

Wade Marvin Smith '60

As Wade Smith tells it, one of his grandfathers was a preacher, a "pillar of the community." The other grandfather was just the opposite, "a river rat, a soldier of fortune who could outcuss anybody," Wade says. "And they are both in me. My life is a constant struggle between the two."

You see the preacher side when he represents the downtrodden, the despised in court. "I think a lawyer's highest call is to take an unpopular case," he says. "I think the duty is to take the case of a person whom the community really feels anger or hate towards." And you see the preacher side when a verdict of guilty, and the accompanying anguish for his client, bring his tears. "The sorrow that accompanies a loss is just overwhelming. I do cry, I believe in crying. I have cried many, many times after cases."

The rough side is a little less obvious. Wade is no river rat, no soldier of fortune. He's not out cussing the world. But it may be the firebrand in him that has led him to the tough-guy world of criminal defense.

At an earlier time in his life it led him to the football field, playing halfback for Carolina and serving as co-captain of the team in 1960, winner of the William Prouty Memorial Award that year. It was along about that time that he faced his younger brother in a scrimmage. When the ball came Wade's way, Roger stuck a helmet in Wade's back, and the ball fell to the ground, incomplete. On the next play, Wade ran the same pattern, but instead of looking for a pass, he leveled Roger with a crushing block. "He was a young cocky athlete," says this chip off his grandfather's block, "and that was richly deserved. Richly deserved." The following year, Wade passed up opportunities to play professionally for the Houston Oilers and Oakland Raiders, opting for law school and coaching the Carolina freshman football team.

Then he and J. Harold Tharrington drew names out of a hat to see who to list first on their new law firm's letterhead. Tharrington won and Tharrington & Smith was born. As consolation prize, Wade got the better office. There followed a legal career that has seen Tharrington, Smith & Hargrove, as it is now known, grow to become one of the largest and most influential law firms in the state—a career marked by the notorious cases, the privately wrenching cases, and public service.

The most notorious of them all have been Wade's criminal defense of Jeffrey MacDonald and Lt. Governor Jimmy Green. The privately wrenching include such hard cases as one Central Prison inmate sentenced to death for the fatal stabbing of a fellow prisoner, a sentence reduced, through Wade's persistent hard work, to life imprisonment. And the public service has benefited from the same drive and determination that has propelled his law career—member of the North Carolina House of Representatives, president of the Wake County Bar (one of the state's largest), chairman of the State Democratic Party, and president of the UNC General Alumni Association.

Wade passed a milestone in his career in 1989 when he became one of only 84 North Carolinians in the American College of Trial Lawyers, an invitation-only honor reserved for the most outstanding litigators in the land.

Yet there are people in North Carolian who know Wade Smith well, not as a lawyer, but as an accomplished musician (he has recorded an album with his folk group Bloomsbury Park and represented American music at the 900th anniversary of the founding of Newcastle, England, among many other adventures). Or as a skilled photographer, with pictures decorating offices far and wide. Or as an ardent outdoorsman, bicyclist, and fisherman.

Wade was born poor and worked hard. He became a Morehead Scholar and senior class president, renowned attorney, accomplished sportsman, and undying optimist. It must be the balance of preacher and river rat, of humanist and legal scrapper, of halfback and banjo picker that makes up this straightforward man with a complex life, a dedicated servant of this University.