

# XAVIER

WINTER 2011

## Forces of Nature

*Shane  
H204es*

2010-2011

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

INSID





The tools of Shane Hughes' research included a 25-year-old car, mechanical skills and a trip to the Yukon.

# NORTHERN EXPOSURE

In the name of research, one student set off for the Yukon in a rebuilt car—that doubled as a hotel

THE ACADEMIC HIGHLIGHT OF SHANE HUGHES' college career began, of all places, on Craig's List. For sale: 1986 Subaru GL, manual transmission, 218,000 miles, \$600.

Perfect. It met his two requirements—four-wheel drive and within his college-student budget. He bought it, changed the oil and transmission fluid, flushed the radiator, replaced the outer tie rods, adjusted the engine timing, replaced the timing belt, rebuilt the carburetor, and added four new tires and a windshield.

Then, in a car that was built three years

before he was born and had more than 200,000 miles on it, Hughes set out—alone—for the Yukon Territory at the edge of the Arctic Circle to meet and study the native Han people of the First Nation tribes. The trip was part of a Brueggeman Fellowship, which sends students on research projects around the world. He was curious to know how the Han were preserving their culture, and the only way to find out was to go there and ask them.

So he put his rebuilt car in gear on June 21, and took off, making his way through the

Klondike highways into Alaska and the Yukon.

It was an adventure only a college student could—or probably would—embark upon. Hughes, a senior majoring in history and theology, dined on canned food, a lot of beans and the best Oreo cookies ever. When the front wheel bearings on the Subaru went bad, he changed them in the parking lot of a Napa Auto Parts store in Montana.

The car soon became his home. Around 1:00 a.m. somewhere in South Dakota, the thunder and lightning drove Hughes from his



tent into the refuge of his car. While he was dozing off, he felt a small tugging on his pajama legs. Convinced it was a mouse, he zipped up his sleeping bag and flicked on the flashlight. But the creature was gone. He didn't really mind that the mouse, like himself, was using his car to get out of the rain. But he didn't want it suddenly scrambling up his shins. So the next day, he wore his pant legs tucked into his socks. It didn't matter. He never saw the little guy again.

The mouse was the first of many wild creatures Hughes encountered, along with bison, elk, caribou, moose and grizzly bears. But research was the main objective, so Hughes' first stop was Dawson City, Alaska. The Han are an indigenous people who relied on hunting and fishing, mostly caribou and salmon, before gold rush prospectors and settlers cut the trees, thinned the game and salmon runs, and built cities where Han people now live.

"I was disappointed in what I found," he says. "I started at the cultural center. But everything seemed to go downhill from there. The language is all but gone. There are only two people left who speak it fluently in Dawson."

He interviewed about 15 Han people. None live the way their ancestors did but instead live in modern houses, work jobs and buy their food at the grocery store. "There is a desire to preserve tradition, but it's now more of an acceptance that it's going away and not coming back," he says. "The older generation I talked to, I got the sense their culture is going away and they're sad."

He put 10,000 miles on the Subaru, and except for a broken exhaust pipe that roared the whole way home, the car was intact. So was he, if not a bit thinner and sleep-deprived.

It took Hughes a while to realize the extent of what he'd done. "While reading about the Han in Cincinnati, they seemed so distant. And then getting there and realizing these people actually exist and meeting them in person was really extraordinary."

Now he catches himself thinking back to his days in the gold country, where the sun never sets and motorists usually find themselves alone on the limestone highways, wondering what delightful gift of nature will surprise them next.

"One time I had my windows down, and I came on a bear on the side of the road. I stopped. Suddenly he sits up really fast, and I rolled up the windows. But he was just rolling over."

To Hughes' relief, this wild creature stayed where he belonged—outside the car.

FRANCE GRIGGS SLOAT

## Visitors

Xavier students have found plenty of education outside of the classroom this year, with a wide variety of speakers on campus, including:

- James Fallows, a national correspondent for The Atlantic, President Carter's chief speechwriter and former editor of *U.S. News & World Report*.
- Richard A. Clarke, who has advised three presidents on security, counter-terrorism and cyber-security.
- Sonia Nazario, who earned a Pulitzer Prize for her book *Enrique's Journey*.
- Lani Guinier, the first tenured African-American woman professor at Harvard Law School.
- Sarah Niemoeller, who survived the Nazi Gestapo and went on to marry the famed theologian Pastor Martin Niemoeller.
- Pop singer Mike Posner.
- *Washington Post* Middle East reporter Robin Wright.
- Pakistan Ambassador to the U.S. Akbar Ahmed.



Jason (far right) is finding his own identity at Xavier.

## DOUBLE DOUBLE

Growing up in the spotlight with three brothers who look alike, Jason Furtick is enjoying his anonymity at Xavier. "The great part about Xavier is people don't recognize me," Jason says.

Anyone watching television in the mid-1990s might remember a Tide commercial featuring the Furtick quads rolling around in the dirt. The boys also did commercials for Levi's jeans and Wendy's. "We walk up to Dave Thomas and say, 'Chicken nuggets, please.'"

They also appeared on talk shows and became a favorite of Oprah's, who invited them to her last show in October.

Conceived without fertility drugs, the quadruplets gained a lot of attention. Yes, they were cute. But cute only gets you so far. The boys grew up, finished high school, and went to separate colleges. Jason initially picked Kentucky State.

It was OK. But when he visited a friend at Xavier, he thought, "This is what college should be like." So he transferred as a communications major.

He rarely lets on who he is, and most students on campus today are too young to remember. "It lets me focus on what I think are more important things, and lets people form opinions of me without preconceived notions."

## RUGBY RANKING



For years, the Xavier men's rugby team sported a reputation for two things: fun and beer, although not necessarily in that order. In recent years, though, the sport has taken on a new emphasis: winning. Last season the team stepped up a notch from being just a club sport and began playing at the Division II level. The move came with what the team describes as "setbacks and a clear jolt of reality." But the experience and some serious off-season weight training is paying off. The team got off to a 4-0-1 start and garnered its first national ranking in October at No. 25 from RugbyMag.com. The site described Xavier as a team that was "winning too much to be ignored."