

## UNC graduate

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college, where he received his license in 1941. But Beech did not want to be a barber, so he eventually he enrolled at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Ga.

Beech said when he first set foot on the grounds of Morehouse, he did not know anything about college. When he first walked into the administration office, it was during the summer when no one was in school. The man in the office told him that he was in the wrong place if he wanted a job, not understanding that Beech had come to enroll.

After the misunderstanding was cleared up, the administrator told Beech that he could work his way through school, since he had brought no money from home. So, he worked

his way through Morehouse by painting floors and cutting hair in his spare time. He graduated in three and a half years.

"I was completely ignorant about college when I came there," he said. "I was just a little boy from North Carolina who had never been away from home."

Beech said after he graduated from Morehouse with a BA degree, he had no place to go to law school. For a time, he had a job selling hamburgers in Durham, but he did not want to do this for the rest of his life, he said. Something that had occurred in his childhood kept on urging him to be a lawyer.

"In the town of Kinston, there were two water fountains, one for whites and one for coloreds. They were right next to the courthouse," Beech said. "I could not understand how such injustice could happen so close to a courthouse."

Beech said his church lessons also made it very hard for him to understand why there was so much hatred and ignorance. "I learned about how Jesus was so fair, but I couldn't understand how he could let this happen," he said.

With this in mind, he enrolled in North Carolina Central Law School, then called North Carolina College. "I was disappointed because the school had three classrooms—one for class, one for the dean and one for the library." He said the books in the library were stacked on top of each other, instead of being on a shelf. You could not get to them, he said.

In 1951, he was approached by Thurgood Marshall and others involved in desegregation, and asked if he would think about being one of the first blacks to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The action came as a result of legal action bought by Floyd McKissick against The University asking for desegregation. According to Beech,

McKissick received his undergraduate degree from another university before the case could end, so civil rights leaders asked he and another student, Kenneth Lee, now a lawyer in Greensboro, if they would want to attend UNC. Both men said "yes" and Beech enrolled in classes in the summer of 1951.

Beech said being a student here was not the best experience in the world. "Kenneth and I were roommates. They put us in Steele Hall alone on the top floor. There was no elevator. We called it the Buzzard's Roost," he said. "There were catcalls and people called us 'niggers' from the other rooms, but we didn't let it bother us."

Beech said both he and Lee did fairly well in their law classes, but they still had some bad experiences.

He said once when all the students had to receive physicals before they enrolled in classes, the prejudice was all too evident. He said all of the black students, about four or five, were put in a separate room with a different doctor to be checked out—all of the black students except him.

"Because they had so many foreign students," Beech said, "and I had very light skin like one, they just put me through the line." He received a card allowing him to use the school swimming pool after he took his physical, but he later found out the other black students had not received such a card.

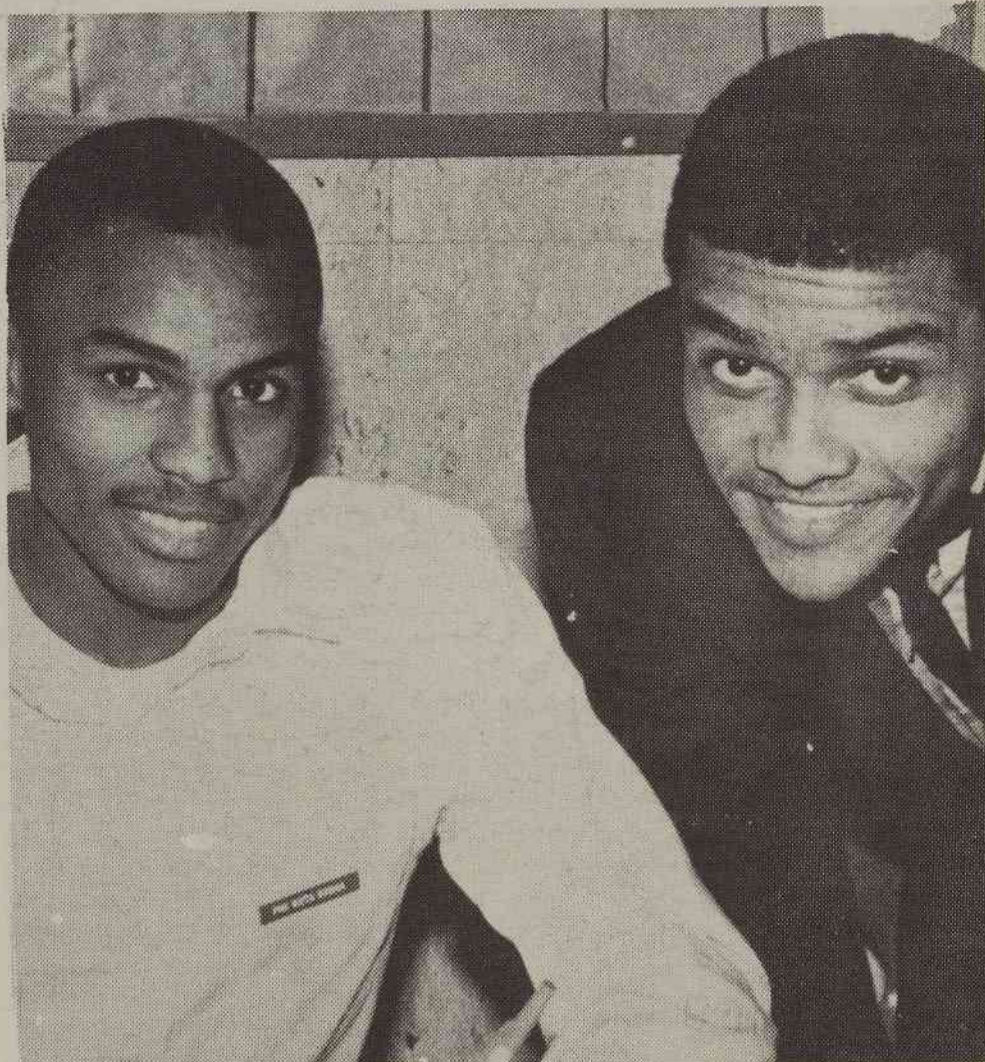
"Three weeks later, the Dean of the Law School called me in after class. He said Chancellor Robert House had told him I had to give the card back," he said. House said that Beech had gotten the card by mistake, but Beech refused to give the card back.

In another incident, the Chancellor gave the black students football tickets, but turned right around and told them not to go to the game. Beech said House was basically a good man, but was chained to the ways of the antebellum South.

"He was a fine person," he said, "but was just embedded with prejudice." Beech said he was never critical of the man, because he could not help the way he had been brought up. "He would make a great grandfather," Beech said. Later in his life, Beech said House would make a stride against racism. Last year, House was quoted as saying in a *Daily Tar Heel* article, that resisting integration was the biggest mistake he ever made in his life.

Beech said, "It took, a big man to admit that."

Reflecting back on his life in Chapel Hill, Beech said the experience was worth the heartache. "There's a lot of give and take in this racial business. Somebody had to suffer first."



Donnie Smith and Arnold Holland selling tickets for Phase Two of their Sickle Cell Anemia Drive

photo by Tammie Foust

## Hawkins

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"My entire family had to uproot ... had to take my son out of a school he was comfortable in and a neighborhood he'd grown up in," Hawkins said. His family adjusted well, however, and, "will probably not want to leave Chapel Hill when I graduate."

Hawkins is scheduled to graduate in December. He said he planned to attend law school but he wasn't sure where yet.

He said he chose UNC because he knew that to get accepted into law school he needed to attend a good school for undergraduate study.

But coming to school was a hard transition for Hawkins, he said. "It was hard to focus my attention on attending classes, reading books, studying and having someone else evaluate my work after I'd been working as a mechanic for nine years with my dad."

He said he attributed the greater part of his success to his wife and son. "They've had confidence in me even when I didn't have it in myself."

His family was very supportive of his decision to attend UNC, he said. "And they are supportive of the fact that depending on where I attend law school, we might have to move again."

As a freshman, Hawkins said he didn't have a major in mind, "but I was leaning toward political science and history." He began thinking seriously about English his sophomore year.

Hawkins said that aside from familial support he was helped a lot by professors and classmates. "And the academic skills sessions under Dean Renwick's minority advising program really helped a lot."

Hawkins said he has utilized those sessions since he arrived at UNC. "I encourage all students to take advantage of them."

He said it was important for students to recognize when they needed help rather than to wait until the day before the final exam.

"There is no substitute for hard work," he said. "To do well here academically isn't beyond the reach of any student admitted."

Hawkins said it was important not to take a course load that can't be handled. He said he took course loads that he thought he could handle.

He averaged two to three hours of studying per day but used his weekends to do a lot of studying, he said.

Hawkins was a minority adviser his sophomore and junior years. He said he found it very rewarding to assist freshmen.

He tutored in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School Systems his junior year and also found it rewarding, he said.

Hawkins said he didn't know why there was a lack of blacks in campus activities but, "I would like to see that problem rectified."

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