



BETTY LANDON RAY

Faison, N. C.

*friendly, musical, capable*

President of Junior Class '49; Canterbury Club '49-'50, Vice-President '50; Granddaughters Club '49-'50, President '50; Sigma Pi Alpha '49-'50; Honor Roll '49; *Belles* '49-'50; STAGE COACH Editorial Staff '49-'50; Altar Guild '50; Choir '49-'50, President '50; Honor Council '50; Hall Vice-Counselor '50; Legislative Body '49; Christmas Pageant '50; Mu.

# Installments

## Part 1: Fireball from Faison

In episode one of Biographical Conversations with Betty Ray McCain, McCain shares stories and memories of her colorful childhood in Faison, North Carolina. She calls her father, Horace Ray, and her mother, Mary Perret Ray, "the dearest, sweetest people."

A country lawyer, Horace Ray represented a diverse clientele, ranging from New Jersey truckers to small-town criminals. McCain recalls that on school excursions to Central Prison, inmates would call out, "Hey Betty Ray, how's everyone at home?"

McCain reveals that during the Great Depression her mother cooked breakfast every morning for the townspeople of Faison. She served grits, vegetables, and coffee—"her own soup kitchen," McCain notes.

McCain's parents, both lifelong Democrats, were also very interested in politics. Horace Ray worked on campaigns, and urged his daughter and her brother to vote as soon as they were old enough. The race for the party's nomination for US Senator in 1950, pitting former UNC president Dr. Frank Porter Graham against Willis Smith, particularly interested the Rays. Jesse Helms, then a Democrat, managed Smith's campaign. McCain recalls that on the Sunday before the election, her father found a campaign piece on his front porch. The flyer featured a manipulated photograph showing Dr. Graham's wife dancing with an African-American man. "Daddy was cussing so loud," McCain says, "and Mama kept saying, 'Hush, Daddy; the children can hear you.'"

McCain graduated from Faison High School a full year early and as class valedictorian. In 1950, she graduated from St. Mary's School, a junior college in Raleigh, and completed her college education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "I loved every minute of every hour I was there," McCain says of her Carolina days, adding, "One of the saddest days of my life was when I graduated."

McCain moved to New York City in 1952 to pursue a Master's Degree in Education at Columbia University's Teachers College. After a colorful two years in the Big Apple, she happily returned to North Carolina. She lived in Chapel Hill, and worked at her alma mater as well as the local YWCA.

Shortly after her homecoming, McCain met the man she would marry serving a residency at UNC Chapel Hill. Dr. John L. McCain, a doctor's son, grew up on the grounds of a tuberculosis sanatorium in Hoke County, North Carolina. "It made him think that doctors are here to serve," McCain says of her late husband's childhood experience. His urge to serve led Dr. McCain to practice medicine for 49 years, and to engage in leadership roles in countless medical and civic organizations.

Episode One of Biographical Conversations with Betty Ray McCain concludes with fond memories of the McCains' wedding day in 1955. "It was sleeting and raining, and I did notice in the pictures that everyone still had on their coats." After a one-year stay in Richmond, Virginia, where Dr. McCain worked as a resident, the newlyweds moved in 1956 to Wilson, North Carolina—a place Betty Ray McCain still calls home.

## Part 2: Head of the Party

Episode Two of Biographical Conversations with Betty Ray McCain takes us to Wilson, North Carolina, where the McCains moved in 1956. Dr. McCain took a position at Wilson Memorial Hospital, eventually serving as chief of staff. The couple moved into their Wilson home just in time to welcome their first child, Paul Pressly McCain. Two years later, the family expanded again with the birth of Paul's sister, Mary Eloise McCain. Despite diapers and bottles, McCain found the time to roll up her sleeves and work for the Democratic Party. She volunteered for the 1960 Terry Sanford gubernatorial campaign and, four years later, worked for Richardson Preyer in the Democratic primary. Preyer's loss to eventual governor Dan Moore broke her heart, yet she still canvassed for Moore because, she offers, "as Jim Hunt and Terry Sanford teach you, you've got to come back together."

McCain put that lesson to good use as she worked her way up the statewide Democratic Party ladder: named Wilson's Democratic Precinct Chair in the mid 1960s, a member of the party's executive committee in 1971, the state's first vice chair in 1972, and, in 1976, the first woman to chair the North Carolina State Democratic Party.

That same year, one of Dr. and Mrs. McCain's dearest friends from Wilson, Jim Hunt, launched his first campaign for governor. McCain served as his campaign manager and once Governor Hunt took office she says she, "did whatever needed to be done," for her fellow Wilsonian. "You know, you've got have somebody back there, seeing what's going on," she said of her role in Governor Hunt's first term.

In 1980, McCain again successfully managed Governor Hunt's campaign, fighting for re-election against I. Beverly Lake, a former Democrat who switched to the Republican Party. Governor Hunt made ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment a key element of his second term agenda. McCain was one of the state's most vocal supporters of the ERA. Efforts to ratify the ERA in North Carolina reached a crescendo in 1981, and Governor Hunt appointed McCain as his chief lobbyist for the measure. McCain worked tirelessly to persuade members of the state legislature to approve the ERA, and came very close to succeeding. Along the way she crossed swords with many people, from members of the National Organization for Women to state representatives and senators who promised to vote in favor of the ERA only to renege on their pledge.

Although ratification of the ERA failed, Hunt's first two gubernatorial terms were so successful that, in 1984, he ran for U.S. Senate against Republican incumbent Jesse Helms. Again, he turned to McCain for leadership of his campaign.

### **Part 3: Secretary of Cultural Resources**

In part three of *Biographical Conversations with Betty Ray McCain*, McCain describes the U.S. Senatorial campaign of 1984—a race between Governor Jim Hunt and Senator Jesse Helms. Although Hunt launched the campaign with a double-digit lead over the Republican incumbent, his advantage eroded. By the beginning of November, polls showed Senator Helms leading Governor Hunt by three points. On Election Day, despite what McCain calls, "a superhuman effort by everybody that worked in every precinct, in every county, in every congressional district and throughout the state," Helms prevailed.

Looking back on the most expensive non-presidential race up to that point in American history, McCain says she regrets that the campaign didn't respond earlier and more unequivocally to the negative advertisements used by the Helms team. McCain believes Governor Hunt would have made an excellent Senator, adding, "if Jim Hunt had won... he would have been president instead of Bill Clinton. He was that competent and that good."

Instead, Hunt returned to a successful law practice, then reemerged in 1992 to run for an unprecedented third term as North Carolina's governor. By that time, McCain had turned down a request to run for U.S. Senate, been elected to the UNC Board of Governors, and unsuccessfully campaigned for a seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives.

Commenting on that race, in which negative advertising targeted her, McCain notes, "you just have to develop a sense of humor...and know that you don't matter a hill of beans to them, and they're just going to treat you like they please, so you might as well have a little fun with it."

When Hunt again won the gubernatorial race in November 1992, he rewarded his dear friend and loyal strategist with a plum position in his state cabinet—Secretary of Cultural Resources. Sworn in January 1993, McCain spent the next eight years elevating the cultural level of her beloved state. Her many accomplishments during this time included opening of the North Carolina Museum of History, celebrating the historic U.S. World War II battleship USS North Carolina, and resurrecting what is believed to be Blackbeard's pirate ship, The Queen Anne's Revenge.

Since leaving the cabinet upon the conclusion of Governor Hunt's fourth term in January 2001, McCain has remained a lively member of the North Carolina political scene. A supporter of Bev Perdue, McCain was delighted when the State House and Senate veteran won election as North Carolina's first female governor in November 2008.

*Biographical Conversations with Betty Ray McCain* concludes with some words of wisdom from McCain, who lost her beloved husband in 2005, "I hope that people will know that all the times will not be good. There will be sickness, and sadness, and you have to have a marriage that's strong enough to bear up under those sorts of things...you just have to understand that's the way it is, and it will get better."

# Timeline

**1931:** Betty Ray is born in Faison, North Carolina, to Horace and Mary Perret Ray.

**1947:** Betty Ray graduates from Faison High School. She completes high school one year early and is valedictorian of her class.

**1947:** Betty Ray attends St. Mary's College in Raleigh, which, at the time, is a two-year college.

**1949:** Having completed the St. Mary's program in May, Betty Ray attends UNC-Chapel Hill to complete her college education.

**1950:** Frank Porter Graham loses Senatorial democratic primary race to Willis Smith and his campaign manager, Jesse Helms.

**1952:** Betty Ray graduates from UNC-Chapel Hill with a Bachelor of Arts in Music.

**1952:** Betty Ray attends Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City.

**1953:** Betty Ray receives a Master of Arts degree in Music from Columbia University. She returns to North Carolina to work at the University of North Carolina.

**1952, 1954:** Betty Ray works as a courier for Educational Travel Associates.

**1953-1955:** Betty Ray serves as Assistant Director of the YWCA at UNC-Chapel Hill.

**1955:** Betty Ray marries Dr. John L. McCain, a physician.

**1955-1956:** Betty Ray McCain serves as Assistant to the Chair of the Department of Internal Medicine, at the Medical College of Virginia, Richmond (while Dr. McCain works as a resident in internal medicine there).

**1956:** The McCains move to Wilson, NC.

**1956:** The McCains' first child, Paul Pressly McCain III, is born.

**1958:** Their second child, Mary Eloise McCain, is born.

**1960:** Mrs. McCain works as a volunteer for Terry Sanford's successful gubernatorial campaign.

**1965:** Mrs. McCain becomes Wilson, NC's Democratic Precinct Chair.

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**1968-1969:** Mrs. McCain serves as president of the North Carolina Medical Association Auxiliary.

**1971:** Mrs. McCain becomes a member of the Democratic Party's executive committee, a position she continues to hold today.

**1972:** Mrs. McCain becomes the North Carolina Democratic Party's first vice chair.

**1976:** Mrs. McCain becomes state Democratic Party chair.

**1976:** Mrs. McCain serves as co-chairman of Jim Hunt's successful gubernatorial campaign.

**1977:** The NC House of Representatives votes to ratify ERA, 61-65.

**1980:** Mrs. McCain co-chairs Jim Hunt's successful reelection gubernatorial campaign.

**1982:** Governor Hunt asks Mrs. McCain to serve as his full-time personal lobbyist for ERA ratification. The bill fails to win ratification in the North Carolina Senate.

**1983-1984:** Mrs. McCain serves as Governor Hunt's campaign manager to win the U.S. Senate seat held by incumbent Republican Jesse Helms. The campaign is the most expensive non-presidential race to date. Senator Helms prevails.

**1987:** Mrs. McCain is elected to the UNC Board of Governors.

**1989:** Mrs. McCain co-chairs, along with Martha McKay, the Pine Needles Network, a political action committee to recruit and promote young women as candidates for state office.

**1989:** Mrs. McCain declines an invitation to run against Senator Helms in the 1990 congressional election.

**1990:** Mrs. McCain loses a close race for the Wilson County seat in North Carolina House of Representatives after Republicans actively fundraise for her opponent.

**1991:** Mrs. McCain wins reelection to the UNC Board of Governors.

**1992:** Jim Hunt is elected to an unprecedented third term as North Carolina Governor.

**1993:** Jim Hunt appoints Mrs. McCain to Secretary of the Department of Cultural Resources.

**1994:** NC Museum of History opens. Mrs. McCain had served as a leader of the NC Museum of History Associates (as well as other cultural groups, such as the NC Symphony Society and the NC Arts Society

**1994:** After Governor Hunt announces a multi-front alliance with Israel, Mrs. McCain launches an effort to make cultural exchange a prominent part of the program.

**1996:** Mrs. McCain receives the North Caroliniana Award.

**1996:** Governor Hunt wins reelection for a fourth term. He reappoints Mrs. McCain as his Secretary of Cultural Resources.

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**1999:** Park in Roper, NC, opens. One of the elements of that park is now the Betty McCain Amphitheater.

**2000:** In a tight budget year, McCain secures \$250,000 for the continuation of the excavation of a shipwreck that many believe is the Queen Anne's Revenge, Blackbeard's ship.

**2000:** Mike Easley elected Governor of North Carolina. Beverly Perdue is elected Lieutenant Governor.

**2001:** Mrs. McCain leaves her cabinet post as Secretary of Cultural Resources.

**2001:** Mrs. McCain receives the Design Guild Award, NC State College of Design.

**2005:** Mrs. McCain's husband, Dr. John L. McCain, dies, "surrounded by his beloved family."

**2009:** Mrs. McCain receives the North Caroliniana Award and the North Carolina Award for Public Service.

**2010:** Betty Ray McCain continues to work for the state on both UNC-TV's Board of Trustees and the Board of Visitors of the Lineberry Cancer Center in Chapel Hill.