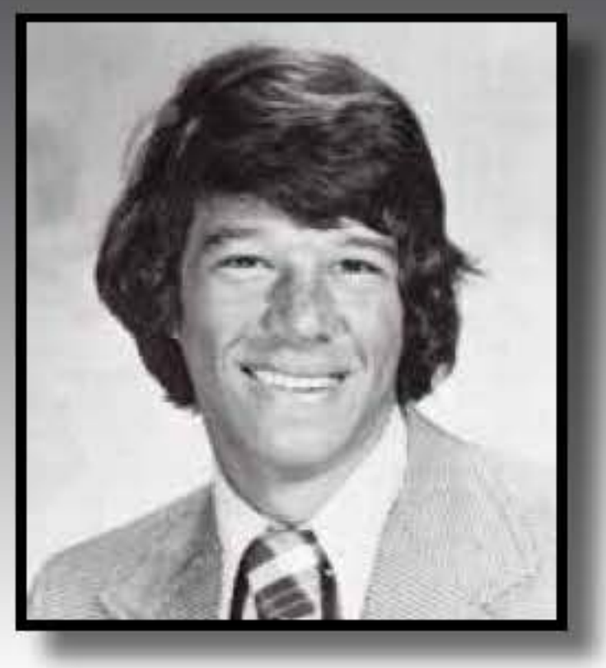


Eric Bleke • Atlanta, Georgia

My introduction to Westminster was in the summer of 1968. I had just finished 6th grade at Tuxedo School and needed summer school for a little extra help with math. I had a great experience and asked if I could go to school there. According to my parents, just a few weeks before the start of fall semester they made a phone call and was told there was room for me. I was accepted right away. The tuition was $800.00. The Westminster admissions process has changed a lot since then!

When I first arrived, I didn't know anyone except Guy Long, an old childhood friend. I quickly made more new friends, and my Westminster experience was under way. My academic experience at Westminster was fantastic. Looking back, several teachers and leaders really stand out in my memory: Dave Drake, Frank Finsthwait, Dr. Lauderdale, Mr. Shields, Frank Boggs, Dr. Ramsey and Mr. Patton. But I can honestly say that I liked and respected all my teachers. How fortunate we all were to have such great mentors, an advantage that became very evident when I was in college and realized how well Westminster had prepared me.

Sports was a big part of my Westminster experience. Starting in 7th grade, I made the basketball team under Coach Perkins. I played basketball every season thereafter and got to play on some very good teams. My varsity seasons, under Coach Van Leer, were especially good as we were consistently one of the top-ranked teams in the state. During the summer, I played soccer with the Westminster summer team, Lynx United. We played against some of the best talent in the state of Georgia and typically prevailed. Because basketball and soccer seasons conflicted, I wasn't able to play both basketball and soccer for Westminster. However, my senior year I was asked to join the soccer team for the state playoffs. It was a great team. We finished 2nd in the state. Coach Bob Sims was an outstanding coach – I felt very fortunate to get to play for him.

Perhaps my happiest memories are the lifetime friendships I formed with my classmates. To this day, I often get together with my high school friends. In high school we all had nicknames, and we still answer to those names today: Burner, BeeWee, Chuck, Geller, Gooey, Gor, Hoov, JD, PT, Raw, Strick-9, T-boy, the IPTAYs. I sometimes wonder what people must think when they overhear a bunch of 65-year-old men calling each other by these nicknames. The names all have stories behind them, but a stranger would never understand.

A big part of my lasting Westminster friendships involves golf. In particular, a group of us have competed annually in an international competition known as the Real Ryder Cup. For about 20 years we have travelled across the pond to play (and often defeat) a team of European friends on courses in Scotland, Ireland, and England. It's a great tradition and a testament to our lasting high school friendships.

My greatest Westminster accomplishment was in 10th grade when I met Emily Manchester. Blonde hair, blue eyes, great smile, so pretty – totally out of my league. We started dating and never quit. In 1980 we got married – although some of my good friends accused us of being married long before that. Between 1986 and 1989 we had three boys: Michael, Taylor and Andrew. They have brought us, and continue to bring, great joy. We now have five grandchildren: Emma Duke, Bo, George, Lore and Mina. It's great to be a grandparent – we love spending time with them and watching them grow up!



Real Ryder Cup at Prestwick Golf Club, Scotland 2013
(L-R) Me, John Dryman '70, Chip Sites,
Tommy Tift, Ched Hoover, and Bob Strickland



Taylor, Emily, Michael, Andrew, Dixie, and me, 2004



(L-R) Andrew, Emily, me, Campbell, Michael,
Cera, and Taylor, Easter 2016



Emily with Mina Bleke (6 mos)



Emma Duke Bleke (5)



Bo Bleke (4)



George Bleke (2)



Lore Bleke (2)

Emily and I have lived in Atlanta since 1992 after some great years in Greenville, SC and Dallas, TX. I built a career as a tech entrepreneur and Emily started in interior design, moved to full-time Mom, then to a trunk show clothing business. When we aren't in Atlanta, we love spending time at the beach and in the mountains.

I have such positive memories of my Westminster experience. It was, and still is, one of the foundations of my life.