

OLD STUDENTS CLUB SPEECH
CHAPEL HILL, MAY 11, 2012
By Tom Lambeth '57

IN THE 18TH CENTURY TWO ROADS CROSSED NORTH CAROLINA. ONE BEGAN IN VIRGINIA AND RAN SOUTH TO PITTSBORO. ONE BEGAN IN NEW BERN AND RAN WEST TO GREENSBORO. THEY INTERSECTED AT THE BASE OF A HILL IN ORANGE COUNTY NEAR THE RUINS OF AN OLD ENGLISH CHAPEL.

THERE THE PEOPLE OF NORTH CAROLINA BUILT A UNIVERSITY.

TODAY WE MEET FOR ANOTHER MOMENTOUS MOMENT IN THE HISTORY OF THAT UNIVERSITY. WE MEET TO DECLARE THAT YOU OF THE CLASS OF 1962 ARE OFFICIALLY OLD.

IT WILL NOT BE NEWS TO SOME OF YOU. RAY FARRIS KNOWS THAT IF HE TRIED TO RECREATE THE CREW CUT OF HIS FOOTBALL PLAYING DAYS ON HIS CURRENT SCALP, HE WOULD RISK BLEEDING TO DEATH. FOR OTHERS THERE ARE DIFFERENT REMINDERS.

IT IS A TRULY AWFUL NAME – OLD STUDENTS CLUB – YET THAT PROVIDE A CHARGE TO YOU WHO GRADUATE TODAY INTO THIS CLUB. IN SOME WAYS IT IS NOT A CHARGE BUT A RE-CHARGE.

FOR HERE ON THIS HILL WE BELIEVE THAT IN OUR PAST IS OUR FUTURE; THAT THERE ARE VALUES FOUND HERE THAT WE INHERIT AND THAT ENRICH AND THAT SUSTAIN NOT ONLY THOSE OF US WHO LEARN AND LIVE HERE BUT WHICH SUSTAIN AND NOURISH THE INSTITUTION.

SO AT OUR BEST WE ARE NEVER REALLY OLD. THIS IS NOT A PLACE OF ANTIQUITY BUT A PLACE OF YOUTH AND FRESH OUTLOOK AND NEW IDEAS AND FLOURISHING DREAMS.

WHEN I WAS A STUDENT I WAS INVITED TO REPRESENT AN HONORARY SOCIETY AT THE WEDDING OF PROFESSOR ARCHIBALD HENDERSON. THE GROOM WAS 80.

SOME YEARS LATER, SPEAKING FROM THE STAGE OF MEMORIAL HALL, I LOOKED DOWN AT THE FRONT ROW AND INTO THE EYES OF LOUIS ROUND WILSON. DR. WILSON WAS THEN 102.

SO THERE IS HOPE FOR US ALL AND THERE IS HOPE FOR THIS PLACE.

AN ARCHAEOLOGIST HAS ASSURED ME THAT WHAT REMAINS OF THE RUINS OF THAT OLD ENGLISH CHAPEL FROM WHICH THIS VILLAGE GOT ITS NAME ARE TODAY UNDER A PART OF THE PARKING LOT AT THE CAROLINA INN. BUT THAT IS NOT WHERE THE SPIRIT AND THE HEART AND THE PURPOSE OF THIS UNIVERSITY ARE TO BE FOUND. THAT SPIRIT, THAT HEART, THAT PURPOSE IS IN THIS ROOM AND ON THE CAMPUS BEYOND AND, YES, IN PLACES MILES AND MILES FROM HERE.

FOR THIS IS A PLACE OF MANY IDEAS BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IDEAS IS THE UNIVERSITY ITSELF. THE IDEA THAT A FREE PEOPLE COULD BUILD AN INSTITUTION THAT WOULD BE BOTH ACCESSIBLE AND EXCELLENT. AND HERE A PART OF THAT GREAT IDEA IS THE LEGACY TO TAKE WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED HERE ON THIS CAMPUS AND PUT IT TO WORK FOR THE GREATER GOOD.

WE ARE PROUD, AS WE SHOULD BE, THAT FEW OTHER PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES CAN BOAST OF SO MANY RHODES SCHOLARS;WHAT IS TRUE OF THE RHODES IS TRUE OF MOST OTHER DISTINGUISHED NATIONAL COMPETITIVE SCHOLARSHIPS. IT IS AFTER ALL THE CORE CURRICULUM TO WHICH WE OWE OUR FIRST ALLEGIANCE; TO THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING AND RESEARCH WHICH NOT ONLY MAINTAIN SCHOLARSHIP BUT BUILD ECONOMIES AND SUSTAIN DEMOCRACY.

THERE IS ANOTHER CORE THAT IS IMPORTANT HERE.

NOT FAR FROM THIS BUILDING, UNDER A TREE IN THE OLD CHAPEL HILL CEMETERY IS THE GRAVE OF FRANK PORTER GRAHAM AND HIS WIFE MARIAN. ON THAT GRAVE ONE FINDS THIS INSCRIPTION: 'THEY HAD FAITH IN YOUTH AND YOUTH RESPONDED WITH THEIR BEST.'" THAT OTHER CORE WHICH DR. FRANK FOUND IN THE RESPONSE OF STUDENTS TO HIS FAITH IN THEM IS THE COMMITMENT TO LIVING BEYOND OURSELVES, TO RESPONDING WITH THE BEST WITHIN US.

SO WE ARE PROUD AS WELL THAT ALMOST NO OTHER PUBLIC UNIVERSITY – AND FEW PRIVATE ONES - CAN BOAST OF AS MANY PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS OR TEACH FOR AMERICA GRADUATES.

HERE FACULTY AND STUDENTS HAVE PUT MEANING TO THE LINES WHICH I SEE IN MY HYMNAL EACH SUNDAY AND WHICH ADMONISHES US "DO NOT BE AFRAID TO DEFEND THE WEAK BECAUSE OF THE ANGER OF THE STRONG; NOR AFRAID TO DEFEND THE POOR BECAUSE OF THE POWER OF THE RICH." THEY HAVE DONE THAT THROUGH LIVES THAT PLAY OUT WITH LOYALTIES TO DIFFERENT POLITICAL PARTIES AND DIFFERENT IDEOLOGIES BUT WHICH ALL EMBODY A CONSTANCY OF COMMITMENT TO A LEGACY OF SERVICE.

HERE WE ANSWER QUESTIONS IN OUR LIVES AND IN THE LIFE OF THE UNIVERSITY THAT HELP US MEASURE WHAT IS TRULY VALUABLE, WHAT IS TRULY MEANINGFUL. WE ASK: IS THE SUCCESS OF OUR BUSINESS SCHOOL ONLY THE NUMBER OF CORPORATE CEOS IT HAS PRODUCED..... AND THAT RECORD MERITS OUR PRIDE..... BUT IS IT ALSO THE SCORES OF NON PROFITS CREATED BY THE GRADUATES OF THAT SCHOOL LIKE NOURISH INTERNATIONAL WHICH FEEDS PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD?

IS ATHLETIC SUCCESS FOUND IN THE TOUCHDOWN RUN OF KELVIN BRYANT OR IN THE ADDITIONAL 10 YARDS HE RAN TO GIVE THE BALL TO HIS INJURED TEAMMATE?

DO WE BELIEVE AND DO WE LIVE THE WORDS OF THE MONOGRAM CLUB WHICH MY FATHER KEPT IN HIS DESK UNTIL HE DIED AND WHICH SAY THAT THE SCORE IS ONLY AN INCIDENT OF HISTORY; THAT TRUE VICTORY IS IN THE HEART?

IF SOME GREAT CATASTROPHE WERE TO SWEEP AWAY ALL THE BUILDINGS OF CAROLINA; IF EVEN DAVIE POPLAR WERE TO FALL, THE IDEA OF THIS PLACE WOULD STILL BE HERE AND THERE WOULD BE THOSE WHO WOULD BUILD IT AGAIN.

SO THE MOST IMPORTANT PURPOSE THAT GATHERS US TOGETHER IS TO THANK YOU WHO ARE 50 YEARS MORE MATURE TODAY – TO THANK YOU FOR THE LIVES YOU HAVE LIVED. WE CELEBRATE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF YOUR CLASS TO OUR STATE AND NATION. BUT MOST OF US WILL NEVER KNOW OF THE SERVICE YOU HAVE PROVIDED TO THE COMMUNITIES WHICH YOU HAVE CHOSEN AS HOME. THERE WE WOULD FIND PLAYED OUT IN YOUR INDIVIDUAL LIVES COUNTLESS ACTS OF KINDNESS AND GOOD SENSE AND PATRIOTISM . THEY ADD TO THE LEGACY OF THIS PLACE BECAUSE YOU ARE ALWAYS A PART OF IT AS IT IS OF YOU. THANK YOU FOR THAT.

YEARS AGO A FRIEND OF MINE AND WADE HARGROVE’S WHO WAS NOT OF OUR COLLEGIATE PERSUASION SAID TO ME “YOU FOLKS FROM CAROLINA ARE SOME OF THE NICEST INDIVIDUALS I KNOW; BUT AS A GROUP YOU ARE THE MOST INCESTUOUS BUNCH OF S.O.Bs I HAVE EVER MET.”

I THINK THAT MAY HAVE BEEN A LITTLE HARSH BUT THERE MAY BE AN ELEMENT OF TRUTH IN IT. WE DO LOVE THE PLACE AND GENERALLY WE LOVE EACH OTHER AND WE DO TALK ABOUT THE PLACE ON OCCASION. YET THAT DOES NOT BLIND US TO THE FACT THAT OTHERS MAY LOVE ANOTHER UNIVERSITY JUST AS MUCH. SO TREAT THOSE WHO DO NOT LOVE THIS PLACE WITH RESPECT AND KINDNESS AND UNDERSTANDING AND.....WELL, PERHAPS, A LITTLE PITY. THEY ARE – AFTER ALL – STRANGERS IN CAMELOT.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHEN MY GRANDSON WAS OLD ENOUGH FOR HIS FIRST FOOTBALL GAME, I BROUGHT HIM TO KENAN. AFTERWARD WE WALKED ACROSS CAMPUS. IT WAS A FINE FALL AFTERNOON. THE WEATHER WAS SATURDAY PERFECT. THE BELL TOWER TOLLED IN THE DISTANCE. THE SOUNDS AND SIGHTS OF THE LAWN IN FRONT OF WILSON INCITED EVERY LIGHT BLUE GENE IN THE BODY. SUDDENLY, CAUGHT IN THAT MOMENT'S MAGIC EMBRACE, MY GRANDSON STOPPED ME, PULLED ON MY HAND AND ASKED "POPPA, IS THIS A SPECIAL PLACE?"

OH, YES, IT IS A SPECIAL PLACE AND EACH OF YOU, FOR AS LONG AS YOU WISH, WILL BE A PART OF IT. AND ALWAYS YOU CAN LOOK OUT AT THE WORLD NOT REALLY OLD STUDENTS BUT FOREVER CAROLINA YOUNG AND YOU CAN SAY

I AM A TAR HEEL!

HARK THE SOUND.