



Friendship

BAND OF BROTHERS

Gary Glisson Day

Learning of a fellow brother's ALS diagnosis brought the enduring spirit of Mizzou community together

By Bill Meeker, *Missouri '80*

During COVID, a few of our pledge brothers became aware of our brother Gary Glisson's fight with ALS. He was diagnosed with the debilitating disease a couple of years earlier, and it had progressed to the point he needed additional care.

A group text was started, and in a matter of a few weeks, we somehow managed to gather all our pledge brothers on the text string. This opened up a whole new world for Gary, who resides at an assisted living facility in Richmond, Missouri, and, due to COVID-19, was confined to quarters.

Because of the facility's strict protocol, Gary could not receive visitors. We began communicating with each other through text messages and a group app. Gary is wheelchair-bound and has difficulty speaking. Texting allowed him to share his thoughts, his great memories of our time together, and his wonderful sense of humor.

We all knew Gary was bright, personable, and, as a long-distance runner, very disciplined and determined. We also learned of Gary's extreme courage and conviction from these communications.

Once the COVID restrictions were lifted, we planned the first Gary Glisson Day, 2021.

After roughly forty years of being separated by careers, family, and distance—all but a couple of our pledge brothers were able to make the journey to the facility in Richmond to join Gary. Pledge brothers came from

all over the US to visit their stricken brother and re-bond over past stories and present lives.

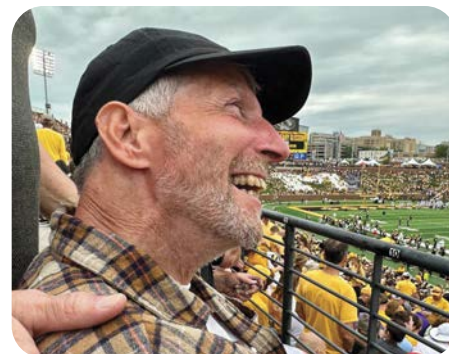
Since then, we have had two additional Glisson Day gatherings, and now all our pledge brothers and many from classes above and below our pledge class have made the trek to visit Gary.

As a Phi in need, Gary is the glue that re-bonded our brothers.

The first Glisson Day was held in a park near Gary's assisted living facility. To be safe, we all had our COVID vaccinations to be with him. Even though we had been apart for so long, and the threat of the pandemic was still fresh in our minds, we hugged and greeted each other as if we had just been together the week before. It was almost like we were pledges again, going on a walk-out—just our little band of brothers. Catching up, remembering our years at the Phi lodge and what bonded this disparate group of men together in the first place.

Gary's memories of our times together seem to be better than any of the rest of us. Most of us had forgotten he took many pictures during our pledge year. He kept a scrapbook of all the photos and shared them with us over the last three years, recounting details of our adventures and misadventures as pledges, bringing back many great memories.

Gary has been an inspiration to us all. He does not complain about his dilemma and battles through the restrictions ALS imposes on his body to communicate with and join with his brothers. As older men, we tend to talk about the aches and pains that are typical of our age. But we all realize how petty those issues are compared to Gary's situation. It is hard



to feel sorry for yourself when you see just how debilitating ALS can be and how strong and courageous our brother Gary has been. Even though his life is mostly limited to the assisted living facility and day-by-day the disease continues to take its toll, he keeps his head held high with an incredibly positive attitude.

He is an exemplary man, brother, and a true Phi. If brother Lou Gehrig was the Iron Horse, Gary Glisson is the Steel Stallion. Both great men, who accepted their fate, did not let it define them and are inspirations to those who knew them or knew of them.



Proud to Be a Phi!

Last fall, Phis from Missouri Alpha and alumni organized a special tailgating event for Brother Gary Glisson, *Missouri '81*, who was diagnosed with ALS in 2018. Bill Meeker, *Missouri '80*, helped surprise Gary by displaying his name in lights on the jumbotron during the game.