
By Robert Salvo

Sometimes failure fuels success.

Carter C. Hudgins was a sophomore at Hampden-Sydney College taking a survey course on American history. He was assigned a paper on the history of the Jamestown settlement. Simple enough, he thought; not only was his father, Carter L. Hudgins, part of the team that was actively working on discovering the settlement’s history, but young Carter had spent the summer working a field school at the archeology site.

"I failed," he says with a laugh. "I took the opportunity to craft this paper using what I had learned working at Jamestown and the discoveries we were making there. ... The teacher gave me an F because none of what I had been citing had been published. Here we are in the field rewriting the history book, and then I try to bring that in the classroom with this traditional professor ... (he) gave me an F."

While the "F" was merely frustrating, it set off a spark in Hudgins. "That was a wake-up call for me to say, 'Holy mackerel, history is alive.' It’s the daily work that changes us and influences us." By being out in the field and putting in the work, young Carter really had achieved what many college students only set as if they were true—he knew more on the subject than the professor. That was the moment he decided to dedicate his career to history. It doesn’t take long to see his legacy in his work today. It impressed, as he put it "a little bit of ‘bad-boy’ attitude to change the traditional understanding of a place. I’d like to think that and my staff bring that to Drayton Hall."

It’s a welcome attitude for a landmark that can be a two-step stop for the visitor. Although the staff is excellent, most of the Drayton Hall experience is the remarkable, but empty, home. "A lot of folks think about Drayton Hall as an empty house, but we have well over a million
Hudgins, cont.

He's just as enthusiastic about the "we" part of the question: what excites him most about coming to work, he doesn't hesitate: It's the staff. Almost every question elicits a response about how effective and transformative his crew at Drayton Hall is. "The best in the business," he says, noting the wide range of duties Drayton Hall's staff are called upon to perform. There's much more to the staff's work than just historic preservation. "And the people here are always willing to help," he adds. "I think that's what makes Drayton Hall as an office is, " he says. "It's really quite an experience." And the children who visit Drayton Hall are often amazed by the history and culture that they encounter here.

"It's important that we keep these stories alive, so that future generations can learn about them," he says. "And it's important that we keep these stories alive for ourselves, too."