

## Nelson Ferebee Taylor '42

Ferebee Taylor has almost always finished on top. He was valedictorian of his high school class in Oxford, N.C. He was the first winner of the Herbert Worth Jackson Scholarship, the first four-year scholarship given at UNC. He was named president of Phi Beta Kappa because he had the highest grade point average in the University. He was speaker for the victorious team in the prestigious moot court competition at Harvard Law School. He won a Rhodes Scholarship to study at Oxford (not N.C.), where he earned two degrees. He became a partner in an esteemed and lucrative New York law practice and associate general counsel of Uniroyal, Inc.

There was one brief chink: he lost in his bid for student body president at UNC, by 50 votes.

The week before the election, Judge Robert Winston (Horace Williams' biographer and grandfather of Ferebee's roommate) had said, "I hope you lose. If you win this, things have sort of gone your way and you've had some distinctions and some honors in the very fact you were nominated, and if you win you'll have the notion that life is just easy and a bed of roses and it won't do anything for you as a human being. But if you lose, and you're able to absorb the defeat and come back and decide you're going to go ahead in life, notwithstanding having lost the election, it just might make a man out of you."

Ferebee told that story to Bill Friday on the former President's UNC-TV program. He noted that in the same election, Louis Harris, who was to become internationally famous as a pollster, lost his bid for *Daily Tar Heel* editor to Orville Campbell, who went on to become editor of the *Chapel Hill Newspaper*.

In 1972 Chancellor-elect Taylor brought to South Building the lesson taught by Judge Winston and the accumulated wisdom of two decades of highly competitive law practice. He had to, since pundits at the time noted that he came to this demanding position in academic administration with practically no experience in academics or administration. And he came when the University faced an immediate challenge—recent legislation had restructured the state's governance of higher education. Gone was the old Consolidated University. In was coming a new 16-campus system, all under one general administration, and each with its own board of trustees.

He succeeded in maintaining Chapel Hill's flagship status. He succeeded where others with more traditional "credentials" in academics and administration might have failed. He succeeded

because of what Frank Porter Graham noted at the time as his "integrity, ability, leadership and winsome personality."

Ferebee earned his highest university-relations marks in a short stint as a General Administration Vice President before being chosen as chancellor, when he worked tirelessly in a special legislative session that wrought the university governance changes. UNC's chief partisan in the Senate, Sen. John Burney of Wilmington, said that Taylor was the "smartest, toughest man in the whole thing." Rep. Ike Andrews, then of Siler City, a chief UNC voice in the House of Representatives, chaired the chancellor selection committee. Andrews' committee recommended Ferebee for the job, Andrews citing Ferebee as "one of the most able men I have ever known."

During his tenure as chancellor, he was responsible for the initiative that has resulted in Davis Library. Affirmative action efforts took on new life as minority enrollment increased dramatically, as did the University's endowment through Ferebee's Carolina Challenge. The University's financial standing was made secure, curriculum was revised, the number of endowed professorships expanded, and an era of unrest calmed into an era of educational achievement.

The faculty passed this resolution:

"Not only what he has done, but how he has done it, is worthy of praise. . . He has a passion for rationality, justice, fairness, rightness, the whole and the long view of things. Herein lies the source of his great inner strength. He is in his own person a standard for all who work with him."