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Teacher spreads Marshall message to Texas students

BY CHUCK MCGILL | THUNDERING HERD ILLUSTRATED

In the opening scene of the 2006 movie “We Are Marshall,” an actress talks about the river that cuts through Huntington, West Virginia, then the nearby steel mill, then the school, and finally the fountain that sits in the heart of campus.

Long before Kristin Cade stepped foot inside the Mountain State and witnessed those places with her own eyes, she fell in love with them. The connection was born from a long distance — more than 1,200 miles — as Cade, a native of Texas, sat down for the first time and watched

Upon meeting Cade, there is no hint that she has never witnessed a game at Joan C. Edwards Stadium. But there she was on Nov. 18 at her hometown Alamodome when Marshall came to town to play UTSA. Finally, Cade could throw on her Kelly green and cheer on the Thundering Herd in person.

the movie that depicted the 1970 Marshall University plane crash and the rebirth of the football program.

"I thought it was the greatest story I had ever heard," Cade said.

Cade's heart was touched. Her passion for a school she did not attend — or had even visited — began to grow. She researched the university and she began to follow the football program. Then, the San Antonio-based journalism teacher had an idea.

She'd create a lesson plan revolving around the school and community that overcame the deaths of 75 people.

"I thought it was the coolest vehicle to teach all the different types of journalistic writing," Cade said. "I do

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this big unit in my class and it is their final exam. You're a newspaper reporter who has to report on the crash."

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"I got so excited and we saw the players and we saw the team, I cried," she said. "I got teary-eyed. I looked at

my husband and I was like, 'This is kind of ridiculous,' but I got so emotional because it is the saddest story, but it's a triumph of the human spirit."

Cade finally visited Huntington two years ago. Her husband planned a Civil War road trip, and she took a look at the map and requested a stop in West Virginia.

"We had to find a way to go to Marshall," Cade said.

Cade and her husband toured the campus and visited the fountain, a special moment for her because she has witnessed the annual fountain ceremony on the anniversary of the crash for years.

"I live stream the ceremony in my class," she said. "I have really good kids, but even when you have a little stinker in class, when they're doing the memorial, every kid in class is mesmerized. They pay attention."

Cade and her husband stopped by the Shewey Building, the structure that sits beyond the north end zone and houses the locker rooms and football offices, where they met Director of Athletics Mike Hamrick.

"He's super nice and he tells me all of the back stories of the school and the football program," Cade said. "I have used those stories in my class the past two years, and it was the coolest experience ever."

Cade was born in 1968, two years prior to the crash, but did not become aware of the story until "We Are Marshall" debuted. She was born in San Angelo, Texas, and attended Angelo State, but now she is devoted to Marshall.

"I love this university," she said. "I wish I had gone to school at Marshall."

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Cade has a journalism degree and initially embarked on a career as a sports anchor. When she lost her job, she turned to education. She

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Kristin Cade

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has taught for 25 years, the last 13 at Alamo Heights High School in San Antonio.

And her friends, colleagues and students have no doubt about her love for Marshall University. She posts about the school on Facebook and follows student-athletes on social media websites.

"I know you're like, 'OK, she's crazy.' I'm really not. I'm an educated woman. I have a lot of redeeming qualities," Cade said. "But this is Marshall, and I feel like I'm Marshall. I really do. I feel like I'm part of the university even though, technically, I have no connections to the school."

"I have instilled in my students why this is the coolest story ever, and they love it now. It's like I'm passing it down and that makes me the happiest person ever."