

# Walter Travis Porter III '53

Commitment and the strength and resolve to meet that commitment. These words accurately capture Travis Porter's relationship with The University of North Carolina.

Picture the Carolina undergrad, born in Lumberton, early years in Bladen County, filling out his Alumni Record card. "List names of father, mother, brothers or sisters who attended UNC," the form says. Maybe it doesn't call for grandfather, but what does a form know? Travis proudly pens: "(G. Father) Maj. J. Spaww (C.S.A.)."

But now he has to hurry. That Carolina lineage traceable directly back to the army of the Confederate States did not guarantee wealth, and his 50-cents-an-hour job at the Scuttlebutt brooks no tardiness.

Thirty years later, elected chairman of the UNC Board of Trustees, Travis said that he never dreamed in those days of selling cokes and candy bars that he would one day head the campus governing board. But perhaps it was inevitable, a turn on the wheel of opportunity presented and repayment made. Travis Porter took advantage of what Carolina could offer, turned that advantage through hard work to great success.

The first turn of the wheel took Travis from Carolina, by way of an ROTC scholarship, into the Marine Corps. Then it was back to UNC, this time as a law student, and graduation first in his class. Travis was the first Chapel Hill law graduate in the history of the school to receive his law degree "with high honors," a special award recognizing his achievements in legal studies granted by unanimous vote of the law school faculty.

Now the wheel turns to law practice and civic service. He and Durham legislator E.K. Powe '44 begin a law practice which over the next decades would grow and change names and styles. Travis serves as president of the Greater Durham Chamber of Commerce and member of its Human Relations Committee, as an officer of the Durham Jaycees, the Durham Progress Group, the Durham Kiwanis Club, the Family Counseling Service, and Durham International Track, Inc. (sponsor of Pan-Africa/USA meet and the USA/ USSR meet); and as an elder in his church and chairman of its board of deacons.

In 1979, the turn of the wheel brings Travis back to Carolina, as he is elected to the Board of Trustees and becomes its secretary in '81, vice chairman in '82, and chairman in '83. He describes his responsibility on the board this way: "A university is not some big corporation. It's a collection of great minds. You cannot shackle those minds." The duty of the Board of Trustees is to make sound policy to free those minds. "Even in a big corporation, boards make policy and contribute; but if they try to run the company, you see a decline in business and a departing management."

"In North Carolina," he says, "a tenant farmer's son or daughter can go to a world-class University because we don't charge much. Carolina gave me a chance to get a good education, and it prepared me for what I wanted to be. I owe whatever success I've had to the University in general and the law school in particular."

As chairman of the trustees, he spoke about that sense of obligation to the University this way: "If the state and the University System are able to maintain university excellence, then it's not necessary for Carolina alumni and others to become involved in politics or the budgetary process. However, if the University's mission or excellence is threatened, I would expect her sons and daughters to protect her by doing whatever is necessary."

Commitment and the strength and resolve to meet it. Thank you, Travis Porter.