

Sarah Virginia Dunlap

Sarah Virginia Dunlap says that the story about how she came to be called “Peaches” isn’t very interesting. But in a sense, the story behind the nickname says what we want to say about her and what she has given to this University through her career and life here.

Her father was interested in improving fruits—crossing different varieties to produce a hybrid superior to the existing ones. His greatest success was with peaches, and he carried baskets of his fruit to friends and neighbors. So his little daughter’s nickname came from tagging along behind her dad and those baskets of peaches.

Something of her father’s interest in combining different elements must have influenced the unique combination of talents embodied in Peaches Dunlap and what she has brought to her work for the University: She is a highly efficient organizational wonder.

For twenty-two years, Peaches was assistant to the late medical school dean W. Reece Berryhill. When she started the job, Berryhill was expanding the existing medical school into a four-year program.

Kenneth M. Brinkhous, professor emeritus of pathology, describes her contributions during these years as, “inestimable. As secretary to Dean Berryhill, she was really the chief executive officer in this tremendous task.”

Former chancellor Ferebee Taylor is proud to have brought Peaches to South Building as the University’s first secretary in 1972. He said of her, “Peaches...is the personification of professionalism at its best.”

This, then, is one side of Peaches: a highly-skilled, perfectionist—a fastidious administrator whose retirement date kept getting postponed because the University could not find a way to let her go.

But this alone does not describe her. Like her father’s unique fruit, Peaches Dunlap is a blending of qualities.

Former chancellor Taylor calls her, “a warm and wonderful human being.” Other colleagues call her: a wonderful role model, generous, good-humored, lovely, gracious, a beautiful person, unique, a genuine saint, winsome, and funny.

Vice-chancellor Farris Womack remembers that when he came to the University, Peaches was one of the first people he met. Of that time, he says, “Because of the nature of my job, there was not much time for a learning curve. In our late afternoon visits, she taught me about the warmth and sensitivity my family and I came to know as Chapel Hill.”

“Peaches is the kind of person who I hug every time I see her,” says Dr. Womack.

That’s how everyone feels about Peaches Dunlap.