

Soup kitchen proves enlightening experience

By JODI SMITH

"...Swing low, sweet chariot...comin' for to carry me...home...swing low..."

A thoughtful smile crossed Bingham's face as he gently laid the mike on the piano and sauntered back through dark faces to his red-chipped aluminum chair.

"Thank you, Brother Bingham. Anybody else?" a deep voice came from the front. There was no immediate reply from the crowd, just weary heads still nodding appreciation of Bingham's soulful rendition. "OK then, if you'll say the blessing with me, we'll eat!" Nodding heads bowed and presently a line formed around steaming aluminum vats of scrambled eggs, grits, toast and sausage.

The grits are misleading. This isn't a potluck dinner at some community church in south Georgia. This is a typical morning at a soup kitchen on the Northeast side of Washington, D.C.—on the third most highly saturated drug block in the United States. But within the cinderblock basement walls of the Third Street Church of God, these "street people" are treated with the utmost care and concern.

This particular breakfast and worship service is run by John Stagers and his One Ministries team, who also work with young school children and inmates at nearby Lorton Penitentiary. Stagers, a jovial, robust black minister who has started several urban ministries around the country, says the team has a policy against giving cash handouts, and has found employment for only a few trustworthy men (including Bingham), who help out at the church and live together in a house across the street. The breakfast service, which began six years ago, is held three mornings a week, but the door is always open.

Stagers and One Ministries has also made significant contribution to reform in Lorton Penitentiary, according to an inmate, Sydney, who now brings in speakers and runs seminars and Bible studies for the other inmates. Several years ago, says Sydney, Lorton was notorious for inmate killings, drug dealing and harassment of visitors—all of which have drastically

decreased since Stagers began work there. Sydney is serving a life sentence but will be up for parole in seven years.

Back at the soup kitchen, today is not a completely typical one. Among the sea of street people in toboggans and grimy overcoats are 15 young students from the University of North Carolina. The students are part of a group project with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, a 750-member organization at UNC, there to help and observe.

The trip, which took place during Spring Break of this year, began as an "experiment," but due to its success will become an annual event. Costing each student \$45, and led by Inter-Varsity staffworker Richard Rhodes (now regional Inter-Varsity director), they stayed in a nearby youth hostel. They also visited Lorton Penitentiary, a maximum security facility, and two other soup kitchens in the D.C. area. One afternoon was spent picking up trash along Third and New Jersey Streets.

Over at a corner table, two UNC students sit down to eat with "Danny," a large, tall man with a golden-brown beard and clear blue eyes. "Do you mind if we eat with you?"

"Nah, sit down." He shrugged.

"Looks pretty good."

"Yeah."

"We're... what's your name?"

"Danny." He looked away and continued eating.

"We heard you playing this morning, you really play well."

A tarnished saxophone lay on the floor beside Danny.

There was a long silence and Danny continued to look away.

"Maybe you could get a band going around here." Silence.

"Tell us something about yourself, Danny." More silence.

In a moment he looked at them. Tears were streaming from his blue eyes, dripping onto his plate.

"I don't have anything to tell... I don't have anything... I messed up everything... He began to cry harder and the students and the man beside him stood to comfort him. "It's OK. We care about you. We really do. It's gonna be all right. You've got to believe it..." After a while, Danny calmed

down and talked with the students. He seemed much more content after the long spiritual discussion.

One of the two students, Patti White, a senior Psychology/Recreation Administration major, said, "When I first looked out into the crowd of people with old sacks and dirty clothes, all I could think of was homeless and lonely. But when they began to sing, there was so much hope and conviction in their voices. These people have next to nothing and yet are really thankful for the little they have." She held up two gold earrings "Bill" had just given her.

"I thought these people would resent us for being middle-class and having the opportunity to go to college, but it was just the opposite. They are some of the friendliest, most open people I've ever met. Sure, most of them have a lot of serious problems, and they didn't hesitate to talk about them. In fact, they wanted someone to talk to someone... like Danny. We counsel them and give what advice we can, but mainly we try to let them know we really care, to see urban poverty from their side. They're caught up in a vicious cycle. They aren't just statistics to be tucked away in some bureaucratic file—these are real people."

Patti said most of the people she talked to were looking for work, but lacked job experience. Many stay in nearby missions free for three nights with a charge of \$5 for each additional day.

Patti turned as Bingham came up to give her a hug. Her smile was unflinching as the big yellow pin dangling from his faded sweater reading "Yes Jesus Loves Me" scratched her shoulder. Over at the piano, Danny was accompanying R.C. on his saxophone. A new pocket Bible protruded from his hip pocket.

Down dirty New Jersey Street, away from the street people, away from the ghetto—the Capitol dome loomed in the distance, just five blocks away.

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Professors are key to college success

By GINIE LYNCH

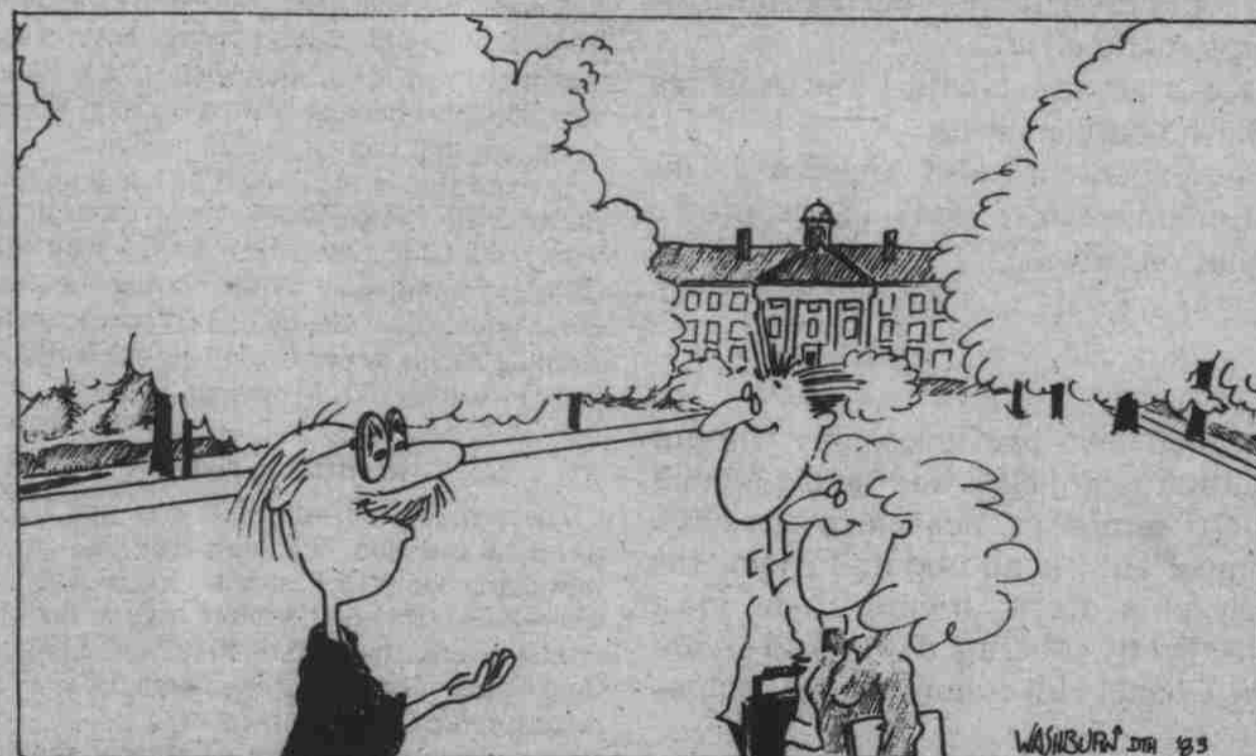
Graduation, is often a time of traumatic experiences for seniors who are, all of a sudden, burdened with great waves of nostalgic memories. Seniors depart bemused and overwhelmed by the real world that awaits them, forgetting to set aside a little time for reflection. It's as though they suddenly say farewell to a lot of past freedoms and hello to the responsibilities of adulthood. And too often, seniors become so involved with friends and the tradition of saying goodbye to the fun and hallowed halls of learning that they forget to acknowledge fellow undergraduates whom they leave behind, to share with them a bit of knowledge or advice on the way out.

So, lest I fall into this thoughtlessly inconsiderate category of recent UNC graduates, here are a few observations that got me through college.

For rising freshmen, it is extremely difficult to have a clear conception of what college is like until you are actually a part of it all, so you might as well throw out the window any preconceived notions that you harbor. The experience or trauma, of being a college student is and isn't a lot of things, but it should never fail to be, a challenge. College will test you academically, socially, religiously, emotionally, physically and mentally. If it does not, you are either at the wrong college or you're a vegetable.

College is a great time in life to take risks, to explore personal potential and define yourself as a person, without the restriction of living under the shadow of your parents' influence. There is so much, rather than too little, to learn. The choice is ultimately yours to acquire some insights about yourself and those who live around you.

Here is a little piece of advice I was given on my first day of college by a then-senior and something that has been a constant source of comfort to me ever since. After all, advice, even the best advice, is merely rehashing something someone else has said before you. What-



ever else you do during your four years of college, make sure you get to know your professors as individuals. Incredibly enough, this statement is to a certain extent, the key to surviving four difficult years of growing pains.

Whatever else you do during your four years of college, make sure you get to know your professors as individuals.

During your college years, you will frequently be lonely and confused. Growing up is a painful task and one that never ends. Even with your support system of peers and booze and partying and footloose-and-fancy-free moments, you will repeatedly feel that you are not understood, in part because you don't always understand yourself. And too, all of a sudden the counsel of your parents will leave you cold because of the desire to do things on your own — to break from the embryonic womb of childhood dependency.

This is where your professors fit into the pic-

ture. Professors, my friend told me, serve as role models and can really enrich your learning experience — inside and outside the classroom. They definitely have a tremendous amount of power over students, be it concern-

ing the good ol' GPA or recommendations to Law School, etc. or basking in the glory of student admiration.

Think about it. As college students, we are exposed to some of the best educated and most diversely talented group of individuals in this nation.

Not only intelligent, but professors are, on the whole, pretty neat people — warm, concerned, compassionate human beings truly dedicated to research and their students. Oh, sure, there are exceptions. And to those chosen few that make a student's life miser-

able for the duration of the course they teach, they leave an indelible mark in his memory. As in every profession, there are those who are rude, obnoxious, disgustingly opinionated and sadistic.

The most intriguing aspect about college profs is that they come in all shapes, sizes, personalities, and scopes of understandings, so there is a little bit for every type of student.

I particularly remember the history professor from my freshman year, his hands gnarled with arthritis and his shoulders often hunched in pain while telling his students with a bright idealistic smile about the beauty in our problematic world; the watching devilish Latin American professor talk about revolutionary political concepts with genius-like sophistication; and finally, recalling the young history professor who gave me confidence in my academic capabilities by simply believing in me. He said, "Don't limit yourself."

To these profs and many more, there is phenomenal gratitude to be expressed for helping us as students to reach farther, to struggle harder, to aspire to be the best we can be and for nurturing us along the way as we left the bright and brilliant memories of our infancy, our youth behind.

Knowledge is power, Robert Penn Warren, the great Southern writer once said in his novel *All the King's Men*. Underclassmen and rising freshman, take this knowledge and use it, don't limit yourselves. Get to know these lofty figures who shape your years of school just as much as your friends do. You won't regret such a decision. College professors oft are the bridge from which we leave the past behind and the link to the real world beyond graduation.

Ginie Lynch, a senior Latin American Studies major from Richmond, Va., is associate editor for The Tar Heel and plans to leave Chapel Hill soon.