

## **Dee Mason**

### **Side 1:**

[She is the new sustaining advisor to the Skylines. A sustainer is a member of the Junior League who has reached the age 40. The Skylines is the local League publication (enclosed)].

She was born in Durham, graduated from Duke and UNC graduate school. She married out of school, knew many people in the community, and moved to Asheville at 50.

[16] There were two options for women who wanted to work - becoming a teacher or a nurse. She taught school for three years and when her first child was born, stayed home to raise her family. She joined the League and volunteered in various areas until she joined the Arts Council where she volunteered for 17 years. She did no paid work until 7 years ago. [Abe Walston, Joe Walston]

[30] She was approached by Betty, who wanted to retire from the Durham paper where she was covering social activities and was asked to find a replacement. She had had no journalistic training but had majored in English in college and had published a play, "It's All Greek To Me." She was in the process of working on a research book on Durham but took this once-a-week job which got her out in the community. She covered 100-year birthday parties, social events held at colleges and churches for Blacks and Whites. She became a feature writer, interviewing people in this community. When her youngest son went to college she got a divorce and started a paper covering Raleigh called "City." The timing for publishing was not good, and it did not survive. She returned to the Durham paper as a columnist and feature writer.

[74] Asheville friends persuaded her to take an overnight hike to Mt. LeConte where she met her future husband who had been divorced 10 years and was raising two daughters by himself. He went to Durham for a legal conference, looked her up, they were married and she moved here. [John W. Mason, Caroline Mason, Susan Mason]

[91] She attended camp Awa-Niko in Swannanoa when she was 11 and was a counselor there at 19. There were only 20 campers at the time, and she looks back fondly at her experiences there.

[104] As a counselor she spent her free Thursday afternoons going to the picture show on Pack Square. She was surprised to see it so changed.

[120] After having lived 50 years in Durham with many friends and family, moving was very difficult. She had worked full time for more than five years, was well-known and very active. Her two step-daughters were still at home and she found "the Betty Crocker stuff was good for a day." Her mother had a heart attack and she had to return to Durham until she recovered. However she said her husband was her best friend and she was warmly welcomed in the city. [Betsy Robb]

[156] Every day she looked through the want ads but found that the kind of job she wanted never made it to the want ads as they would in a larger city. Asheville is a networking town but, though

she volunteered her time to do publicity for the Windcap auction, she found there was not a lot of networking on a woman's level.

[175] In Durham professionals were hired for events and the opening of new buildings. Through the Windcap auction she was invited to a "Focus Group" - a breakfast at Café on the Square with twenty-five women. She sat next to Winner who was planning a grand opening for the new Heart Building of Memorial Mission Hospital. She said she would be interested in doing this on a consulting basis. [Harriette Winner]

[186] At this time a friend of hers from Durham moved here with her doctor husband who had fallen out with his partners. Together they started a business and planned the major event for the opening of the Hospital. Perry had been president of the Durham League and Dee had done a lot of work for the Arts Council. They formed a limited partnership, called their company "In Every Event" and were hired for two more events. (See enclosure) They decided that, if they couldn't find a job, they would create one. [Perry Van Dyke]

[200] She was called by the Executive Director of the Arts Alliance who had been called by her former director in Durham. Following a lunch she was hired for 6 months for 20 hours a week planning a special event for the Arts Alliance. She has done a lot of acting and singing and felt right at home. Met some wonderful people, volunteers and professionals. [Linda Wilkerson, Yvonne Coleman]

[230] She was then approached by Cynthia the Executive Director of Pack Place to see if she would do some fund raising on a limited basis as the Marketing Director had just left. She was just told that if they get the grant she would be hired full time. She feels she has finally found the job she wants. She has been here 1.5 years and this is fast for Asheville. This is not the Triangle. This was like starting all over again. No one knew her when she came here but her skills translated. [Cynthia Grant]

[254] She met Carol through her lawyer husband and asked if there was a place for her on the paper. Carol said that it was unlikely and then she was called about the need for a restaurant person on the Hot Ticket. She was phoned when she had had to go to Durham for her mother's surgery but her husband took her clips over for approval and the paper waited for her. She had done restaurant reviews before. She was told that she wasn't to trash or review a restaurant but to make people feel comfortable and know what they were about. The paper gave her visibility and name recognition. She feels she belongs. [Carol Currie, Walt Currie, Betsy Robb]

[287] She said she has been very lucky. First of all having married John who knew so many people and is respected. She has just been elected an elder in her church: "I've been lucky, but that's the story of my life." [John Mason]

[300] She feels she has been lucky with the paper and especially with the "Focus Group." A woman stockbroker, no longer in town, pulled a group of women together every three months by sending out cards to key people. Through a Durham friend she was invited to lunch by David who had been told, "You've got to rescue her. She is turning into Betty Crocker. This is not our Dee." David gave her name to Wareen who contacted her for the Windcap Auction and gave her

name to Cynthia. In this way she met other professionals and got the Memorial Mission job. [Cynthia May, Michael Armentrout, David Benson, Wareen Williams]

[358] She knows her way around the city because of her restaurant assignments. She has gotten to know an entire subculture.

[365] For a while she felt as though she had one foot in Durham. She now feels she has both feet here. She would give up anything and everything to be with her husband. John had offered to give up his practice here and move to Durham. He had been brought up in Rutherfordton and has been here 20 years.

[403] She came in as a professional and found her husband had many wonderful friends who had been supportive while he was raising his daughters. They were happy to see him happy. They were welcoming and helpful to her but she needed her own private group of friends.

[435] In Durham one can be private. It is not that way here. Word spreads. It was wonderful having Perry, a friend from home. This is a small town. Her marriage is the latest true romance story. In a larger city you don't keep up with everyone. Everything is grist for the mill. She has met a number of natives. This would be rare in Durham. There is no feeling of "in" and "out" group but she was surprised at the attitude towards women. Women are more accepted as "players" in the Triangle. Her opinion was sought but this is more of a male society. Women here still make brownies and go to church socials. [Perry Van Dyke]

[517] In Durham there is a strong, wealthy Black population and the people listen to the minorities. They are forever having programs like Building Bridges. (see Sue Walton and O. T. Tomes tape)

Through the Durham Arts Council, friendships between the races developed and, while she has contact with Margaret through the YMI here, she has few contacts with Blacks here (see Margaret Fuller tape). Asheville is tolerant of diverse groups, and she has met a number of gays in the Arts, but they are not invited to the Biltmore Club. She has not seen intolerance, and Blacks live side by side with whites. The Religious Right however is an exception. [Margaret Fuller]

[605] For a small area she feels that the city offers diverse and interesting elements.

## **Side 2:**

She feels that the center of the city is coming back to life. There is a sign of vitality. She has found that people in the restaurant business are choosing to come back to the center (see Kosta tape). She hasn't been here long enough to know how much this has to do with Pack Place and the BB&T building but, having come from a place where the center of the city has died and probably will not come back, Asheville has more going for it. The center is holding more than anticipated, the city is not far flung and the edges are not entrenched.

[2/36] Since her childhood she has never lived in a neighborhood where she could walk to a video store [they didn't exist then either!] The various neighborhoods are not decayed and exist as part of the infrastructure.

[2/45] In Durham whites moved out of downtown because of the schools. The city is divided along racial lines with 80% blacks in the city and 80% whites in the country. The division will never be breached. Downtown is a desert and frightening at night. She feels safe working at night here and finds this exciting. Wise people had a tremendous vision and the elements that make it work.

[2/64] Most women do not tend to be as assertive here as they are in the Triangle. Her friends through her husband volunteer and do church work. The first question asked is what church do you belong to. Wareen doesn't attend any and people are surprised. [Wareen Williams

[2/78] She and Perry had different ideas about their program. Perry wanted to offer services as a volunteer to show what could be done and then charge. She came as a working girl believing that once you give it away you will always give it away. She will help Perry but wants to sell her skills. She wants to be paid for them. [Perry Van Dyke]

[2/90] Linda had thought of approaching her for the Art Alliance job as a volunteer but wisely did not. While most women her age do not work she feels she is worth being paid and needs this to make her feel good about herself. She knows she is worth what she is paid. She probably wouldn't have worked had it not been thrust on her. Her previous husband didn't want her to work because of his income tax bracket. Working gave her freedom to go out on her own. There are plenty of volunteers doing a good job and most women her age with sufficient income, are volunteering. [Linda Wilkerson]

[2/118] Pack Place has a wonderful group of volunteers. Younger women are on boards - one is on 8 or 9 boards. In Durham, a black woman is on many boards (a token). [Meredythe Holmen

[2/137] She took early retirement in the Durham Junior League [at one time a member became inactive automatically at age 40. This was changed and based on service rendered]. She was responsible for starting the Children's Theatre which lasted for 15 years. She does not like being involved in attending meetings.

[2/153] She transferred [a League privilege] to the Asheville League so she could go to a luncheon once a year. This was not high on her list. Her mother is urging her to rejoin the Colonial Dames but she is not interested in any more clubs - she has "been there, done that, don't need to." One of the purposes of the League is to train members, she has moved on and has used this training as a stepping stone for personal growth.

[2/181] At an Arts Alliance meeting she was introduced as a staff person and someone said she writes that "little column." The man sitting next to her, when he found she was John's wife, changed his attitude towards her 180 degrees - she refers this as "staff infection" and people assume she is obviously working for the fun of it. This expresses what old Asheville is like - a slight tinge of scandal. However, most people accept you for what you are

[2/222] She likes the kindness she sees in people - most people don't honk in traffic. Durham used to be like that. She wonders what will happen when we start being important and cites the Grove Arcade. This is a magnetic place.

[2/233] Everybody she has talked to who runs a restaurant, found the place while driving through and wanted to build a restaurant here.

[2/240] She hopes we are not building a monster and that building will not get out of control. She applauds the sign ordinances and considers Patton Ave. a nightmare. A friend of hers fell asleep at a traffic light!

[2/268] She saw Pack Square in the early 60's and used to buy blue shirts for campus at the Army Navy for 88 cents. She feels the area vibrant now. While working with the Arts Alliance she was involved with filling the empty storefront widows with art exhibits. Places to put art are disappearing, according to Joey who is responsible for this. [Joey Moore]

[2/285] She feels that the position taken by the Citizens-Times a two-edge sword. The attitude of boosting the town, like the Chamber of Commerce makes for bland writing. There is no investigative reporting [there was with the Green Line until it became the Mountain Xpress], and when she was hired to write her column she was told, "We don't trash our neighbors." This was not the policy in Raleigh, where the emphasis was on competitive selling.

[2/320] Her job at Pack Place calls for marketing locally and nationally. She works with the Chamber of Commerce for leads, setting up conference and meeting places. She sells space in Pack Place for parties and weddings. She is also working on fundraising. Pack Place suffered from "contribution burn-out." Now it is time to let the people know that the project is succeeding and long range plans for endowments and individual giving need to be made.

[2/361] The Arts Alliance publishes a paper sporadically. It thinks of itself as the United Way of the Arts. She worked with them through June putting on "Art a la Carte". This was a series of small dinner parties all under Buncombe and other counties with artistic themes. Small parties were given and then one big party to raise money. She left good notes so it can be recreated.

[2/402] She said she feels she has landed in heaven. This is a wonderful place to live. It was difficult moving, harder than she thought to leave and harder to get both feet firmly planted here. She said, "You don't have to know everybody, you just have to feel comfortable where you are and a lot of it has to do with my wonderful husband who has given me a good reason for being here."