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### **Gardner-Webb is a Place Where Lasting Friendships are Forged**

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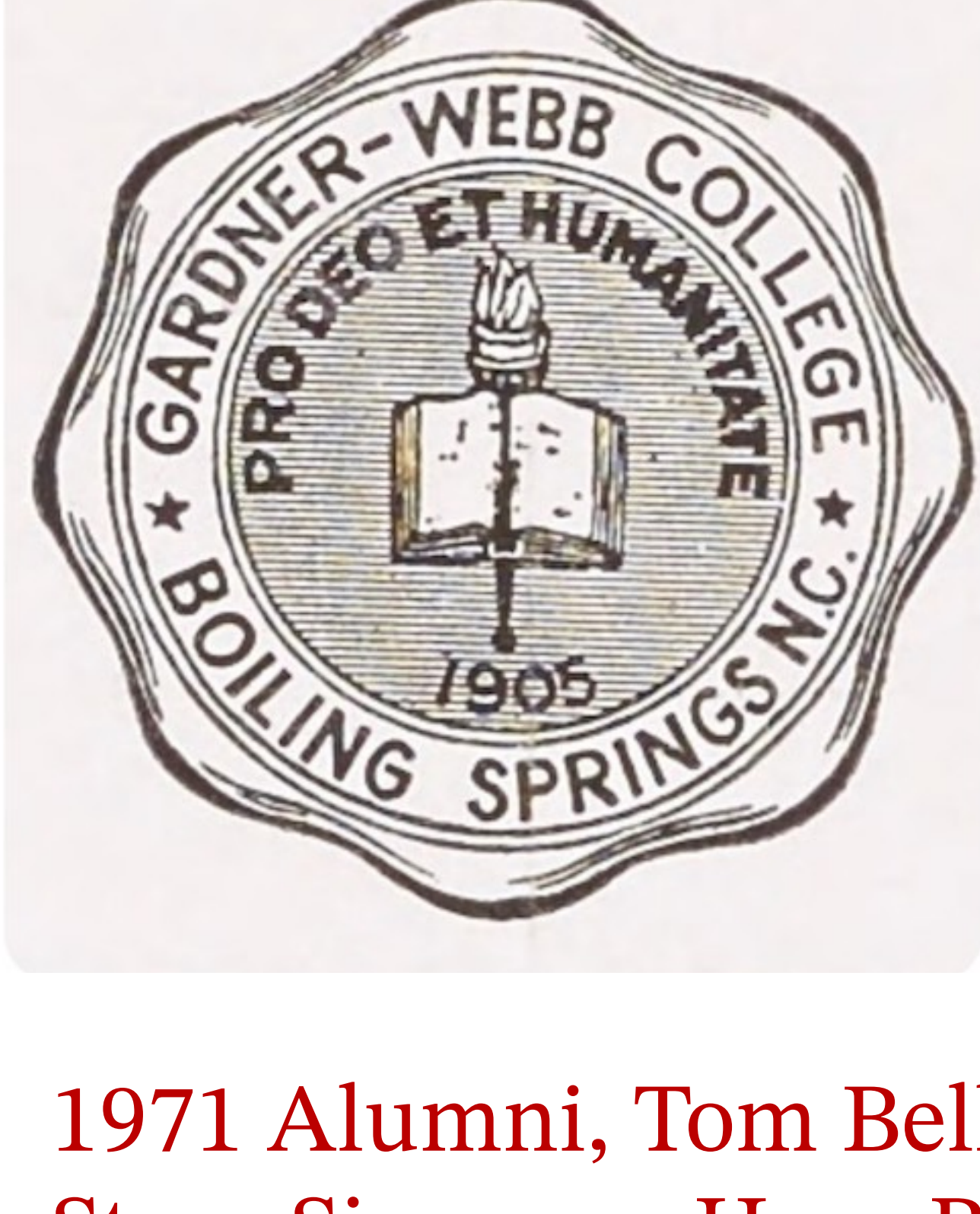
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ALUMNI

# Gardner-Webb is a Place Where Lasting Friendships are Forged

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON JANUARY 28, 2021



## 1971 Alumni, Tom Bell and Steve Simpson, Have Remained Close Friends for 50 years

**To our readers:** Gardner-Webb University celebrates a historic milestone in 2021—the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of senior college status. Transitioning to a four-year college in 1971 was the result of 10 years of planning and meeting goals. To celebrate this anniversary, Gardner-Webb will publish a series of articles highlighting the stories of former faculty, staff, alumni and supporters who experienced this significant achievement. [View the history timeline here.](#)

Gardner-Webb's Class of 1971 were trailblazers in the College's effort to achieve accreditation as a four-year college from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The requirements stated that at least one group of students must attend for four years. Among those who received their bachelor's degrees on May 16, 1971, were Tom Bell, of Atlanta, Ga., and Steve Simpson of Raleigh, N.C. They did so, certain that SACS would soon grant their alma mater accreditation.

Bell and Simpson, like so many other students, found a home at Gardner-Webb where they forged friendships that have lasted a lifetime. Both men currently serve on the GWU Board of Trustees. "Over the long period of time being associated with Gardner-Webb, I've been blessed to have friends like Steve," Bell affirmed. "There's about eight of us who still get together every couple of years."



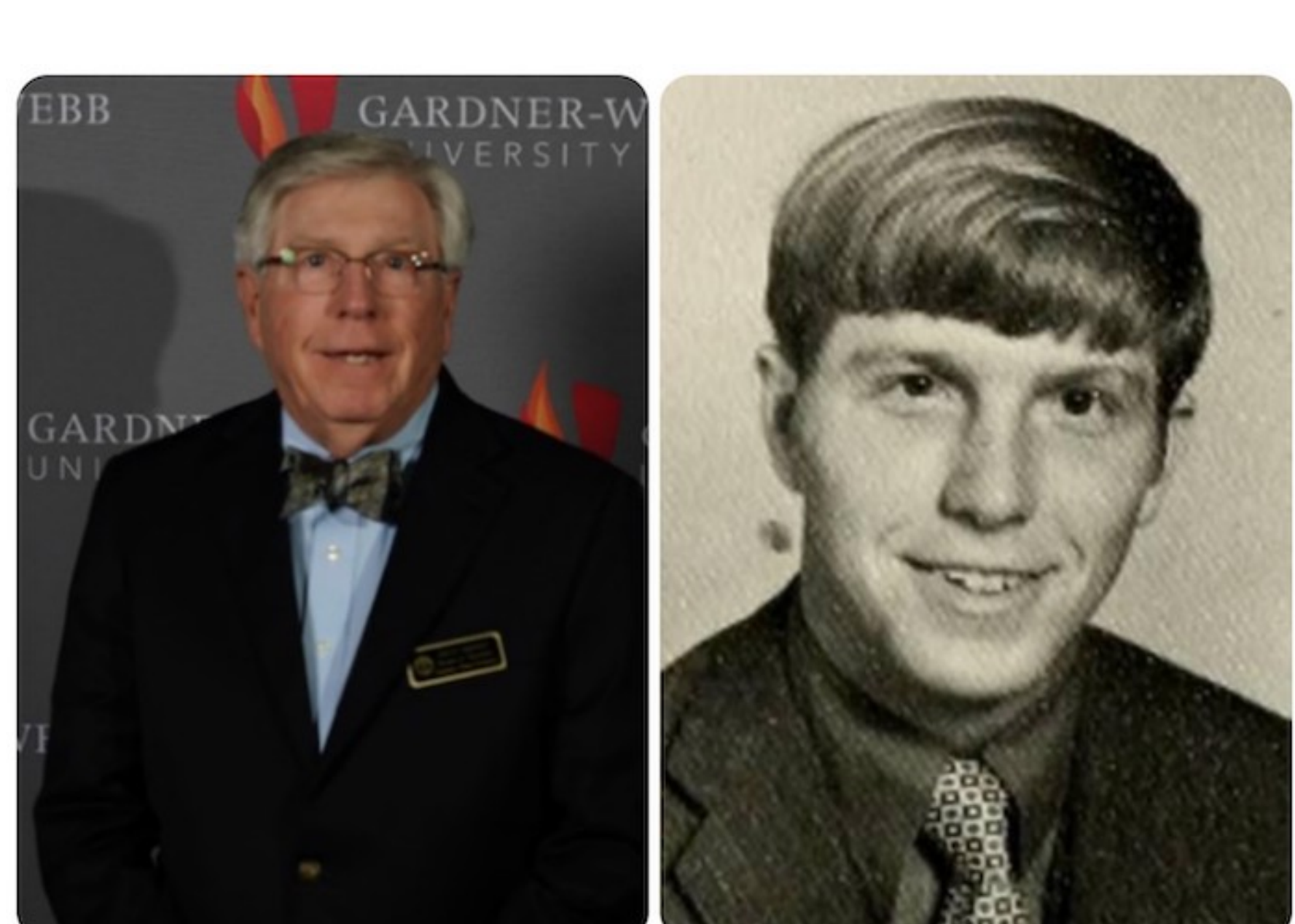
Tom Bell

A native of Suffolk, Va., Bell received a Bachelor of Arts degree in social science, economics and history. He was one of many students who attended Gardner-Webb from 1964 to '66 and received an associate's degree and then decided to come back when Gardner-Webb began offering the bachelor's degree. Some of his fellow students returned after serving in the Vietnam War. Others, like Bell, came back to GWU, because it was the best place for them to be.

"Gardner-Webb offered us who were coming back to the school a unique opportunity to gain a foothold on our education and to accomplish what we intended to do," stated Bell, who has served as a GWU Trustee for nearly 20 years in total. He lives in Atlanta, Ga., where he moved in 1971 to take a job with a trucking company. In 1982, he opened his own trucking/warehousing business and retired in 2012.

"In my particular case, from the financial standpoint, I couldn't have done it without the university's help," Bell asserted. "I was given an opportunity to be a (resident director), received a partial tennis scholarship and worked as a secretary. I couldn't have done it without some of the great professors that we had at Gardner-Webb and so it was a blessing to me. I have spent most of my business career trying to find a way to give back to the University in a small way. It's been a joyful ride."

Simpson, a native of Greensboro, N.C., came to Gardner-Webb on the advice of his high school math teacher, who was a GWU alumnus. "He said, 'If you don't go to Gardner-Webb, you will be home in six weeks,'" Simpson remembered. "It was good advice. I truly would not have done well at a larger school."



Steve Simpson

Simpson earned a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry, and on the day he graduated in 1971, he was set to begin work for a furniture company developing stains but got his draft notice. "I joined the National Guard within a day or two of receiving the notice and stayed for 13 years," he said. He was sent to the Guard Unit in Kennesaw, Ga. With nowhere to stay, he contacted Bell and slept on the floor in Bell's dining room until he could find a place.

Simpson served in the guard and eventually went to work for a property management business. In the meantime, Bell moved away from Atlanta. Years later, when Bell came back to Atlanta, he and his wife moved into an apartment community that Simpson managed. There was a fire in the complex, and Simpson got the chance to repay Bell the hospitality he showed him in '71. Bell and his wife stayed with Simpson and his wife until everything was settled.

"That was the one thing I got out of Gardner Webb," related Simpson, who now lives in Raleigh, N.C. "We have guys who have been together since graduation. We share the same troubles and joys."

Both Bell and Simpson believe that Gardner-Webb has a bright future. They point out the success and reputation of the graduate programs. "When I come to campus and look at Gardner-Webb, I think it has integrated the diversity much more so than the larger universities," Simpson said. "We have a good president to lead us going forward. He understands the challenges of being a school like Gardner-Webb and being able to compete from a standpoint of the quality of education but also the cost."

*Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university. Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics to prepare students to become effective leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.*

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- [Gardner-Webb Alumni Remember Transition to Senior College Status \(50 years ago\)](#)
- [First Theatre Arts Majors Appeared on TV Twice During Four Years](#)
- [Former Gardner-Webb Faculty Members Remember Transition to Four-year College](#)
- [In late 60s, Gardner-Webb Gave Professors, Like Tony Eastman, Incentive to Earn Doctorates](#)
- [Professor Emeritus Came to Gardner-Webb When First Baccalaureate Class Were Freshmen](#)



Steve Simpson shared his Student Handbooks from 1967-68 and 1969-70. Each included "A Guide for Living" that students were expected to follow. The 67-68 book gave the following guide for the proper attire for campus, classrooms and informal dates. Women were expected to wear cotton dresses, blouses or sweaters and skirts with flats or heels. Men should wear sport coats, wash and wear trousers, sweaters or sport clothes as the weather permits. Students were expected to dress up for the Sunday noon meal. Women should wear suits or dressy dresses with heels, and men wear a suit and tie appropriate to the event.

The Student Handbook from 1969-70 added a section to forbid men with long hair, beards and unkempt appearance, and women with unkempt appearance. In the dating section, the curfew for sophomores and juniors was midnight on Friday nights. Juniors could stay out until 12:30 a.m. by special request and only for events that meet the privilege. Women would be allowed to travel out-of-state with their parents' permission. Proper dress for campus and classroom activities was changed to "informal" and described as clean, neat and in good taste, according to the philosophy of the college. The dress code for other occasions remained the same.

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