

Terry Sanford '39

A newspaper columnist wrote recently that he hadn't put much stock in Terry Sanford's bids for the presidency. Terry was from North Carolina! Didn't presidents come from fancier places? Terry himself never doubted he had presidential caliber, but he was put off by the magnitude of the sales job, the importance of image polishing; none of that was the forte of a man whose aim was to be rather than to seem.

And however plain it might have felt to be a North Carolinian around the time of the election campaign of 1972, it is indeed a fancier place now, owing to Terry Sanford's half century of devotion to the needs of its people.

His vision of leadership and governing is summarized nicely in the title of his first book: *But What About The People?* He dreamed, he delegated, he led with that question always in mind.

Classmates say he was talking excitedly about the governorship before he left Chapel Hill. He attended Carolina on a student loan and on the income from jobs in Swain dining hall, managing his dorm, and delivering *The Daily Tar Heel*. His political career began when he won the presidency of Manly Hall in 1938, and he went on to be speaker of the Student Legislature and president of his senior class.

By 1950, with law school, a stint with the Institute of Government, and war service as a paratrooper behind him, he was president of the state's young democrats and was clearing his path to the mansion in Raleigh.

Terry's term as governor coincided with the Kennedy years in the White House, and the comparisons are many – especially the fondness with which both administrations are remembered.

He helped North Carolina find a way – the right way – out of the tangled web of segregation. His leadership provided a model for other states, and it redefined the southern governorship. While others resisted court-ordered desegregation, Terry said, "What we need is massive intelligence – not massive resistance. Let's not close our schools but try to improve them."

His efforts on behalf of the public schools tend to overshadow an equally determined emphasis on improving higher education. His Commission on Education Beyond High School created one of the nation's premier community college systems, and transformed two-year colleges in Asheville, Wilmington and Charlotte into three of the brightest lights in the UNC system.

His legacies include The N.C. School of the Arts, and the Governor's School.

In 1964 he responded to a *Yackety Yack* survey as follows: "Three years at present location. However, generally I am a lawyer." Terry thought of himself not as a government official, but as a thinker and doer who happened to have particularly good clout. The profiles written of him over the years say little about the North Carolina Fund. But the massive anti-poverty campaign which became an early model for Lyndon Johnson's Great Society was his idea, quietly passed to a cadre of socially-conscious young people with ties to Carolina.

Terry accepted the presidency of Duke University and served it with distinction, for which we have long since forgiven him. Actually, he made it easier for Duke and Carolina to cooperate by paving the way for joint faculty appointments, course crossovers for students, and coordinated library purchases.

In one term in the U.S. Senate, he showed Washington a progressive side of North Carolina it seldom had seen. He boldly opposed the gulf war; he fought to reform our approach to relations with Central America; and he prodded his colleagues toward a more open and honest process of writing the federal budget.

Throughout his career his thoughts never strayed far from Carolina. While governor he chaired the Board of Trustees. When his governor's travels took him outside the state, he often took the time to speak to alumni groups. Repeatedly, he insisted that the reform needs of the public schools should not undermine the need to lift up North Carolina higher education. He pushed for higher compensation for faculty in Chapel Hill, saying they should be compared to peers at the best universities in the country, not just in the region. He touted the School of Social Work in successful pleas with presidents Kennedy and Johnson to locate the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in the Research Triangle Park; other prominent government agencies followed it there.

Most recently, Terry's vision took him back to RTP as the catalyst for a world-class performing arts center to serve the cosmopolitan wonder the Triangle has become.

Terry Sanford said this about his alma mater on University Day in 1987: "What we learned at Chapel Hill was not chemistry and economics and mathematics. Those were the instruments of learning. We learned, we absorbed, with Frank Porter Graham as our master teacher, that solid tradition, those hopes of this University born of the beginning of a new nation, values this great University continues to nourish – freedom and liberty and tolerance, the search for truth, the defense of dignity, courage to arrive freely at convictions, and the personal courage to stand for those hopes and truths."

He was a statesman, in the boldest sense of that word. He stands with few peers at the head of the class of progressive leaders in the history of this state. Generations of North Carolinians who have been touched by his hopeful imagination and his tireless devotion to betterment know the sincerity of one of Terry's favorite mottoes: "We're working on it."