

Gillian Townsend Cell

We lost her just a few weeks ago. June 30, she will be gone for good. The old song says, "Don't it always seem to go, that you don't know what you've got till it's gone." This time, it's not true. In Gill Cell we knew what we had and we will sorely miss her.

It doesn't help to cast our memories back 25 years and remember that we got her almost by accident. While working on her doctorate in British history at the University of Liverpool, Gill, a native of England, held a fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research in London. There she met John Cell, then a Duke graduate student working on his Ph.D. and a native of Raleigh. Gill came to America 10 days before her wedding and intended to live in our corner of the world only until the end of John's one-year teaching appointment at Duke. When John was asked to stay, Gill, new to America, came looking to Chapel Hill and was hired as a lecturer in British history.

To the credit of us Tar Heels, we caught on quickly to Gill Cell's worth. Within a year she was on the tenure track. A few years later, she became the first female tenured member of the history department faculty. Within 10 years, she was in her first administrative position—associate dean of the graduate school.

In 1981 she had to give up that position when Chancellor Christopher C. Fordham, III asked her to undertake a most demanding job. As the University began to come to full grips with the problems and potentials presented by an increasingly diverse student body, Gill became Carolina's first full-time Affirmative Action Officer. It proved to be a stint of unparalleled success, characterized by an overwhelmingly effective program of recruiting top minority students, and she left only when, in 1983, she became chairman of the history department, the first woman to hold that position at Carolina.

Just two years later, the chancellor called again, this time to name Gill Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and the General College, a top administrative post to which she was reappointed in 1989. As dean she oversees 31 academic departments, countless curricula and programs, 650 faculty members, and 12,000 students, all at the core of the University.

In these years as dean, she has been a champion of undergraduate education. Early in her first term, she said she had three goals: to improve Carolina's intellectual atmosphere; to lead the College of Arts and Sciences' \$11 million fund raising campaign; and to support the faculty financially and otherwise. On the first, the giant strides of the undergraduate honors program will be a permanent monument to her service. On the second, it suffices to say that the \$11 million fund raising campaign raised \$22 million. And on the third, all of us at Carolina will remember her as a devoted servant in good financial times and as a determined battler and insightful arbiter in tough times like we now face.

To UNC's incoming freshmen in 1985, Dean Cell said, "The only failure on your part will be the failure to take advantage of what is here, the failure is to be passive, not to be engaged in the intellectual enterprise which is our joint mission. Immerse yourself in the corporate life of this academic community." For Gill Cell, there was never any such failure at Carolina.

As an administrator, teacher and friend, Gill Cell has helped us bring out the best we could offer those who came to Carolina for their education. We wish her Godspeed as she leaves us for Lafayette College—and we hope she goes with a little tar on her heels.