

Billy Carter

The quintessential man for the 1980s

By WILLIAM DURHAM

PLAINS, GA.—It was a rainy night in Georgia. The mists rose in wisps as I trudged along a downtown street. Red and blue neon flashed in black puddles. Stale coffee and a cold hamburger sat in my stomach like battery acid and a lump of clay.

I was on my way to interview a man who is to be, perhaps, the quintessential man of the 1980s. His involvement in international affairs has been well documented by the world press. He has connections in the highest offices in the nation. He nimbly treads the narrow line between crafty deviousness and outright illegality. His name? Billy Carter.

And yet he is a modest man. He postponed interviews on national television with the three major networks in order to chat with me. He wears blue jeans or overalls and drinks beer. He is not overly fastidious in his personal habits.

I met him in an inexpensive hamburger cafe on a side street. He was eating fried chicken and drinking beer, just as if he weren't the president's brother. After casual introductions, I leapt right into the interview.

"Billy (I may call you Billy, mayn't I? Thank you), how do you feel sitting here eating fried chicken and drinking beer, knowing that your brother is the president of the United States?"

He chewed a while before answering. Then he flashed that impish grin which has made him known the world over and said, "Uh, Ah love mah brother Jimmy. Ah try to be a good brother to him."

It is rare to find such childlike sincerity in a public figure of Billy's prominence. I told him this. He shrugged and said, "Aw shucks."

"Billy, you are aware, I am sure, that the recent publicity concerning your relations with the Libyan government has been a source of potential embarrassment for your brother, coming as it did just before the convention."

"Harriet, bring out some more beer," he shouted. "Yes, sir, Ah am aware of that. But mah brother and Ah are very close, and we love each other. Ah do mah best to please mah brother Jimmy, but Ah can't do it all the time."

"Do you think that you should try to maintain a lower profile in order to avoid embarrassment?"

He spat out a chicken bone and grinned toothily. He waved a beefy arm, a bulky gold watch flashing. I was discovering just what kind of charisma this man had that had charmed heads of state the world over. He exuded hospitality and a rather peculiar odor.

"Why don't y'all have some fried chicken," He said. I took a leg and began to gnaw it. It was gray and greasy, but had that good old farm flavor that is so delightful.

Still chewing the stringy yet flavorful meat, I asked the most biting of my battery of questions. "Billy, did you and your brother conspire illegally in the Libya affair, and did the president then purposely withhold information?"

"Well, mah lawyers have advised me not to answer any questions on this matter," Billy sighed, his cherubic face sadly wistful. "But, because you're a friend, and all—after all, y'all've eaten fried chicken with me (this accompanied by a playful swipe at my shoulder, leaving grease stains on my trench coat)—Ah feel that Ah can tell y'all that mah brother Jimmy and Ah haven't done anythin' illegal that Ah know of."

He giggled, popping another beer open with a practiced flip of his wrist. "Ah love mah brother Jimmy." He grinned and tilted his head back, guzzling the entire can. With another grin, he crushed the empty can on his head. He was a man undaunted by the excited company he kept.

He had to leave just then to meet with several network reporters, but he took the time to wrap up some chicken and cheesecake. With a "See y'all later" and a wave he was driven off in a large limousine, surrounded by a bevy of Secret Service men.

Slapping my battered fedora on my head, I shuffled off into the drizzle of the night. I reflected that it was refreshing to meet a public figure imbued with such delightful innocence. A reporter is cynical by nature, but after talking with Billy I felt like having a glass of warm milk and going to bed.

And so I shuffled on into the gloom of the night.

William Durham, a junior English major from Chapel Hill, is editorial assistant for The Daily Tar Heel.



DTH/Scott Sharpe

Prep onslaught



DTH/Scott Sharpe

This colorful crowd is attending a preppie mixer, intended to parody the styles characteristics of preppies. However, some see more than clashing colors in their clothing.

The social implications of pink and green

By DAN FESPERMAN

Aphids in a rose garden.

A hair on a butter knife. Wolfpackers in the bleachers.

Nasty images indeed, but try this one on for size: Preppies in Chapel Hill. By the dozen. By the score. By the hundreds, even thousands. And multiplying like bacterium on a slide.

It's enough to zap the starch right out of a blown-back, hot-combed, triple-layered, Zieg-Heil haircut. Or to suck the sheen from an ultra-bright, putrid-reek, perma-press pair of day-glo greenies. Or even wipe the smile off the face of a grinnin', flip-tailed, shirt-sewn, upwardly-mobile 'Zod gator.

Enough, in short, to make an alum like me feel that his old school has fallen ill with Creeping Reaganism, blithely

sliding downhill on rails greased with the dregs of Watergate and Jaycee Jamsam.

Yeah, yeah, there were Preppies in my days, too, back a long four years ago. And there were too many of them then as well, at least for my tastes.

But on each visit to Chapel Hill since, I've noticed more and more of the homogenous little Fascists crawling around. I don't mean actual prep school graduates. Some of those occasionally achieve individuality once they reach college and shed their old cocoons. And I don't simply mean Greeks, either, though they certainly have a healthy share.

I mean the hoity-toity fellows (and women) with their heads stuffed into self-aggrandizing clouds of conformity. "You wearin' plaids? OK, I'll wear plaids too." "You gonna buy striped belts to match your pants and tops?

Yeah, me too." Those guys. "So big deal, twitface. What's the harm in a few Preppies?" That's the usual reply to babblings such as mine, so I'll answer the question now.

The harm is to the sanity of the rest of us. We get tired of seeing robots march across the campus and through our lives.

We get tired of self-serving bugheads who graduate with a B.A. degree and go on to a career of glad-handing down at the Chamber of Commerce.

Because along with each and every Preppie goes the Preppie value system. The system which says, "Hey, Exxon's OK. What's wrong with a little profit?"

The system whose answer to dissent is "Nuke 'em."

The system which brought us Nixon, Vietnam, bad Victorian romances, TV docudramas, *The Complete Book of Running*, Spam, Ronco Veg-o-Matics, Bubonic Plague, the Peloponnesian Wars and Java Man (he wore topiders, remember?) What the hell, let's blame it all on the Preppies.

So, do Chapel Hill a favor, turn the tables, and bring them to their lime green knees.

Nuke a Preppie for lunch. Ship the waste to State.

Dan Fesperman '77 was news editor for The Daily Tar Heel.

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