

REMARKS TO CLASS OF 1961 – 50<sup>TH</sup> REUNION  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
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By David Grigg

In September 1957, Chapel Hill was beautiful, but it seemed unseasonably hot to the Freshman Class. Most of the girls were not here yet, their arrival delayed until the fall of '59. The campus was huge, stretching from Graham Memorial to Kenan Stadium, from The Scuttlebutt to the new Cobb Dorm.

Their academic backgrounds varied, but the typical freshman was the best North Carolina high schools had to offer. They were from Charlotte, Raleigh, Asheville, Wilmington and Greensboro, but also from Snow Hill, Murphy and Ahoskie. Many of the towns represented, or even counties, had fewer citizens than the University's 7,038 student body.

There were other folks as well. International students, students from across the South, from the Midwest, New York, out West too.

There were prep school boys. They seemed more worldly and better prepared academically. They turned out to be good guys.

We signed up for classes 'til noon on Saturday and chemistry lab on Friday afternoon. Books were huge and costly, the syllabus intimidating. There were a lot of folks smarter than you. Classes were scary. As one math professor said "Hold on to your seats boys we're getting ready to fly." It was easy to get behind. There were professors and advisors, like Dr. J. R. Caldwell, who took time to talk to you and really cared.

Some students were athletes as well and spent more time on the practice field than they did in class. Not just football. Who would have thought that the swim team would spend hours running the track.

By best count, all of us were white, except for three. The three were pretty isolated, and not much said about it. They were pretty much confined to campus because the theater or the restaurants didn't serve them. Almost no one had a car.

Jim Tatum was the new football coach.

That October Bill Aycock became Chancellor. He was likeable, open and took a special interest in students. He once gave me a lesson in economics: the reason good football coaches make more money than good English professors is – supply and demand.

Bill Friday, a person of enormous vision and national stature, was President of the Consolidated University. Ann Queen ran the Y and was a counselor and advocate for students. Ray Jefferies was Assistant Dean of Student Affairs – a person we came to know and love as a friend for fifty (50) years.

Dwight Eisenhower was President. As we started classes he sent federal troops to Little Rock to enforce integration at Central High School. Racial issues were in the forefront throughout our time in Chapel Hill.

The Russians launched Sputnik in October.

We opened the football season with a 26-0 win over Clemson. “WE WON” was the Daily Tar Heel headline as we beat Duke 21-13, the first time in seven years.

We recalled the editor of the Daily Tar Heel. Asian flu swept through the campus, yet classes continued. One night we smelled smoke through the quads – the First Presbyterian Church on Franklin Street burned.

Some things never change: Ike pledged “no extra spending”. At graduation that year, the Tar Heel said “June Graduates Face Tougher Time in Obtaining Jobs”.

The Playmakers presented “No Time for Sergeants”. Tyrone Power and the Ray Anthony Band were on campus. Speakers included Adlai Stevenson, Ayn Rand, Eleanor Roosevelt, Abba Eban, Charles Kuralt and Paul Tillich.

Nikita Khrushchev became Premier of the Soviet Union and Charles DeGaulle Premier, later President, of France.

Pope Pius the XII died the next year. The Chinese Communists started shelling Quemoy and Matsu as the United States sent our fleet to the Formosa Straights to support the Nationalist Chinese. The Cold War was warming up.

We beat Duke again 7-6 in football but lost to State 80-56 in the ACC Basketball Tournament.

Bomb threats interrupted classes.

Castro “liberated” Cuba.

Alaska and Hawaii became the 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> States.

Hurrah! Most of the girls joined us in September of '59. The Daily Tar Heel ran a series of front page photos of “Tar Heel Beauties”.

The girls seemed to be academically a cut above. They were attractive and typically came from the best women's colleges across the South. With only two years to go, they jumped into student activities. They were cheerleaders and in every phase of student government. They were activists, writing for the Daily Tar Heel or picketing for civil rights.

Ike and Nikita Khrushchev were still at it, and Khrushchev declared "God is on our side". A Tar Heel editorial astutely asked "Is Khrushchev Sincere?" The Russians shot down Gary Powers' spy plane and tensions rose.

"Peanuts" and "Pogo" appeared every day on the editorial page of the Tar Heel.

In 1959, we lost coach Jim Tatum as he prepared for the football season. Perhaps as a forecast of things to come, new coach Jim Hickey declared that he was proud of his team in a 20-18 lost to Clemson.

We heard about forever student Al Lowenstein's brave trip to Southwest Africa.

The Playmakers presented "Carousel". The Kingston Trio was here. The UNC-University of Toronto Student Exchange trips began. Students began the long push for a new Student Union.

On campus that year were the Archbishop of Capetown who spoke on growing racial tensions in South Africa, the President of Guinea, Charles Van Doren, of quiz show rigging fame, Robert Oppenheimer, Pete Seeger, Senators Hubert Humphery and Al Gore, Sr., Bette Davis, Carl Sandburg, Frank Graham, Terry Sanford and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke in Hill Hall on the "Struggles for Racial Justice".

Our last year began in the fall of 1960. Enrollment was up to 8,500, including 6,260 undergraduates.

Castro conferred with Khrushchev in New York and looked more like a Communist than a freedom fighter.

It was the year of the 1960 election and the Kennedy-Nixon debates. The Daily Tar Heel endorsed Kennedy, but Kennedy barely won a student poll.

A young Jack Kennedy became President. A young Terry Sanford, Governor of North Carolina.

In football, we lost to State 3-0 but beat Notre Dame 12-7 and Duke 7-6.

Marilyn Monroe left Arthur Miller. Jimmy Hoffa was indicted. The UN set out to stop the violence in the Congo. In April, we stumbled into the Bay of Pigs fiasco. There also seemed to be a growing crisis in Laos that some feared might lead to a Southeast Asia war. The Adolf Eichman trial began. Russia rocketed Yuri Gagarin as the first man into space.

The NCAA hit Frank McGuire's basketball program with a one-year probation for "inadequate and ineffective accounting". Chancellor Aycock was not happy. A young assistant coach, Dean Smith, helped to straighten it all out.

On February 1, 1960, four black NCA&T students insisted on service at Woolworth's in Greensboro, and the sit-ins began. By early 1961, Carolina students were picketing the Carolina Theater.

Students rallied for a new Student Union in front of President Friday's home, the new union to come years later.

The Playmakers presented "South Pacific".

On campus were Nathan Pusey, the President of Harvard University, Dr. Robert B. House, Al Lowenstein spoke on "The Dark Continent", Henry Cabot Lodge, Imogene Coca, The Weavers, Chuck Berry, Nina Simone, Robert Frost and the memorable concert of Joni James.

Graduation Day came, June 5, 1961. While some in our class made history later, there was one who made history on Graduation Day. David Dansby marched with us to graduation as the first undergraduate African-American to graduate from the University of North Carolina.

We experienced broadening and intellectual challenges in the classes of Dr. Bernard Boyd, Dr. Natansen and others. An early mystery was why savvy Professors like Drs. House and Harlan would preside over crip courses to overflow crowds giving the same questions on exams year after year. Mystery solved: How else to expose young North Carolinians to the wonders of the Classics.

These were the most broadening and enlightening four years of our lives. We came from the shelters of mostly small towns and cities across the South and from Southern liberal arts colleges to the real world. As an NC State alumnus and friend says, tongue in cheek – but yet most accurately – "There's all kinds in Chapel Hill." How true; and how wonderful it was – and is – that we, and students before and after, have had the experience of all kinds of people. A gateway to intellectual challenge and the real world.

The University of North Carolina was and is a special place. A place of challenge, a place of excellence, a place of diversity, a place of learning, a place of excitement, a place of new horizons and a place of good times. A place of lasting friendships, a place where friends of 50 years ago literally pick up right where we left off, as if it were yesterday. A place for our children and grandchildren.

Oh, what a privilege it is to be part of this wonderful place. And, yes, as if to acknowledge it all, God did indeed make the sky Carolina Blue.