Investiture 2014: Memories of Catawba
Dr. Edith Bolick, Class of 1970

Forty-four years ago, I, along with Dr. Clapp, sat in this chapel as our commencement activities began. It is fitting that our formal commencement week activities begin here, for it represents the Judeo-Christian heritage on which the College was founded and from which she draws her strength to this day.

I know some of you have been in this chapel more than others. For those of you in the evening program, this may be your first visit, though each Monday and Thursday evening as your classes began at 6:00 p.m. you would hear a hymn or two followed by the alma mater from the carillon. For some of you in the traditional day program, the last time you were here may have been your freshman year, when you returned from Freshman Retreat, or on the occasion of an Awards Convocation. Others of you have been here frequently, as participants in worship and members of our wonderful college choirs. Regardless, I hope as alumni you will return to this chapel, whether for weddings, which I imagine some of you are planning, or for our annual Service of Lessons and Carols during the Christmas holiday season, or just for some quiet time to reflect. To this day I still find “the still small voice of calm” when I enter this special place.

I arrived at Catawba in 1968 as a transfer student and with the exception of 4 years in graduate school at Chapel Hill and eight years teaching at another institution, I have been on this campus ever since. My late mother would often tell her friends she sent me to Catawba when I was 19 and I never finished!

Dr. Clapp and I were classmates, the class of 1970, and he and my husband Larry, also of the class of ’70, were roommates their senior year. Sometimes when I’m walking across campus I feel like that 19-year-old college coed again, and then I run into Ken Clapp and think, “How did he get so old?” Of course, a quick glance at my image in a window soon reminds me I’ve gotten old – or older - too! It’s hard for me to believe that in one more year Dr. Clapp, my husband and I will celebrate our 45th class reunion.
A few years ago a classmate I had not seen in almost forty years came to Catawba for a visit. Actually, he was something of a “boyfriend” during my senior year. While he was here, as you can imagine, we reminisced as we looked through our old yearbooks. I thought a great deal about what has changed at Catawba since 1970 and what has remained the same.

First, some of the changes. Catawba is far different physically than it was for the class of 1970. The year I graduated, the current gym was under construction, and Hoke Building, which today houses Computing Services and Music, served as the gymnasium. Woodson Hall, where many of you lived as freshmen, was almost new, built to house the growing population of baby boomers of which I am a part. In 1970 we actually thought Woodson was quite modern and nice!

Ketner Hall, where those of you in our evening program have most of your classes, of course was not here. There was no evening program, and only a few non-traditional students in the day program.

The student body numbered almost 1100 so at times we were crowded. Male students lived in the south wing of the Administration Building, in the space which now houses the offices of English Professors Fuller, Grant, Anderson and Stahr. Thankfully, those walls cannot talk! I recall standing in the hallway waiting to go to class when the door would fly open and guys living on that floor would rush out, obviously not too long after they had showered. In fact, my classmate who visited told me he was among the guys on that hall who were placed on water probation, but he didn’t want to give any details.

Freshman students were not allowed to have cars on campus and the majority of upperclassmen didn’t have them anyway, so much of the social life at Catawba was on-campus since most students stayed here for weekends. A Salisbury city bus stopped every hour at the front of the Administration Building to transport Catawba students downtown and back again. My children laugh hysterically when my husband Larry tells how he would pick up his date at the dorm and they would ride the bus to town for a movie. For some reason he still can’t figure out why not many coeds ever
went on a second date with him! Thankfully, by the time I met him he had a car, a little red VW.

Weekly chapel and monthly vespers were required, and if you had too many absences, credit hours would be deducted from your academic record. The chapel choir was quite large, and a few days after our graduation the choir left on a three-week tour of Europe.

As I mentioned, Dr. Clapp was in my class, and was president of the Student Government Association our senior year. One of my clearest memories of Ken is from an 8:00 class we took together our senior year. No matter how early I arrived, he was always sitting there on the front row reading the newspaper, probably the *Wall Street Journal*.

Tuesday-Thursday morning classes also met on Saturday morning, and I can recall sitting in classes on Saturday and hearing the Catawba band warming up for the football game. Classes started after Labor Day, and our exams for the fall semester were after Christmas. On the one hand that was great, because Christmas celebrations at Catawba were not overshadowed by looming exams. The live nativity scene replete with animals on the chapel lawn was a highlight of the holiday season for students and the Salisbury community. On the other hand, we often spent Christmas vacation writing terms papers and getting ready for the exams, which would start a week after we returned.

While many of aspects of campus life have changed since I graduated in 1970, it’s remarkable how much has remained the same. When I recently looked through the 1970 *Sayakani* yearbook, I was stuck by the themes of the first fewer pages: war in Vietnam, looming environmental issues, and concern over social inequality. I was struck by how forty-four years later your senior class faces the same issues: foreign wars in Afghanistan and Iraq winding down, yet troubling signs from Russia, environmental alarm, and an economic climate which has adversely affected families across the country. Yet when I look at the pictures of my senior class, we appear full of optimism and hope, ready to go out and make a difference in the world. I’m pleased to say that you look the same. It’s your time to go out into the world and make a difference.
Forty-four years after I graduated I still have contact with a number of my Catawba friends and retired faculty members. I hope you will do the same.

Forty-four years after I graduated I still make a financial contribution to Catawba each year. I hope you will do the same.

Forty-four years after graduation, I still know all the words to the Alma Mater, which in my day the freshman class had to memorize during orientation and sing upon demand by upperclassmen, while wearing freshmen beanies. Of course, I get to sing the alma mater several times a year and hear it every night on the carillon, so that helps. My favorite line in the alma mater is this: “Brighter than the sun upon waking, are the friendships time can not outwear.”

When the classmate I had not seen in almost forty years visited, his wife shared with me that he was a bit apprehensive, wondering what we might talk about after all these years. As she soon realized, we picked up right where we had left off in 1970. These are the kind of friendships time can’t outwear. Cherish them. Come back for reunions and homecoming. Stay in touch.

For many years the late history professor, Dr. Bruce Griffith, would speak on this occasion. He would tell the senior class how during his Catawba days in the early 1960s the President of Catawba, Dr. Robert Keppel, would speak to the students at opening convocation each year, and in his deep voice, point several times at the gathered students and say, “You are Catawba! You are Catawba!” That certainly was true of Dr. Griffith and it’s true of you, the graduates of 2014 – you are Catawba. As Catawba alumni we represent Catawba to the world beyond this campus, not just with our talents, skills and professional accomplishments, but with our lifestyles and values – our commitment to service and community. Take pride in your alma mater. Represent her well. And from all Catawba alumni, especially the class of 1970, let me extend our congratulations and best wishes to each of you, the Class of 2014.