

Norton styles: a Davidson tradition

By NELLE McCORKLE

Nortonize— Verb — To cut hair, always accompanied by friendly conversation [derivation — Kenneth Watson Norton, owner of Norton's Barber Shop, Davidson, N.C.]

For forty-three years, Kenneth Norton's style of barbering has been part of the Davidson idiom. Since 1942, Norton has operated his barber shop; before that year, Norton's father and brother ran the shop, beginning in 1910. About 1927, they moved the shop to its present location on Main Street.

Norton ("Most of the students call me Norton; lots of the townspeople call me Ken.") began his barbering career as a shoeshine boy in his father's shop. After graduating from Woods Morgan Barber College and Carver College, a forerunner of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Norton served in the Army at Fort Bragg in a military police battalion from 1935-55. Possibly as a "throwback to Army days," Norton can occasionally be seen riding to work on a motorcycle, although he said, "Since purchasing a new truck last year, I've been driving more." Despite living twenty miles away in Rowan County, Norton also bicycles to work. He admitted, "My wife calls me her 'teenaged husband.'

Although known for short, classic cuts, Norton maintains that he has no preference as to hair length, but simply cuts "until the customer tells me to stop."

As an example he cited mohawks he cut for members of the Davidson football defensive team before a 1980 Bucknell game: ". . . I stopped by the M & M to pick up lunch. Someone told me several people were waiting for me in the shop. Several members of the Davidson defensive team wanted mohawks with their numbers cut in back."

Norton said he cut team members' hair until they had to leave for practice that afternoon; he then stayed open late to finish: "I cut mohawks that night until seven o'clock!

"I told them they were going to look awful dadblamed silly if they cut those mohawks and then went out and got beat." Although losing at halftime, the Davidson team won the game. Norton later learned, "The captain had told them at halftime, 'Remember what Norton said!'"

Other unorthodox haircut requests don't faze Norton, unless "a minor comes in." He said, "I told one little boy [who requested an outlandish cut], 'You bring your mother down.'"

This concern for his customers extends to five generations of one Davidson family whose members' hair Norton has cut. During the late twenties, Norton's father cut the hair of Dean Rusk '31 when Rusk was a student. In the shop, Norton keeps the letter Rusk sent Norton's mother on her husband's death in 1969, saying, "It's the proof of a big person who remembers little people."

Besides barbering, Norton is an active Scoutmaster for Boy Scout Troop 373 at Sandy Ridge A M E Zion Church. A 1978 recipient of the Silver Beaver Award, Norton's involvement in Scouting began when he was a twelve-year-old member of the troop at Ada Jenkins School, then administered by students in the College Y.M.C.A.

Norton's other activities include watercolor and acrylic painting, charcoal drawing, woodcarving, stained glassmaking and gardening. Often he combines these projects, as in a small, vivid watercolor of irises from his garden. Norton keeps an acrylic portrait of his wife, a teacher at China Grove Elementary School, in the shop. The entire back room and front window are devoted to Norton's plants: when com-



Bill Hartman

Norton faces a real challenge.

plimented on the *Impatiens* in the window, he insists that his mother cares for that plant.

Norton's mother, aged ninety, lives in Davidson; for years a local seamstress, she "still sews a little." Norton's connections to Davidson extend to his grandfather, who farmed land which now is the college baseball field; Norton himself learned to plow at age nine.

The Nortons have two children: a son who is a Navy flight technician stationed in Bermuda and a daughter who teaches at Rowan Primary School in Spencer, NC.

Currently operating four barber chairs

alone during the week, Norton rents a chair to barber Joseph McClain on Saturdays. "At the highest peak of our business," Norton's father managed four other barbers, including Norton.

Norton noted, "Hairstyles seem to be getting shorter. When I started, people wore flattops . . ." He insisted that he has no favorite haircut, but described his barbering philosophy, "I try to please."

Although women's haircuts were "one-fifth of our trade during World War II," Norton said, haircuts now include "about five percent ladies."