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## An Ode to the RA

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## An Ode to the RA

By Bree (Adamson) Watson  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Being a resident assistant wasn't just a job — it was an experience.



Columnist Bree (Adamson) Watson (top center in white shirt) and other Lake Claire RAs hold a celebration in the community center about 20 years ago, (Photo by Lauren (Shamus) Elek '04)

Along time ago in a residence hall not too far away, I stared at the blank, beige cinderblock walls and standard-issue furniture inside Lake Claire #56 and took a deep breath. “Responsibility!” I groaned, while shaking my head. “Responsibility! Sheesh!” I repeated this anxious mantra while my dad and I unpacked boxes of my belongings.

I had lived in the same on-campus apartment building during my first year, and now, as a sophomore, I was about to become the building's resident assistant, one of UCF's new batch of RAs.

While I'd handled a fair amount of responsibility as a babysitter, a soccer referee, a summer camp counselor and retail employee, the encroaching reality of overseeing a three-story building filled with fellow college students was far more daunting.

It turned out to be far more rewarding, too.

Being an RA became so much more than a college job that had the perk of proximity to classes and reduced housing costs. It gave me the confidence to tackle new challenges. It encouraged me to meet new people. And it gave me lifelong friends.

I'm glad I took a chance on a new challenge — a new responsibility.

It was not an easy job. Weekly work nights and on-duty weekend shifts kept us plenty busy, in addition to planning and promoting events for residents — and completing our college coursework, of course. Even the interview process to land a sought-after spot was challenging.

Preparation for the role required training, teamwork and a handful of certifications. We completed first aid and CPR courses. We enthusiastically practiced the proper way to use a fire extinguisher. And we learned how to de-escalate roommate conflicts, which were often sparked by a thermostat setting or an unkempt kitchen sink.

We promoted athletic events and art gallery openings. Hooked hungry residents into attending start-of-semester building meetings with the offer of free pizza. Lamented a lack of attendance when few showed up to our activities. And we arranged for entertainingly informative programs about alcohol safety and sexual wellness, thanks to partnerships with UCFPD and Wellness & Health Promotion Services (respectively ... and separately).

Essentially, our job as RAs was to seek out and sort through the abundant opportunities offered at UCF and give our neighbors a welcoming place to meet up, hang out and gain a sense of community.

There were independent residents, who rarely needed assistance. Forgetful residents, who regularly left their apartments without a key and needed to be let in. Homesick residents, who needed a hug or a high five. And of course there were unruly residents, who needed a visit from UCFPD to deal with various violations, including — yes — a flaming pizza box in the stairwell.

One of the things that stands out to me all these years later was how different the RAs were. Sure, we were all in college — all Knights — but our backgrounds, majors, interests and goals were wonderfully diverse. While many jobs bring together people with similar

talents and skills, RAs are a motley crew, united by a passion to guide and care and create.

A schoolteacher and a biologist. A graphic designer and an engineer. A social worker and a copywriter. These were just a few of our future careers. It was like *The Breakfast Club* meets MTV's *Real World*, complete with drama and hijinks, courtship and loss, evening salsa lessons and late-night *Dance Dance Revolution* competitions.

Twenty years later, I still look back fondly on my time as an RA. And I'm still in touch with many of those friends. The fearless ones who raced paddle-less canoes on Lake Claire. The spontaneous ones who slid through rainy day mud piles in the courtyard. And the patient ones who tolerated my weekly watching of *The West Wing* while on duty in the community center.

I'm glad I took a chance on a new challenge — a new responsibility. That leap continues to have positive ripple effects today. And I know it sounds a bit nerdy, but I am so proud to have been an RA. Lake Claire forever.

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