

# FEATURES

## 'Papa Collier' opts for right chemistry

By **JULIA WHITE**  
Staff Writer

To a college freshman homesick for the familiarity of high school, a friendly face would be welcomed. That's just what F. Nash Collier, chemistry professor emeritus, has taken on as his task at the University — befriending new chemistry students.

Wearing a sign proclaiming his student-given title, "Papa Collier," the retired professor comes in every afternoon to help more than 1,300 new chemistry students in lab. After coming to the University in 1957, Collier has tried to intergrate an ideal he learned while teaching at Howard College.

"I'd like to establish the small-school feeling here at Carolina whenever possible," he said. "I have a policy I call 'speak to a stranger.' I try to get all my students to speak to at least one stranger per day."

Collier says he likes to think of his students as children, from whom he learns many lessons. "We talk

about everything from homework to their personal life," he said. "I try to give them advice. You could call it kind of a love-lorn advice relationship." The students in return give him ideas for a very unchemical type hobby — poetry.

His poetry ranges in topic from his wife to people he observes to a boa constrictor named Alice. A section title poem "Admonition on Brevity" says it all: "Be brief." Another gives his "Writer's Pact": "We agree to read one another, And whom we can't endure to read, / To praise." He also deals with more serious subjects, such as nature in "The Wonder of this Day": "Dune grass arching from sand to sand / Flutters sharply, / Wax-bright leaves of salt-enduring plants / Bounce in the glare, / Contesting with their shadows / The sting of sand, wind driven, / Needles me to cognizance, / Of the wonder of this day."

As his poetry shows the humor and insight of this soft-spoken Southern gentleman, his greenhouse shows his care for nature. He has over 400



Tar Heel/Jamie Cobb

Dr. 'Papa' Collier makes his chemistry classes more palatable

different kinds of cactus and succulent plants that he cares for every day.

"You can't get these kind of plants in the wild, since they are often endangered species," Collier said.

"They have to be imported. Mostly they grow in greenhouses around the U.S." On his desk in Venable Hall is a tribute to his favorite plant, a dried out skeleton of a cactus plant.

Another item on his desk is a miniature statue of the Roman god of fire, Vulcan. "This statue stands in Birmingham, where I grew up, and one day I stood right here on the space between his ear and his shoulder when I was young," he says proudly. His desk also holds a small stuffed otter and a copy of his book of poetry, "A Flight of Birds."

After leaving Birmingham, he received a degree from Howard College and got his master's and doctorate degrees from Ohio State University. He said he loves living in Chapel Hill, having been at UNC since he began teaching.

"This town is so liberal, you can do or be anything you want," he said. "No one looks at you funny when you want to do your own thing."

Collier and his wife Esther live alone now that their three children, Martha, Cathy and David, are grown and are pursuing graduate degrees from the University.

Collier's advice on academic matters is free-flowing. "If you want to go into chemistry you should be a consistently good student and like math," he said. "Chemistry needs good structural organization. You can't learn it all in one semester or year." Many of his students will readily agree with this point.

He also advises everyone to get out and do some exercise every day. He does calisthenics every night to keep him looking young. His poem "The Bones" tells of his opinion on growing older: "The bones of the spine, / Explained the orthopedist, / Wear unevenly. / The bones wear, / I muttered, / Walking away, / I always thought some things. . . / and so, once did I, / Croaked a stone / On its way to sand."

The poetry habit that he picked up late one sleepless night has developed into 300 poems. He plans to publish a new collection soon titled "Speak to a Stranger." In the back of his current book he tells what causes his fatherly attitude to the "children" of the University.

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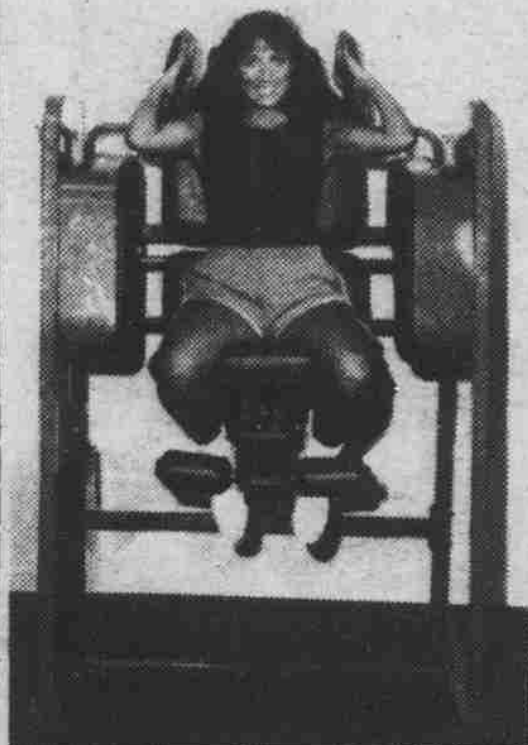
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