

Durham-Chapel Hill: no love lost

By WILLIAM H. WILLIMON

It's that time of year again. We in the Durham-Chapel Hill area are in the midst of our annual "unexpected" drought. An absence of rain is becoming predictable in our area, as predictable as the annual earnest appeals from our neighbors over in Chapel Hill for water in their time of need. "Can you spare 500,000 gallons, pal?"

Now, I am pleased that we in Durham have enough water to spare, and I am pleased that we are helping Chapel Hill through another dry spell. But our Chamber of Commerce is teaching me to think "Durham First," so, along with that lone protesting city council member, I have some nagging questions in the back of my mind about the wisdom of our annual show of beneficence toward Chapel Hill. Should the citizens of Bull City keep our weaker neighbors afloat through another summer? I ask this question because I am tired of having my beloved city put

down by neighbors who would be high and dry except for our neighborliness.

We moved to Durham a little over a year ago. Before we had even taken up residence, it soon became apparent that we were entering a city in the grip of a vast inferiority complex. "Durham is O.K.," one of my colleagues on the Duke faculty begrudgingly admitted, "but you would like living in Chapel Hill much better. It is so much more civilized."

When we were wined and dined by my new colleagues, where did we go for dinner? Durham? Are you kidding? We drove bumper-to-bumper down a dangerous stretch of four-lane suicide to Chapel Hill ("the only place where you can find a good restaurant in this area") where we paid a large price for small portions of wilted broccoli and "beef stroganoff" which looked vaguely like something we used to eat out of a can in the Army. We followed dinner by a stroll along Chapel Hill's shops where we soaked in culture and sophistication

and tried not to be goggle-eyed at the prices, were hooted at by three undergraduates in a light blue pickup truck, festooned with subversive bumper stickers, and then returned to dear old drab Durham. I for one was not impressed by the self-effacing attitude of many Durham residents in the presence of the self-conscious, belligerent snobbishness of that little town to the south.

Personally this Durham citizen has had all the condescending, ungrateful, hypocritical slurs from Chapel Hill that I plan to endure. No more fawning over and covetous longing for Chapel Hill Chic to replace Durham Drab. Citizens of Durham unite! Durham first!

What is this chic culture and sophistication with which Chapel Hill seeks to intimidate us? It is mostly the pseudosophistication of an effete intelligentsia who have cloistered themselves in an academic ghetto of reactionary romanticism. Chapel Hill chic is wearing shoes which make the

human foot look like a duck and hurt like the devil unless you sit at a school desk all day. Chapel Hill chic is driving an old gray Volvo (in bumper-to-bumper traffic behind 2,000 other old gray Volvos mired in the congestion of Chapel Hill's narrow streets) while munching a yogurt-wheat germung bean candy bar.

Chapel Hill chic is the courage of marching in a protest demonstration in front of the Chapel Hill Post Office in bold support of a cause which everyone else in Chapel Hill is in favor of except for one aging professor emeritus. Chapel Hill chic is fighting any city expansion or modernization and then driving over to Durham for a job or every time you have to buy a toothbrush. Chapel Hill chic is buying old, worn-out, used buses when mass transportation is all the rage (even if everyone already drives a Volvo) rather than building an adequate town reservoir.

In place of this so-called "chic," give me good old drab Durham any day. Here is a no-nonsense, strictly utilitarian, no-frills town without pretense and presumption. We are what we are. We would rather eat fried chicken with the Colonel here than French cuisine in Chapel Hill. Our problems match those of some of the greatest cities in the world. Our crime rate is as high as any major metropolitan area in the country. Our city council has more important things to argue about than the height of city buildings and how to make downtown look quaint. Intelligence and sophistication here are measured by one's ability to get from one end of downtown Durham to the other without once going the wrong way down a one-way street. And I ask you, name me one place in Chapel Hill where one can buy:

1. a good hot dog with lots of chili.
2. a current issue of Hot Rod magazine.
3. a large strawberry artificially flavored and colored soft drink.

Everytime I step out of my house and catch the aroma of freshly cured tobacco gently hovering over Bull City, or pull my Dodge Dart over to the side of the street to let two police cars trailing three fire trucks trailing one ambulance scream past me, or spend half a day hunting a book in our downtown library (who says we in Durham don't honor the past), I know I live in a great city. Durham first!

Last August, during the last water crisis, the very friends of mine from Chapel Hill who made such derogatory remarks about my town, who flaunted their abrasive "I'd rather be in Chapel Hill" bumper stickers and complained about feeling uneasy when they left their car parked in front of my house; were the very same people who drank nine glasses of water at a dinner at our home and ended the evening by asking to take a bath in our tub because such acts were against the law in Chapel Hill. This year, I for one am putting my foot down. You don't drink my water if you don't love my town. It is as simple as that. Let's see how romantic and sophisticated Chapel Hill feels when it becomes a capital offense to flush a toilet.

These days, when everything down there seems to be a lovely Carolina Blue except the town reservoir, Durham drab is looking better all the time! Let's all drink (water) to that! Durham first!

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