

Deborah Ann Potter '72

Deborah Potter, CBS television news correspondent, succeeds marvelously as a communicator because she combines the perspective of the artist with the insight of the thinker to show us the unexpected. And sometimes the unexpected, once perceived, becomes the obvious.

As sons and daughters of Carolina, we all share a perspective that leads us to a sense of loss that the Chapel Hill we knew as students is no more. The old men of the 1920s lament the passage of an intimate intellectual outpost. Students of the '30s, '40s and '50s miss the everyday friendliness of the village. The children of the '60s and '70s recall wistfully the heartfelt commitments that permeated their campus experience. Even the alumni of the '80s feel nostalgia for things as they were in those recent "good old days."

Deborah Potter's perspective is different. In 1982 she wrote: "These days, when I return to Chapel Hill, I'm not struck by how much it has changed, but rather by a reassuring sense of continuity. Walking across Polk Place, overhearing conversations about courses and current events, I can only smile, recalling the times more than 10 years ago when I'd be almost overcome by my own good fortune at just being here." Things peripheral change, but across time the essence remains, and the students of any particular time understand their good fortune. It is a refreshing perspective and insight.

Deborah got her start in broadcasting as a Carolina sophomore in the primitive studios of WCAR, the original all-campus student radio. She quickly gained a reputation in the journalism school and RTVMP department as talented and hard-working, surviving her first encounters with journalism instructor Ken Byerly, an old newspaperman whose hard grading was legendary and whose motto was "Good writing is rewriting."

"I'd hand in my assignment," Deborah recalls, "and it would come back just bleeding. There'd be red ink all over it. Then I'd have to do it over and over again. Later on I realized that this was his way of making you a better writer. He was demanding, but he got the best out of you. Today, I'm grateful that he took the time to care that much."

Graduating as a member of Phi Beta Kappa, she went to an internship with a Washington television station and was quickly promoted to producer of the noon news. From there she moved to the Voice of America and received a masters degree from American University under the renowned Edward Bliss, who literally wrote the book on broadcast journalism. Then, morning drive anchorwoman for an all-news radio station in Philadelphia followed by graveyard shift duty for CBS News in New York. Her first on-camera TV exposure came when the network moved her to Chicago. In 1980 she landed a back-up slot on the White House beat, then became chief White House correspondent, and in 1985 began heading CBS's State Department coverage.

No matter how far up the ladder Deborah climbs, Chapel Hill will remain close to her heart. She believes in giving back part of what the University gave her. She is a newly-elected member of the Board of Directors of the General Alumni Association and whenever she can she accepts invitations to speak to Carolina broadcasting and journalism students. She has said that one day, when her professional goals are fulfilled, she would like to come home to Chapel Hill, this time as a teacher. Tomorrow's students could not be more fortunate.