



Q&A:

LINKED DESCENDANTS

Goldie Owens and Felicia Furman

Goldie Owens is a medical assistant living in Winnsboro, South Carolina. Her husband, Veshawn Owens, is the great-great-grandson of Anderson Bates, who was enslaved by Samuel Furman, a son of the university's namesake, Richard Furman.

Felicia Furman is the producer of the PBS documentary "Shared History" and is writing a book tentatively called "African Americans at Woodlands Plantation." She lives in Boulder, Colorado, and is a direct descendant of James C. Furman, the university's first president.

When did you first learn of and meet one another?

Furman: In 2014, as a member of Coming to the Table (an organization for those who wish to acknowledge and heal from racism rooted in the nation's history of slavery), I wrote three blogs about my Furman slave-owning ancestors for a site called BitterSweet: Linked Descendants. It featured one of the interviews done in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration of formerly enslaved people. I was most interested in the interview of Anderson Bates, 89, who was enslaved by Samuel Furman, a son of Richard Furman, at a plantation near Fairfield, South Carolina. Bates also mentioned "Jim Furman that run the Furman school first near Winnsboro, then it moved to Greenville, S.C." One day, many years after publication, I got a telephone call from Goldie Feaster Owens of Winnsboro, South Carolina. She said her husband was a direct ancestor of Anderson Bates.

Owens: In 2017, when my husband's cousin, Taledia, came down from Maryland, she brought us the book, "South Carolina Slave Narratives," which featured their great-great-grandfather Anderson Bates. After reading

it and seeing they were on the Furman Plantation, I started to do a little research but stopped because I had started nursing school. Earlier last year, once the family decided to plan to have their family reunion after almost 27 years, I started doing more research and came across the website BitterSweet: Linked Descendants. I put my information in the "contact us" and gave a detailed description of why I was seeking more information and who I was. A few weeks later, I received an email from Felicia, and I was nervous but excited when I saw her name in my email feed. After a few email exchanges we spoke over the phone. As soon as I heard her excitement about my husband's descendants being connected to her descendants on her father's side, it warmed my heart. I got off the phone and told my husband about our conversation, and it brought tears to my eyes. Although I'm not linked, my husband and children, Jada and Jayson, need to know the significance and the importance of this relationship Felicia and I had started and how this will affect the history between these two families.

What was it like to make contact? What is it that bonds the two of you?

Furman: Goldie was upbeat and friendly from the beginning to the end of the call. She wanted information, but more specifically, she seemed to just want to talk to a Furman ancestor – someone descended from people who had lived and breathed at the same time as Anderson Bates. We seemed to immediately bond over our shared history. I knew that life was hard for Anderson Bates, and he had survived indefensible physical and psychological adversity. And of course, Goldie knew that, too. But in a few short moments, we had become linked descendants.

Owens: We have kindred spirits. Felicia expressed such gratitude toward our family. Even though she didn't have anything to do with that period, she expressed remorse and apologized for the decision of her descendants owning slaves. We both had the understanding that we couldn't change the past, but we could take this step now and write a new beginning. We text and email each other often. She is such a genuine person, and I'm honored to know her – but I've been blessed to call her my friend.

What do you hope your friendship can teach us about history, healing and understanding?

Owens: That the past is written, the present is here, and you have to be the change in a positive way. If you allow your past to break who you are and who you can become, then this hatred and negativity of our descendants' past will hold you back. This experience has been an awakening, because living in the South and experiencing so many racial barriers and biases, it is humbling to know both sides of the spectrum are willing to meet in the middle and start fresh and rebuild from our families' history.

Furman: We started our relationship understanding the importance of knowing our history and what it could teach us not only about the past but the present and future. During our telephone and email conversations, I thought about the importance of forgiveness and salvation and about our responsibility to accept the truths of our nation's major tragedy and move forward in the spirit of doing what one could to repair the foundation of our still-fragmented society. Could our friendship help accomplish this? We have begun to find out. ✦

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EMME EDWARDS '24

When a first-year student first walks on campus, the world changes for them. It's exciting, horrifying and wonderful all at once. You are starting a new chapter of your life with a new sense of freedom while leaving so much of what you know behind. When I first came to campus, it was nothing like they said it would be in the movies. I was sitting in a Hula-Hoop, standing 6 feet away from everyone, and I was not allowed to have people in my room. Little 18-year-old me felt as if the weight of a global pandemic was on her shoulders and that there was no way college would be a worthwhile experience.

Coming to college is challenging, and it only becomes more difficult as you add academics, sports, relationships, clubs and more. I joined Paladin Peer Support in my sophomore year as I realized I could help people on campus who struggled just as I did. As the current president, I hope to continue to help anyone who is struggling on campus to know that their feelings and hardships are valid and that the members of this club are always here to have these conversations. Paladin

Peer Support was started as a club made to train students on campus to meet one-on-one with their peers to help them feel supported and help them through any troubles they were having.

Now that we have many peer mentors on campus through the Pathways Program, our club is shifting toward overall campus support and wellness. We will still offer training for counseling, and students are always welcome to come to us for a meeting. Paladin Peer Support has begun to collaborate with the Trone Center for Mental Fitness, and we are planning for events, such as an aroma therapy stand, a comfort food stand, and an event in which a student walks around the lake with a peer. We will strive to make campus a happy place while making sure every student knows about the mental health resources available to them at Furman. ✦

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emme Edwards '24 is the president of Paladin Peer Support. She is double majoring in psychology and anthropology.