

# ALABAMA ALUMNI

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## Ramsey Family on Tour

Student Winners Broaden Horizons



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# Family Ties *to* Great Ideas

by Jan Pruitt Duvall



ETHAN TIDMORE

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and broadening  
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of Alabama  
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Ramsey Award  
and the Great  
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Every January, the University of Alabama Awards Committee faces the challenging task of selecting the recipients of the University's four premier student awards. To be honored with the Sullivan, the Ramsey, the Mayer, or the Bloom is to have earned a crowning mark of distinction. But winning the John Fraser Ramsey Award not only bestows recognition and a cash award on the recipient, it also makes that student the newest member of the Ramsey Family, an amazingly diverse tribe of previous recipients, lifelong friends and former students of the Capstone's late, legendary "Doc" Ramsey. In celebration of their mentor's love of life and learning and his remarkable generosity, the family presents their new relation with a welcoming gift of round-trip trans-Atlantic airfare, a Eurailpass and connections to "relatives" in the countries whose history John Ramsey taught so memorably at the University from 1935 to 1977.

The tour was the brainchild of two members of the board of directors of the Ramsey Award,

Jim Caldwell, '61, MBA '68, and John Harris, '79. The desire that motivated them is a refrain in the family: to make the same difference for new generations of students that John Ramsey made for them. And in a world where international understanding is an increasingly necessary skill as well as a source of cultural enrichment, the Great Ideas Tour can make a significant difference in a student's life.

"We named the Great Ideas Tour after Doc's two-semester, senior-level course called 'Great Ideas of Western Civilization,'" says Caldwell, vice president for new business in the F-15 division of Boeing in St. Louis. "Dr. Ramsey stimulated us to learn about our cultural roots in the Middle East and Europe. Whenever alumni travel in an area they studied with Doc, they do it with an informed appreciation of the history, art, science, literature, music and architecture of the place."

Recognizing and broadening cultural appreciation among University of Alabama students is the



*Ethan Tidmore,  
Ramsey '98  
recipient,  
climbed the  
bell tower of  
St. Paul's  
Cathedral for  
this view across  
the Thames.*

goal of the Ramsey Award and the Great Ideas Tour. New College graduate Harris took his first trip to Europe in 1973 under Ramsey's tutelage. "He helped me plan my itinerary, which during that summer included London, Paris, the Swiss Alps, Monaco, Rome, Olympia, Athens, Istanbul and Vienna," Harris said. "He made valuable suggestions about everything from museums to restaurants: 'I can't recall the name but it's just behind the Biblioteque Nationale. Try the boeuf bourgignon and a bottle of Côte du Rhône. I had a memorable lunch there in the summer of 1937. If Jacques is still the waiter, give him my regards.'"

"With the exception of two days in Bimini and a half hour in Juarez I had never before been out of the United States. Armed with a passport with the ink barely dry, a Eurailpass, a still-pristine copy of *Europe on \$5 a Day* and \$600 in traveler's checks (of which \$150 was a gift from John Ramsey), I boarded a commercial airliner for the first time in my life. Seven hours later I arrived in London, disoriented, bewildered, intimidated and wonderfully excited. The following three months, along with the early months of my second European stay (begun in 1977 and still continuing), were certainly the most formative periods of my life."

Harris, who was born and bred in Woodlawn, Alabama, now lives in Austria and has established a group of eponymous fitness centers with facilities in Vienna, Brussels and London. He returns to Tuscaloosa for the Ramsey banquet almost every April.

"Doc and I corresponded regularly from the time I returned to Europe until shortly before his

death. He provided historical anecdotes about places I was visiting. He recommended books to read, paintings to see, and which foods and wines had to be sampled to round out the experience.

"I was delighted when I was asked to join the Ramsey board in 1992, because I knew it would give me the chance to pass on to Ramsey Award recipients some of the opportunities which Doc had given me."

England, Scotland, France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany and Belgium were points on the itinerary of Mallory Hayes Rottinghaus, the first Ramsey winner to receive the new generation of opportunities provided in John Ramsey's honor.

"My main objective for the tour was to explore the actual places and landscapes of my historical and literary studies. I tried to get an overview of the sites most important to Western civilization with the hope of exploring more in depth on return visits," said Rottinghaus.

"There were two most powerful experiences of my tour. The first took place as I stood on the Culloden battlefield in northern Scotland. I had just taken Dr. Hill's Gaelic history course, and standing on that almost deserted moor, I said to myself, 'This is where it happened. Right here a people and a way of life were wiped out.' I had that same powerful moment of emotion and similar thoughts thousands of miles and 200 years in historical time later standing at Dachau concentration camp in southern Germany. These two moments were not the most pleasant of my tour, but they are the ones that stay with me because until I had actually stood in those places, it was difficult to truly imagine the horror and reality of





it all."

Rottinghaus, who returned to England as a Rhodes Scholar, says that the tour "had a profound impact on aspects of my life that I never would have imagined before going. Obviously, it expanded my knowledge of geography and the places which have shaped our collective history. More unexpectedly, the tour enriched my connection to the history of my religion and strengthened my faith life as I spent a good deal of my month in Europe traveling alone."



*Tidmore and host Dr. Bill Barnard, professor emeritus of history and member of the board of directors of the Ramsey Award, in his flat in Oxford, England.*

## John Fraser Ramsey 1907 — 1983



As history professor, fraternity adviser, A Club secretary, and selfless friend, John Fraser Ramsey made an impact on The University of Alabama that continues through all those whose lives he touched. His legacy is honored in the award that bears his name. Volumes could be devoted to his accomplishments, good works and talent for composing risqué limericks, but these paragraphs from the resolution passed by the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences upon his retirement give the essence of the man.

"During the [42 years of his tenure] Professor Ramsey had a profound influence on the University. To the classroom he brought a wide range of professional knowledge, a grace and wit that was peculiarly his own and, at the same time, a demand for a high standard of academic performance from his students. Those who attended his lectures found to their surprise, and sometimes to their dismay, that John Ramsey's version of history included art, music, literature and philosophy, and that he was as knowledgeable about Mozart as he was about Montesquieu.

"Professor Ramsey insisted that his students, his colleagues in the history department and the University at large pursue the highest standards of academic excellence, and in the many capacities in which he served . . . he never lost sight of his objective. . . .

"His circle of friends and admirers is so wide and varied as to defy description. They are of all ages and from all walks of life, and they know him as a bon vivant, master teller of tales and gourmet cook. He is tolerant of their intellectual and moral infirmities while at the same time maintaining his own rigorous moral and ethical code."

The John Fraser Ramsey Award was the first Universitywide endowed fund. Now that the corpus of the award has reached a substantial level, the board of directors of the Ramsey Award, chaired by Tuscaloosan and Phi Kappa Psi fraternity brother Jay Massingill, is working to endow the Great Ideas Tour, which is currently funded by annual contributions.

If you are a contemporary or former student of Doc Ramsey who would like to be included in the annual dinner, or if you would like information about giving, write to the board of directors of the Ramsey Award, c/o Jan Pruitt Duvall, Box 870144, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0144, or e-mail [jprudvall@ur.ua.edu](mailto:jprudvall@ur.ua.edu).



Mallory  
Ann Hayes  
Rottinghaus,  
Ramsey '94  
recipient, took the  
first official Great  
Ideas Tour. She  
spent a month  
visiting sites  
whose history she  
had studied, and  
poses here before  
Edinburgh  
Castle with a  
member of the  
Highland Guard.



The 1995 Ramsey recipient Darren Mowry's goals for his tour were "to see some of the most exciting and beautiful places on Earth, to take in as many nontourist sites and sounds as possible, and meet as many people as I could. I did all of that, but would have to say that the last turned out to be the source of my best memories and most exciting times. Standing in amazing cathedrals and listening to beautiful music from pipe organs that were older than our country was a regular occurrence on the trip, but my time drinking wine and discussing politics with an incredible couple who lived outside of Brussels competes with the cathedrals for memories."

Mowry's tour took him from London through the Chunnel to Brussels, then to Vienna, and then to Paris on the Orient Express. "The Great Ideas Tour was not my first trip to Europe, but it was my first trip alone and by far the most exciting—and scary—trip so far," Mowry said.

"The scariest point of the trip was running to catch a train from Belgium to Vienna and realizing after I was seated in my compartment, that my wallet, including all my cash, passport and ID was gone. I grabbed my backpack and ran to the terminal where I searched frantically for what seemed like hours. Just before the train pulled away from the station, a little old lady walked right up to me with an outstretched hand. There was my wallet." Mowry thanked her with a smile and jumped on the train. "Not a thing was missing or even opened in the wallet. She had seen the passport photo and had been looking for me, too."

**W**hen asked to share

worst moments from the trip, almost all the Ramsey winners recount similar misadventures that became learning experiences. Scott Dickerson, the 1997 recipient who traveled the Netherlands, Spain, Austria and the Czech Republic in the summer of 1998, said, "My worst moment was the first lesson I learned about backpacking. I arrived in Madrid at eight in the morning thinking that would give me plenty of time to find a place to stay that night. I wound up having to go all over Madrid with my backpack, which was heavy, before I could find a hostel that wasn't completely booked. It was my second day in Europe. I had flown into Amsterdam and then spent 12 hours on a train to get to Spain."

"Madrid is an incredibly daunting city, if you don't know your way around—it's huge, compared to most of the other cities I'd been in. I wandered around in a circle in the Puerto del Sol for an hour and a half before I figured out where I was. It was really disorienting. That's my worst moment. Then I arrived in Vienna before John Harris and before John Harris's key, so I played the same game in Vienna. But by that point I'd come to grips with ambiguity. I could tell myself, 'I'll find a hostel. I'll figure out a way.' And by then I had a backup plan. I knew that if worse comes to worse, you take your Eurailpass, hop on a train, spend the night on it. Just go somewhere else and come back!"

Dickerson, an honor student graduating in computer engineering who spent the summer of 1997 doing research at Chiba University in Japan, is also a proficient blues guitarist. He exemplifies the calibre of students who are recognized by the Ramsey Award: immersed in study, dedicated to service, deeply involved in campus activities and already packing planners that show few unbooked hours. The change in perspective afforded by the Great Ideas Tour struck a common chord in Dickerson, Mowry and Ethan Tidmore, the 1998 Ramsey winner who traveled in England, France, Switzerland, Germany and Austria and found himself caught up in a celebration of Brazilian soccer fans on the Champs de Elysees during the 1998 World Cup.

"The trip was life-changing for me," said Tidmore, who is spending his senior year at the University completing his studies and fulfilling the demanding job of president of the Capstone Men and Women. "Just that three weeks. I hesitate to speculate what I would be doing now if I hadn't taken the trip, but I probably would have already applied to law school and I'd be on my way next year and that would be that. I think that would



have been a fine career, but I've re-evaluated, and now I'm looking more as to what will give me that sense of adventure and mission again that I had on the trip. I was out there having a great time, but I also was accomplishing a lot of self-development."

"This trip opens up a whole new continent to people," Dickerson said. "Students are really busy—I think people forget how busy students are—and the Ramseys are people who are so involved on campus that our world's really small. The trip, especially at this time in our lives, reminds us that there's so much more to the world than just college and student involvement. It broadens our perspective and it's a breather for the people who take it. Even now, I'm immersed again in engineering, and talking about the trip is a reminder of how important it is to take some time to just enjoy life. We're not the kind of students who usually take breathers. We're the kind that somebody has to hit over the head and say 'you gotta stop and re-examine.'"

Ramsey board member and UA professor emeritus of history Dr. Bill Barnard has hosted several Great Ideas tourists at his home in Oxford, England. "To walk the streets of London, Paris, Vienna, Rome or Madrid is to absorb something of the presence of the Western past in the present," he said. "John Ramsey had the gift of opening new worlds of thought and culture to his students. I can think of no better way to share a sense of John's values than to provide talented students the opportunities afforded by the Great Ideas Tour." Barnard's generosity echoes that displayed by Ramsey during his life, and carried on in his name by his friends now.

The amenities of the Great Ideas Tour—though not the funding—were made retroactive for 1993 Ramsey recipient and medical student Will Bearden. "I wanted an authentic experience off the tourist track, so I tried to spend a lot of my time in smaller towns," Bearden said. "People are amazingly open in a relaxed setting. I plan to specialize in ophthalmology, so with John Harris's help I incorporated a three-week rotation in the clinic of ophthalmic surgeon Dr. Susanne Binder in Vienna, and spent five weeks traveling."

Back in Tuscaloosa last month, the awards committee carried out its difficult but enjoyable charge and selected from many well-qualified candidates the winner of the 1999 Ramsey Award. That person and the winners of the other three premier awards will learn in February at a surprise ceremony and banquet of the honor they have received. In April, the winner will meet the



rest of the Ramsey Family at a dinner celebrating the life and influence of John Ramsey and introducing the new recipient to the high standards of scholarship, friendship and integrity by which he lived and which cause his memory to be so honored. If this recipient is like those who have gone before, he or she will be blown away—and will return every possible year for the family reunion.

"The Ramsey dinner gives me an event around which to plan my annual visits back to campus," Rottinghaus said. "Being a Ramsey winner allows me to meet and spend time with some amazing people, both the other winners and the faculty and friends of Dr. Ramsey."

While the Ramsey winners come from a wide variety of disciplines and have very different personalities and interests, they are kin in their appreciation for the honor they have received and their belief that the Great Ideas Tour has opened doors in their lives—and so has let in a quantity of light.

Doc would like that.

Jan Pruitt Duvall, '77, MA '97, is associate director of Communications.



*Above: Scott Dickerson, Ramsey '97, before the spires of Sagrada Familia in Barcelona.*

*Inset: Will Bearden, Ramsey '93, during his medical rotation with Dr. Susanne Binder in Vienna.*