

# Fresno Pacific College and Relationships

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The morning fog was still hovering when my roommate, Patti Guichard, and I walked from our dorm room toward our first class. It was freshman year, winter quarter 1973. Past Alumni Hall, where we stopped to get a hot chocolate, and on toward the Science Building; I looked to my left at the Amphitheater and had to stop abruptly in surprise. There on the stage, at a jaunty angle, sat my 1969 red Toyota Corolla, as though in a dealer showroom. The last time I had seen the car it was parked only yards from my first-floor window, in the lot behind the almost-new F dorm. After I caught my breath from the shock, it didn't take me long to determine who had moved it, and when, and certainly why! The culprits were soon hard at work to move it BACK to its spot, pushing it as they laughed and laughed. I laughed, too, both then and now—some of those “culprits” remain my dearest friends.

If you walk on campus today, while F dorm is still there, the Amphitheater is long gone, the “new dorms” are now part of the “old dorms,” and several imposing and impressive buildings have been added; however, I imagine the young people are still the same: still ready to do the crazy and wonderful things college kids do.

We were a small school in those days, with just about 400 students. We didn't have a gym, so the basketball team practiced and played games at several different locations. We had a lot of international students, some of whom played on the soccer team. I had only a smattering of knowledge about soccer—is it like football? field hockey?—and enjoyed learning from the athletes and the other international students, both about the sport and their countries of origin. We spent a lot of time together in Alumni Hall, eating and visiting and laughing together. One memorable exchange occurred in the food line. A very sweet young woman who spoke English as a second language whispered a question to me: “Leah? What is ‘gonna’?” It took me only a second or two to realize how to answer, and also to understand the courage it took for her to ask me that question. My life was being enriched right along with hers—mine even more than hers. It is also important to note that I began school in fall, 1972, the same year Title IX passed, but a school like Pacific only fielded men's sports during

my years of attendance. It would take longer to incorporate women in the ranks of inter-varsity athletics. That, too, is a big change and we are all better for it.

During my four years at Pacific, the bookstore was moved twice, the Registrar's Office, where I worked as a work-study student, was moved at least three times, and some of the old dorms were re-modeled to be used as offices, often more than once. My first quarter, the girls still had a curfew, but that changed the second quarter. Oddly, almost every girl agreed that we actually came in sooner at night when we didn't have a curfew. The Amphitheater was where the musicals and spring dramas were staged, and the graduating class received their diplomas (and where young men could tease a young woman by using the stage as a car park). Today the Bookstore sells logo-themed merchandise for the Sunbirds, not the Vikings. Our incongruous—for a school with pacifist roots—Viking mascot in green and white is now a soaring bird in orange and blue. Twice a week we met in Alumni Hall for College Hour, giving our number to an attendant who duly noted our presence. That also changed --- to an honor system --- during my four years at Pacific. On those days, it was a lot of work to re-configure the room from dining hall for breakfast to auditorium for convocation and back to a dining hall for lunch. Each building was always "multi-purpose." But things were changing, even if the buildings were mostly the same during that decade. No curfews, no attendance taking at College Hour. The college was empowering the students to take personal responsibility rather than remaining the omniscient "in loco parentis" it had been.

The Registrar's Office was where I learned to use an electric typewriter as well as a key punch, a large machine, a bit bigger than an upright piano, that utilized then-current technology to create class lists, grade sheets, and transcripts. Every class had a card, every student had a card, and consequently each student had several class cards. Adina Schmidt, the Registrar, and I would leave campus to go to another location to get the cards sorted appropriately so we could print the lists, labels, etc., that were needed at any given time during the quarter. Then I separated the class lists and distributed them to individual teachers, or, if it was grading time, I put the report cards in mailboxes and then posted the labels with grades for each transcript. It was painstaking work, and labor intensive. I graduated in 1976; when I returned four years later to work for Adina one more year, the system was in the process of being converted to the computer age. The cards were gone, the key punch machine obsolete. A

computer system is still in use, although of course many times improved from when we first implemented the system. That first year we constantly had to call a “tech office” in San Diego for help. Now I imagine there is a tech department right on campus.

Something else changed during my undergraduate years: the name of the school. In my work in the office, I saw older transcripts from students, dating back three decades, when the name was Pacific Bible Institute. Then it had become Pacific College of Fresno, almost always shortened to Pacific College. This caused some consternation and confusion, because very often we were mistaken for University of the Pacific, in Stockton, so finally the board and the faculty agreed that the most logical thing to do was to anchor us in a location, and we became students at “Fresno” Pacific College. This created a lot of new work, changing the transcripts, etc., to the new name, but adding “Fresno” as the first part of the college name gave us pride of place. And told all who were unsure exactly where our college was.

Not all students lived on campus, of course, and the “non-residents” had a representative on student council. My senior year I was that person, and I worked very hard with Gary Nachtigall to procure and have installed a bank of lockers that could be used by students who did not live on campus. A place to put your things when you were moving from class to class, or meeting to meeting, just to have a sense of belonging—we agreed that was important, and the funds were approved. I did not notice where, if anywhere, current lockers might be when I was last on campus, but I hope that either I just didn’t notice them, or the students themselves determined lockers weren’t needed. Things change, and the ability to adjust to what is needed is a skill we all should learn. Institutions, too! It’s wonderful to have beautiful buildings and adequate facilities, but the most important thing is always to listen to the people: what is needed for us to be a community? Are we hearing each other?

One of the most important things to happen occurred late in the decade. Fresno Pacific has a sister institution, Tabor College, in Hillsboro, Kansas, and in the 1970s there was a slight, developing rivalry between the two schools, not in athletics, of course, but for donation dollars and students. Many alums from Tabor lived in California, and certainly there were Kansans attending Fresno Pacific. There were concerns about fairness, and how to keep two institutions fiscally responsible, and so there was a recommendation that BOTH schools

close and a new one open up somewhere between California and Kansas, i.e., Denver, Colorado. To that end, a detailed report was made available, and a conference scheduled for mid-March, in 1979. Each church would send a requisite number of delegates to debate and then vote on a resolution.

I was determined to be a delegate, and was elected by the Reedley Mennonite Brethren Church congregation, where I was then a member, so I traveled to the conference along with several people from my church. The conference was full of wonderful, caring people who loved education, loved both the schools, loved the Lord and wanted to do what was best for everyone. We listened to a rising chorus of people who truly felt the best idea was to start over in Denver, where we could purchase an incredible campus there that was no longer being used. On paper, and after seeing the facilities, it sounded like a great idea. But I, who had grown up in Bakersfield and who had found community at Fresno Pacific, had several reservations, and I was able to articulate them during my turn at the microphone.

The way the conference was set up, two microphones were placed on each side of the auditorium, and people who wished to speak would then get in line on either side and wait their turn. As I stood there, I listened intently to each speaker, because I did not want to miss something: what if I repeated a point, or made a conflicting point without acknowledging the previous speaker? I felt it was important to make a good showing, for my college and my church. I had some things to say, and I really wanted to do a good job.

Of all the things I have done in my life, I feel most proud of what transpired next. I stood up with my notes and began to speak, explaining each of my reservations clearly. First of all, the largest numbers of MB constituents were in Kansas, Oklahoma, and California. Colorado had only a small number, so who exactly would be served? Would all the professors be able to move to Colorado? Would enough students be drawn to travel long distances from home to attend the school? And the two most important considerations were these: California provided state scholarships (now Cal Grants), but they could only be used at California colleges and universities. As a recipient of one, for example, I would never have been able to attend a school in Colorado unless the school itself gave me a substantial scholarship. Plus I had qualified for work-study, funded partially by the state, and was able to earn enough money to live on while I was a student. Would Colorado afford the same opportunity? I had

gone to Fresno Pacific intending to get a credential; without a credential from California, teaching options were very limited in the state. So would students attending a Colorado school and finishing a credential program there ever return to California? Would a student desiring to teach in California ever attend a college in Colorado?

When I finished speaking, I could feel a change had occurred in the room. By the time of the final vote, the resolution was to “regionalize” the schools, and that gave both institutions the ability to focus on the needs of their students. It was a stunning end to a long and drawn out conversation and debate, and the result is that both Tabor and Fresno Pacific University are still serving their communities. Fresno Pacific is regarded highly in the Central Valley in many capacities, not the least of which is providing an abundance of excellent teachers. Oh—and I got a small paragraph in the *Christian Leader*! I am still thrilled!

I moved away from California with my family in 1990, and we only got to visit periodically until we moved back in 2014. Each time I have been on campus in the intervening decades, I have been reminded how grateful I am to have been a part of the community, and to have been there during the decade of much change. The relationships I made, the things I learned, how much my faith grew and how I grew as a person—I am grateful for it all. And when I am on campus, I can walk past the place where the Amphitheater used to be and still see that little red car, poised on the stage.

