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Legendary 'Fat Man' - William Flowers

Biographical sketch of William Grant Flowers. This and other articles may be found in the University Archives.

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Most people would be offended to pick up a nickname of "fat man," but it is a label one William Grant Flowers has lived with for most of his life and you can get his attention quicker by using the nickname than his given name. More than once someone has been unsuccessful contacting him because they couldn't give the operator his unadulterated name.

This handle came to our subject when he was in the eighth grade, which was when dancing became a big part of his life. There was a popular song with lyrics that went "everybody loves a fat man, and oh how a fat man can rock." He admits that the phrase that friends tagged on him fit and just stuck. "I didn't mind and it got be rather unique after awhile," he said.

His love for dancing increased during the high school years while he attended Edwards Military Institute. During the summers he would work all week until noon on Saturday and hitchhike to Morehead to dance his heart out. "I had \$10 in my pocket and I just lived for those Saturday nights. On Sunday it was back to face another week on the farm."

The farm to which he returned was between Kenly and Princeton and he fondly remembers growing up there and the wonderful stories his grandfather told. Although his grandfather was blind, he was active and with the aid of a wire his father had strung around the farm, he did numerous chores and died just five months before his 100th birthday. "He made American history come alive for me," said Flowers, "for his daddy was in the Civil War and had passed happenings on to my grandpop."

"Mom and three of my aunts had gone to college up in Greenville, so I suppose I was destined to go that way too. I was a little late applying, so when I got there in the fall of 1956 there was no dormitory space. Four of us guys lived in a room above the florist and then ten of us rented a house. We were quite a crowd and we had a heck of a good time," he remarked. He credits one of his roommates, the late Snooter Finley, with putting him on the right track. "He was a veteran and he literally made me study. That seriousness was good for me."

During his second year he lived in **Umstead dorm** with Tom Nelson of Jacksonville. That was the year he met Barbara Wilson from Bethel, who also had a love for dancing. They saw each other every day in the soda shop and cafeteria. The romance grew and they were married at the end of that school year.

"That first year of marriage we lived in one room and I was a hard working **laundry** man when I wasn't in classes. I'd go around in the morning collecting laundry from the guys in the dorm and bring it back in the afternoon." Their first child, Julie was born at the end of their junior year and Barb had decided she would leave school until Mrs. Joe Ange offered to take care of Julie for no pay. Both "Fat Man" and Barb felt she was an angel in disguise as Barb was able to continue her studies so they could graduate in 1960. "Those were lean years, but we loved our time at East Carolina," agreed Barb and "Fat Man." They were fortunate that Barb's mother moved to Greenville to attend classes, thus providing a babysitter which gave them a social life which of course included dancing.

Following graduation the Flowers went to Norfolk where he had a job with Burroughs Corp., and Barb started teaching first grade. In 1969 his job with Burroughs took him to Raleigh and he says, "I knew I was home. I'd walk down the street and see East Carolina people, go to a party and always see someone I knew from school and I just knew I never wanted to leave. I feel I have the best of both worlds because I live in Raleigh and on the weekends go to our place at the beach. I'm a fisherman -- love to fish."

When asked if perhaps he might retire at the beach, he said, "I don't know if I'll retire, because I really enjoy working. I'm a people person -- I love people and love to associate with them. For years there has been a group of 10 to 20 of us, many East Carolina people, who meet at a local restaurant for breakfast. It's this kind of thing that just makes living here so great." Bill Jenkins, '60, a member of the "breakfast gang" said, his earliest

remembrances of "Fat Man" is dancing on the patio at the soda shop on campus. He said, "He is one big-hearted person who never does anything in moderation, and his after-the-game parties are just one example of that."

Most people who live in the Raleigh area are familiar with the parties Jenkins mentions which traditionally take place on the weekend of the ECU-State football game. It began in 1970 when "Fat Man" invited a few people over to the house after the game. The next year it was wall-to-wall people and so he hosted the group at the neighborhood club house the following year. When that became too small, the party was held in a skating rink and then one year at the fairgrounds. This year the after-the-game social was held at a large clubhouse. As one alumni staffer said, "everyone has a good time at these socials, but nobody has a better time than "Fat Man."

His daughters and wife say he fully shows his devotion to many things he believes in and ECU is high on his list. Barb said when one of the girls was thinking of attending another university, he suggested they spend a day together in Greenville and by the end of that day she was convinced ECU was the school for her. Richard Dupree, executive director of the Pirate Club, said "Fat Man" is a true pirate. "He is one of a kind and works hard for ECU athletics and ECU in general."

Flowers has been in business for himself since 1977. He said it was something he always wanted to do and decided at that time he better get on with it. "We give very good services on a very good product," he remarked, "selling business forms all over eastern North Carolina."

Bill Flowers, a person who exudes vitality in whatever activity he pursues, admits, "I work hard and I play hard and dancing is one of the best ways to have a good time." The Flowers usually go somewhere every weekend where there is dancing, frequently to dance contests to see what others are doing. He said more people are getting involved with dancing and people are getting back to shagging, which is his speciality. "I've had people ask me to show them some steps and I feel honored." If dancing is the secret to maintaining one's youth, "Fat Man" Flowers will be one of our ageless alumni.



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