

MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY
ALUMNUS

BULLDOG COUPLE SHARES ADVENTURE OF A LIFETIME

By Sid Salter

Photography by Steve Brandon

Among Mississippi State University alumni, perhaps the most successful and certainly the most prolific big game hunters are Steve and Patsy Fowlkes Brandon, who split time between their homes in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the Becker Bottom community in Monroe County, Mississippi near Amory.

Yet Steve's "weapon" of choice is a digital camera and his trophies are some of the most phenomenal wildlife and nature photographs in the world. Over the past 15 years, Steve and Patsy have been on photo safaris to exotic, challenging destinations including: 11 African countries on 10 trips; Antarctica, the entire length of the Amazon River, the Galapagos Islands; India; Easter Island; Australia; 3 trips to the Arctic; Patagonia; Costa Rica; and many others.



Through Steve's photographs and both their programs about nature to schools and civic clubs, Steve and Patsy have become in demand as speakers. Steve's photographs are often published, and a gallery in Chattanooga features his work. His photography has been viewed in gallery exhibits and one-man shows including one recently at Mississippi State. For a complete look at Steve's photo safaris, visit www.kingdomsafari.com.

Patsy said: "I had always taken photos of people, but Steve gravitated toward animals and nature. He has a really good 'eye' and he sees details that I wouldn't otherwise notice. I look at the big picture, but Steve sees, and patiently waits on, the details."

While his photographic "eye" remains a God-given talent, Steve had a natural affinity toward photography as his grandmother and uncle were both professional photographers. Their collection of over 100,000 photos depicting agricultural technical advancements and the Delta society from 1925-1985 is now part of a collection held by the Southern Media Archive at the University of Mississippi.

Raised on a family farm in the Arkansas Delta near Helena, Steve attended Mississippi State University on an academic scholarship and graduated in 1972 with a degree in plant pathology and weed science and in 1973 with a master's degree in weed science. While at Mississippi State he served two terms as student director of the Colvard Student Union and was elected to the Student Association Senate. He was honored by inclusion in Omicron Delta Kappa, Blue Key, Gamma Beta Phi and Who's Who.



Upon graduation from MSU, Steve returned to Helena and worked in his family agribusiness, primarily responsible for managing the family's agricultural supply center. Seven years after returning to his family business in Arkansas, Steve became the U.S. representative for the French technology company Sigoure, based in Roanne, France. He would later join Westinghouse working with the nation's electric utilities in planning and implementing new power plant generating projects.

Steve's career again changed when he was offered an equity position in SPEC Group, a science and engineering staffing company servicing nuclear and fossil electric utilities, construction companies, and equipment manufacturers including his previous employer Westinghouse. SPEC Group later merged with TMP Worldwide, with Steve serving as a senior vice president of international operations in an organization with 292 offices in 32 countries including its well-known interactive subsidiary Monster.com. Steve retired in 2002, but continues to consult in the area of organizational management of large companies.

Patsy Fowlkes Brandon hails from Amory and is the daughter of Bill Fowlkes, a 1941 graduate of Mississippi State and the niece of Tom and Hal Fowlkes, 1935 and 1938 graduates.

Focused almost solely on academics, Patsy graduated in just three and a half years with a degree in biochemistry in 1974. One of her academic papers, co-published with Robert Wilson in 1975, advanced the development of commercial catfish feed in the early stages of the catfish industry in Mississippi.

Patsy later did post-graduate studies and research at the College of Medical Sciences, University of Tennessee at Memphis, where she was president of the Student Body, and later at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Patsy later moved into the pharmaceutical sales arena first at Mead Johnson, then Merck, and finally spending 19 years at Schering Plough until its acquisition by Merck.

Patsy served as regional director overseeing Schering Plough's products prescribed by physicians including her flagship product Claritin. During her time at Schering Plough, Patsy received every sales recognition award given by the company, including being only one of three people during her tenure to win the company's top award twice. Patsy was the only Schering Plough manager asked to serve on a team to build a new organization from the ground up for the cardiovascular drug Integrilin.

A mutual friend of Steve and Patsy's, who knew both had graduated from Mississippi State, introduced the couple in Nashville in the fall of 1998 to go on a blind date. The blind date led to a second date in which Steve had tickets to a Vanderbilt vs. Tennessee football game and a Vandy vs. Ohio State basketball game later that night. Steve invited her to attend either game, but Patsy suggested they attend both games.

"I knew I had found a keeper," Steve laughed. Within the next two years, the couple married.

Steve and Patsy support Mississippi State University both in the academic and athletic areas. They are recognized by the MSU Foundation at the J. Charles Lee Society level, and by the Bulldog Club at their Champions Level. Additionally, the couple has endowed an academic scholarship.

Their donation for the renovation of Colvard Student Union led to the naming of Fowlkes Auditorium honoring Patsy's father and uncles, and their support of Women's Athletics led to the naming of The Brandon Press Box at the Nusz Softball Field, and the future Brandon Media Center at Humphrey Coliseum.

Steve and Patsy also give freely of their time with both speaking regularly to groups at the university. Steve's presentation on "What to Do Today to Get a Job upon Graduation" has been presented to dozens of classes, fraternities, athletic teams and student groups over the past 10 years, and his nature programs are always well received.

In 2006, Patsy was honored by the Southeastern Conference when chosen to represent Mississippi State during the Women's SEC Basketball Tournament in Little Rock, Arkansas. Patsy's longtime commitment to her university, as well as significant contributions to the growth, development, promotion and support of the MSU Women's Basketball program were commended as she received this special honor.

In 2018, Patsy was honored by the university as one of nine Distinguished Fellows for the College of Agriculture for her outstanding career in the pharmaceutical industry. Patsy serves on the College of Agriculture and Chemistry Department Advisory Boards.

Steve serves on the Executive Committee of the Alumni Association's National Board of Directors. The couple has hosted one of the association's annual send-off parties in their home since the inception of the events, and are active in their local alumni chapter, with Patsy serving as President. Additionally, Patsy was a charter member of Women About Maroon, a women's group promoting the university.

Steve has two children, Warren Brandon (Kelly) and Amy Waggoner (Neal) along with five grandchildren, Ella Brandon (13), Emory Brandon (11), Kate Waggoner (10), Beau Brandon (8), and Avery Waggoner (7).

