

Barbara Byrd Fordham '49

Mrs. Fordham, known to many friends as "Babs," grew up in Greensboro where in high school she was voted "most talented." She attended the University at Greensboro known then as Women's College.

During her sophomore year she met Chris Fordham. "I knew who he was although I had never met him," she said. "Then, on an Easter Sunday, I went to church with my parents and he came in, dressed in his Merchant Marines' officer uniform, and sat down in front of us." The next day, he called her.

They were married in 1947 when she was nineteen. She says that this early decision in her life was the wisest one she ever made.

Her husband, daughters and friends agree that Mrs. Fordham is "most talented" in the vocation she has chosen. She has devoted most of her life to her role as wife and mother. She has been successful, she says, "because I'm a realist. I believe in give-and-take in families. I have tried to avoid getting stuck on the unimportant details in life, and I've tried to teach the girls to do the same."

Of his wife, Dr. Fordham said, "She's about the nicest person anyone could be. All the girls take after their mother. They have her values and concerns. They care about other people. I'm the lucky fellow who married her and I give myself credit for knowing it."

Her daughter, Betsy Templeton '81, said that when life as the wife of the Chancellor is hectic what keeps her mother going is her sense of humor and her relationship with her husband. "What keeps her happy, patient and smiling is her relationship with Daddy," said Betsy. "They're best friends. I've never seen anything like it. She always looks so proud when he's speaking."

Another daughter, Susie Crowell '75, adds that Barbara Fordham is especially sensitive and capable of putting herself in other people's situations and understanding why they think as they do. "She's an optimistic person who always thinks the best of people."

Anne McLendon has been a friend of Mrs. Fordham's since the days when they were both wives of young doctors and neighbors at Glen Lennox. Mrs. McLendon describes Barbara Fordham as a person who gets along well with people. "She just gives something to people that makes them come away from her feeling better about themselves."

Barbara Fordham is the First Lady of the University at Chapel Hill. She loves it. "I love the University most in the world next to my family. To me, this institution is like a living being," she said. "I have a wonderful time here. I love the students. I enjoy the travel we do. I love basketball!"

Those in the University community value Mrs. Fordham's talents as first lady. Friends Dean and Linnea Smith '76 enjoy their friendship with the Fordhams. "Babs is a gracious hostess who has a sincere interest in other people. She's a vivacious, intelligent lady who has had an impact on the University through the years and helps it run smoothly in many unspoken ways," said Coach Smith.

Dr. Fordham appreciates his wife's help in his work as Chancellor. "She enjoys being a hostess. People sense that, and that she is genuine, and that makes them feel comfortable. There's a genius in that and it's a bonus to the University."

"Barbara is very modest," said another long-time friend, Coach Bill Guthridge. "She's always stayed in the background. In receiving an award like this, she would say to her friends, 'takes El Cake-O!'"