Classmates Come Together to Honor a Fallen Friend

By Dane Petersen



Three of John Jackson's many friends - Brian Kearon (C'03), Kevin Tyler (B'03), and James Jacobs (C'03) - at the 2007 John T. Jackson Foundation fundraiser.

Several members of Georgetown's class of 2003 have spent part of their first five years as alumni working to honor the life and spirit of a classmate, John Jackson (B'03), who died in a tragic accident only a few months after graduation. Their determination has resulted in the [John T. Jackson Foundation](#), which has raised \$150,000 to date, of which \$120,000 is earmarked for scholarships at Georgetown.

When the class gathers for their five-year reunion this month, his many friends are certain to be thinking about Jackson. They still talk about his eagerness to make new acquaintances. Wyatt Harris (C'03), Jackson's roommate their first year at Georgetown, says this eagerness was clear from the start. "On the first day [of college], he made 20 friends just carrying his bags up the steps at Village C," Harris says. "I was kind of the opposite spectrum of John; he forced me to come out of my shell a little and made me realize how important it is to meet new people."

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John Jackson at his graduation in 2003 with his sisters Lyndsie (left) and Lisa.

Another friend, James Jacobs (C'03), concurs. "He was very outgoing and wanted to meet as many people as he could," Jacobs says. "He was also really noticeable from a conversational standpoint. He had a really loud laugh."

Jacobs says Jackson was always up for anything and encouraged his ever-widening circle of friends to join him – whether it was just tossing a football around, heading out for a quick round of golf, or a road trip to see a concert. As one example, Jackson joined the sailing team as a walk-on member, despite having grown up in Kansas City, Mo., not an area known for aquatic sports. "He wanted to join everything," Harris says. "He was looking to get the most out of college."

Mike Callahan, Georgetown's sailing coach, says Jackson's lack of experience was not a problem. "Our walk-ons have a lot of energy, they're willing to learn, and they try hard, and John fit that perfectly," he says. "He was a super nice kid, and was fun to be around – he helped make competing less stressful." A regatta the team hosts each season was renamed in John's honor, at the request of his teammates, and a team boat bears his name as well.

John's sister Lyndsie Jackson worked in Washington, D. C., for two of the four years John was at Georgetown and saw for herself the effect Georgetown had. "College was when John came into his own, and it's indicative of the friends he made," she says.

After graduating in the spring of 2003, Jackson accepted a position with a real estate firm in Chicago. His father, Robert Jackson, says John was excited about being in Chicago and the new opportunities awaiting him. Tragically, shortly after moving there in June 2003, he and 12 people were killed when several decks at an apartment building collapsed. Lyndsie, who was also attending the party, escaped with minor injuries.

Jacobs and a few other Georgetown friends flew to Kansas City and "set up camp" as friends from Georgetown arrived for the funeral. "Ninety kids from Georgetown came, and (John's mother) Linda, (John's

sister) Lisa, Lyndsie, and I were blown away," Robert says. "We thought there might be five or 10." A service held at Dahlgren Chapel in the fall was attended by hundreds.

"John was a wonderful kid, and it says something about the kind of kids that come to Georgetown," Robert says. "This is what they do. They were living all over the country and they came to the service."

Harris says that friends wanted to honor Jackson's memory. "We wanted to do something, but we didn't know what. We knew it should be upbeat and enjoyable," he says. "John was always the life of the party in the best possible way – always making sure everyone was having a good time – so we thought we should just throw a big party and raise some money."

Harris, Jacobs, James Cagnetti (B'03) and several others organized the first John T. Jackson Fundraiser, which was attended by 450 people. By 2006, number of guests had climbed to 850. They decided to dedicate the funds raised to scholarships as the best way to honor Jackson's broad range of friendships and experiences at Georgetown.

Lyndsie Jackson says the dedication of friends has been remarkable. "These kids were 22 when they started the foundation," she says. "In the beginning, they were told it would take at least five years to raise \$100,000. They said "we're going to do it in three," and they did."

"We thought it might take a long time, and that they would get distracted by their careers and new families," says Robert. "But they were very enthusiastic." He praises how John's friends have worked hard for his legacy and how they represent their school. "I can't say enough," he says. "It reflects highly on every aspect of Georgetown – on admissions, on attending school, on what's being taught. Georgetown has the perfect touch for selecting students."

Dane Petersen is the managing editor of *hoyasonline*.

Visit the [John T. Jackson Foundation Web site](#) or e-mail [Solomon Stavis](#) at Georgetown to learn more about contributing to the foundation's efforts to raise scholarship dollars.

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