

Lost and Found

By Nikita Redkar

Ali Bradshaw — THE BATTALION

Former student reunited with ring 17 years later

There have been countless stories of Aggies losing their rings in the past, but rarely has there been a story of an Aggie losing his ring more than once.

Stu Arledge, Class of 1986, had three Aggie Rings within the span of seven years.

"My first ring was stolen during a total rampage robbery at my home and I ended up misplacing my second ring," Arledge said.

Soon enough, Arledge replaced his last ring just in time for his 1993 move to Waco, Texas. He and some friends had gone to Waco's Cottonwood Golf Course. Arledge removed his ring and set it on the green before playing, "just to be safe."

"Ironically, it was then I lost my new ring," Arledge said. "I went home to realize it was gone and when I returned to the golf course the next day it wasn't there. I couldn't think of anywhere else it would rather be."

Arledge decided he was done with Aggie Rings forever.

"I had given up and decided I was just not destined to have a ring," Arledge adds. "Three strikes and I'm out."

Seventeen years later, in 2010, Arledge had relocated in Fort Worth, Texas and was in the middle of an important business meeting when a woman from Riesel, Texas, called.

"This woman starts asking me a lot of questions about my life and where I'm from," Arledge said. "Some questions were just so personal that I had to stop her and ask, 'What's going on?' It was obviously not a business call."

The woman turned out to be Jane Kristen, a former student and employee of Riesel Foster Elementary School. She asked Arledge if he went to Texas A&M, to which he responded, "Yes, in 1996."

"The next thing she asks is if I lost my Aggie Ring ... and my heart just stops," Arledge said.

Arledge said he told Kristen he lost his

ring a long time ago. Kristen responded by telling Arledge a fifth-grader in her school, Oreen Rosas, had recovered an Aggie Ring in her grandfather's backyard in Hewitt. Rosas knew her school's principal was an Aggie, so she decided to take the ring back with her. The school traced the Aggie Ring to Arledge and contacted him immediately.

"The phone call was a total shock and I nearly fell out of my chair," Arledge said. "People in the office began to worry about me because I wouldn't stop jumping up and down and screaming."

Arledge said he has no idea how his ring ended up in Hewitt, but he immediately identified it as the ring he lost on the Waco golf course.

"[Kristen] offered to mail the ring to my address and I told her, 'Hell no! I'm getting in my car right now,'" Arledge said.

The event received widespread attention and was even documented by the town's local news station.

"I met the little girl [Rosas], bought her a teddy bear and said thank you very much," Arledge said. "The whole event was surreal and I love talking about it. To be reunited with my ring after 17 years is something else."

Arledge said after the chain of events, he does not wear his ring anymore.

"My dad passed away 11 years ago and I have his ring and my ring displayed on a mantel at home," Arledge said. "I don't wear it because I don't want to lose it again."

Arledge said he commends the Aggie network for knowing exactly the steps to take when a lost ring is recovered.

"How great is it that an Aggie found my ring and knew exactly what to do, exactly how to contact me?" Arledge said. "Who knows where my other two rings are? But I know they were certainly not recovered by an Aggie."

Longhorn recovers former student's Aggie ring

The Aggie Ring is more than a piece of jewelry; it is a celebration of academic achievements, a symbol of pride and an admittance into the Aggie network. Losing the Aggie Ring is heartbreaking, as Louis Smien, Class of 1988, knows.

During the past Thanksgiving, Louis traveled from College Station to Dallas to take care of business responsibilities while his family was visiting relatives. Smith stayed at Dallas' Anatole Hotel, where he believed to have last seen his ring.

Damen Smien, Class of 2014 and Louis' son, said his father only removed his Aggie Ring when he was going to sleep or taking a shower.

"The night before my dad left Dallas, he left his ring in the hotel safe," Damen said. "By the time we all realized it was missing, we had all gone back home."

The Smiens called the Anatole hotel numerous times to inquire about a lost, golden ring. The hotel staff said they had not found it.

"My father was devastated," Damen said. "He had held that ring for 26 years."

Having lost the ring in a large city and at one of the most frequented hotels by non-Texans, Louis was sure the ring was gone for good, Damen said.

Louis was convinced his ring would have been stolen or pawned off. Months passed and he lost hope, eventually considering buying a new Aggie Ring. Then tragedy struck the Smien family again.

"In February, my grandfather passed away after a long and healthy 88 years," Damen said. "Although never an attendee, he was the proudest Aggie dad and grandfather a person could ask for."

Louis neglected work responsibilities and checking emails due to having so much on his mind. A few days passed and after returning to normalcy, he checked his email and had a message from an unknown address. For Louis, the message was a blessing during a most difficult time:

A friend of mine has found your Aggie Ring.



PROVIDED
Louis Smien, Class of 1988, had his ring returned to him after he lost it in a hotel.

Give me a call. Signed, Scott Eberhart '74.

"Initially, my father wanted to surprise us with the news," Damen said. "But we figured out immediately because among everything that was going on, he had been smiling a little more than usual."

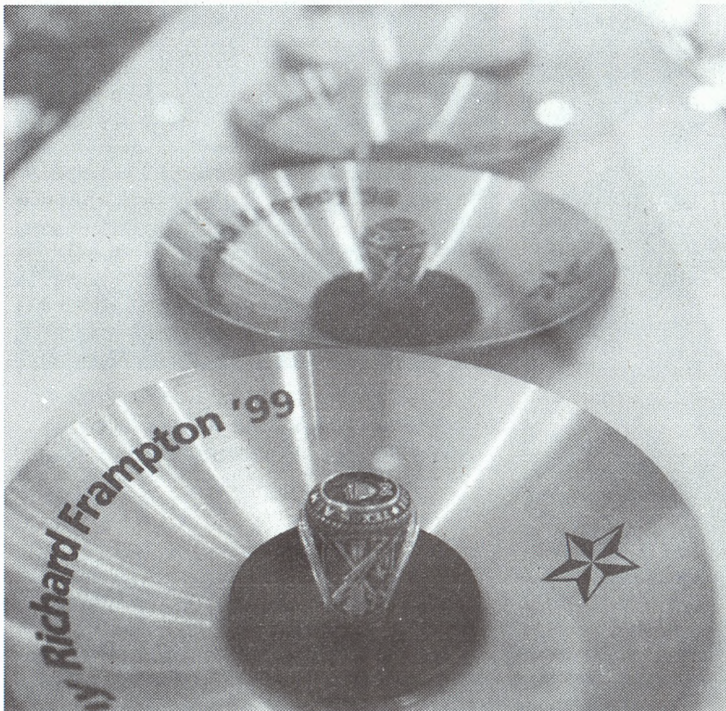
A Longhorn pilot had retrieved the ring while at the Anatole Hotel and had immediately called his closest Aggie friend, Eberhart, to share the news. Eberhart then contacted the Association of Former Students to collect Louis' contact information.

"It's unbelievable how strong the Texas A&M community is while you're a student and even after you graduate," Damen said. "This incidence goes to show even those outside the Aggie network knows the ring signifies. Even a Longhorn took the time out to find our family and return the ring."

Kathryn Greenwade, vice president of the Association of Former Students and Class of 1988, said the Aggie spirit signifies a strong sense of community to anyone who is familiar with it.

"You don't find something like this at other schools," Greenwade said.

Memorial Ring Collection honors fallen Aggies



The ring of Jeremy Frampton, who died in the Bonfire Collapse, represents the Class of 1999 in the Memorial Ring Collection.

By Sam Scott

On January 15, 1970, J.B. "Josh" Sterns, Class of 1899, presented his collection of Aggie Rings to the Association of Former Students. Located in the Clayton W. Williams Jr. Alumni Center, the collection provides a history of rings spanning from the Class of 1891 to the Class of 1964, each year represented by one ring.

Carrying on this tradition, the Alumni Center houses the Memorial Ring Collection. Picking up where Sterns left off and continuing to recent years, families of deceased Aggies have donated the rings of their loved ones to memorialize their spirits and represent their respective classes.

Although nearly 50 classes are represented in the Memorial Collection, each year has a unique story to tell. The Class of 1995, for example, has two rings that represent the class, those of Gena and Joel Johnson — a young couple killed in a car wreck their final semester at Texas A&M.

The ring that represents the Class of 1999 reminds onlookers of another campus tragedy. The ring donated by the family of Jeremy Frampton was worn by one of the 12 Aggies killed

in the Bonfire Collapse.

Connor McCasland, the latest addition to the Memorial Collection, will represent the Class of 2015. McCasland, who died last June, was about to start his senior year at A&M as a food science and technology major.

A member of the Fightin' Texas Aggie Band and the A-Battery outfit, McCasland was described by his friends and family as having a larger-than-life personality.

Casey Hodgson, one of McCasland's Corps and band friends, said Connor was always open for a conversation and always wanted to have a good time.

"He was just always so nice to everybody, and he was there to help you whenever you needed anything," Hodgson said. "There were times whenever I would need help with something and he would just drop what he was doing to help me out."

Now McCasland's Aggie Ring, his story and his enthusiasm will continue to be a source of inspiration for all — McCasland's ring will be dedicated to the Memorial Collection on Wednesday.

Kathryn Greenwade, vice president of the Association of Former Students, said each addition to the Memorial Collection involves a worthy Aggie to represent their class.

"The individuals in that ring collection, when you learn their stories, it's like, 'What a great person to be representing that class? How proud can that class be that that individual represents them?'" Greenwade said.

Another captivating story lies behind the ring recently dedicated to the Memorial in August 2014. Representing the Class of 2010, Lisa Ramirez fought a battle against pulmonary hypertension for six years before her death. Even though she was diagnosed with the disease early on in her time at A&M, Ramirez was able to graduate with a degree in agricultural leadership and development.

Greenwade said the ring dedication for Ramirez was particularly special.

"When her ring was added to the collection, before we put it in, the family had Father David from St. Mary's here and he blessed the ring with water from the Jordan River," Greenwade said.