

**Remarks to the Class of 1963 – 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion**  
**University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill**  
**May 11, 2013**  
**By Richard Vinroot**

*“What is it that binds us to this place as to no other? It is not the well or the bell or the stone walls ... [o]r the crisp October nights ... No, our love for this place is based on the fact that it is, as it was meant to be, the University of the people.”*

- Charles Kuralt. UNC Class of 1955

For me, a lot of those people are here tonight, in this room — as members of this Class of 1963. Thank you very much for coming back, and for being such an important part of my, and my family’s, life for more than 50 years! We meet here tonight in a place where the memories are good, the welcome is warm, the campus is still spectacular, and we all love to say “Go heels — and go to hell, Dook!”

For all of us this is a special place, for different individual reasons. For me — a first generation American, first generation college student (indeed, first generation high school graduate) — it was a place of real awakening. I actually became very “self-conscious” here, learning quickly how little I knew, and how much I needed to learn, to compete with all of you. And I still am , after reading in

our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Yack about all the wonderful things you've done since leaving Chapel Hill.

What I got here, from the great teachers we encountered, and from all of the experiences we shared — in and out of classrooms — were the gifts of “education”: how important it was to listen, think, debate; question and doubt; and realize how much I did not know, and would need a lifetime to try to learn.

More important than “education,” however, what I got here was a great sense of “morality” and “tolerance”: how so much of life at that time, for many around us — particularly for the only two members of our class of almost 2500 people who were not white (Lester Carson and Garland McAdoo) — was simply not fair, nor consistent with our values and American ideals. And I began to think a lot about what it meant to be a “good citizen,” and “to love one’s neighbor.”

In a sense, I learned here that there would be more to making a “good life” than simply making a “good living.” And that my experience at Carolina was as much about developing a “good conscience,” as getting a “good education.”

A lot has happened since we left Chapel Hill in June, 1963. President Kennedy's tragic assassination in Dallas 5 months later, the assassinations of Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy 5 years later, Watergate and Nixon's impeachment in 1972 and the War in Vietnam during the 60's and 70's. The disintegration of the Soviet Union and fall of the Berlin Wall in the '80's, the AIDS epidemic of the 90's, and Enron and its aftermath at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The internet, cell phones, the horror of 9-11, and subsequent 10-year wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — both just now ending. A sexual revolution, and a man of color elected President of the United States — not once, but twice. And a student body at this great university that is now predominantly female, and numbers approximately 30,000 — as compared to the almost all white, mostly male, 12,000 or so University, of which we were a part 5 decades ago.

But what is it that binds us to this place, and what is its special significance to us now — or more probably, to our children and our grandchildren?

In the gospel of Charles Kuralt "it is, as it was meant to be, the University of the people." As I understand that phrase, I think he's right! Unlike great

“finishing schools” like those in the Ivy League, or Stanford — or even Dook — Chapel Hill was and is — to my way of thinking — “the great equalizer.”

By that, I mean that it is a place for everyone — those of means and those who are not, and everyone in between. Anyone can receive a world-class education here, and achieve great things in their lives thereafter — in this state, this nation, and indeed, anywhere in the world. For more than 225 years that has been true, and I’m confident it will continue to be so for centuries and generations yet to come.

As I look back over my years here, I can’t remember any particular thing that I learned. What I remember — as I’ve said before — is that it is a place where I became self-conscious about my own shortcomings, and my life-long need to get better. And where I became inspired to try to be a better person. It is where my very “soul” was challenged, and (I hope) expanded for the better.

And for that reason Chapel Hill is a sacred place in my life. I suspect that it was — and is — for you as well.

As a consequence, I now consider my diploma to be an “honorary degree.” That’s so because its true significance is what happened to me during the 4 years before I got it — and all that has happened in my life since then.

I know that many of you have done some really great things in your lives; and we’re all very proud of you. From my perspective, I have not. I did not go from here and “save the world.” I have not written a great novel, nor done anything else that I consider to be particularly noteworthy.

What I’ve tried to do, however — like so many of you — is to serve my country, be a good spouse and parent, raise decent children, deal with the ups and downs of daily life, be kind to my friends and neighbors, and in some small ways, contribute to a better community — and a better world.

I’ve had good days, and bad days, on all counts.

During these past 50 years I’ve frequently been asked, “aren’t you a Carolina man?” Each time, I’ve enthusiastically and proudly responded “yes.” But as I think about that question tonight, it occurs to me now that I don’t really know what a “Carolina man” (nor a “Carolina woman”) is.

But what I do know, is this: I am a better man because of what happened to me here. I met (and married) the love of my life, and got to be friends with all of you. And tonight I get to be with all of you again; and would not want to be celebrating my 50<sup>th</sup> college reunion in any other university anywhere — with anyone else but you.

Occasionally I hear people say that their college years were “the best years of their lives.” I don’t, because that would reflect poorly on the rest of my life. So I don’t feel that way — because the 50 years since Chapel Hill have been very blessed years for Judy and me, and our family.

Instead, I say tonight that my years in Chapel Hill — with all of you — were very, very special, and wonderful years in my life. I hope you feel the same way, and that all of you will have a very happy “rest of your life,” as well.

*Bon Voyage*, dear friends. Let’s get together again soon. And Hark the Sound!